

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: CREATIVE REBELLION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST  
CENTURY: THE REINVIGORATION OF AMERICAN  
POLITICAL LIFE THROUGH PUBLIC ART

Diana Zsuzsanna Boros, Doctor of Philosophy, 2010

Dissertation directed by: Professor James M. Glass  
Department of Government and Politics

Drawing on the work of Tocqueville, Nietzsche, Camus, and Marcuse, this work argues that there is an urgent political and societal need for greater support of public art projects and better access to these sources of funding. More art in public spaces would revive and animate communal environments, create new relationships between the individual and the public, strengthen feelings of community, and foster the desire to participate in the public. All art creates participatory desire and behavior, but visionary art is how political progress through individual rebellion can be best accessed and articulated. This work defines visionary artistic creation as the union of instinctual creative energies and rational reflection. Mainstream art, despite its aesthetic rearrangements, fails to connect the viewer with questions that will engage them over time. Visionary art, especially the public and social, is needed to seek out and materialize the newest, alternative possibilities for our individual lives, for our societies, and for the political systems under which they abide.

CREATIVE REBELLION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:  
THE REINVIGORATION OF AMERICAN POLITICAL LIFE THROUGH  
PUBLIC ART

By

Diana Zsuzsanna Boros

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Advisory Committee:

Professor James M. Glass, Chair  
Professor George Ritzer  
Professor Jillian Schwedler  
Professor Vladimir Tismaneanu  
Professor Ian Ward

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## INTRODUCTION

*Instinctual revolt turns into political rebellion.*

– Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*

*Even the most realistic oeuvre constructs a reality of its own: its men and women, its objects, its landscape, its music reveals what remains unsaid, unseen, unheard in everyday life.*

– Herbert Marcuse, *Art as Form of Reality*

*It is difficult to get the news from poems yet men die miserably everyday for lack of what is found there.*

– William Carlos Williams, *Asphodel, That Greeny Flower.*

### **The Argument**

We generally take for granted that the foundation on which American democracy rests is the interactive, ever-evolving landscape of civil society – the social and civic associations of Tocqueville's (1835/2002) observations. But whether or not we agree with Putnam (1994, 2001) that American civic associations have for decades been on the decline, we must confront the question of whether these types of political and social activities are enough to sustain the health of our system of democratic representative government and the culture it engenders. Do our associations harness a collective of truly

free and involved voices, or is civil society's sincerity threatened by the excessively self-interested and conformist tendencies that underlie American democracy? Do our civil organizations sustain democratic life? And if they do keep democracy alive, do they allow only sporadic breaths, heavy with dust?

The Left of today, however diluted within mainstream America, contend that true democracy – of, by, and for the people – has gone the way of free love and Marxist revolution. What remains is the subject of debate. Some say all of our institutions are façades for domination by the powerful few; others go only so far as to complain about the ineffectiveness of the Electoral College system or of our voting booths. That Americans are in crisis is a foundational assumption of this work. Regardless of the extent to which some Americans feel alienated from the governing system, most would likely agree that democracy in the United States is not only far from a direct political mechanism, it often lacks sincere connection with the average citizen. It is not a logical stretch to conclude that a person who does not feel involved or needed will likely not wish to participate. It is an easy conclusion that in America one can be quite comfortable – politically, emotionally, materially – and “free” without exerting individual political will. This “free rider” problem (Putnam, 2001) enables the "gentle herd" mentality that is inherent in American life. We must seek new solutions to this lack of public participation by the average American by attempting to draw them from their individualistic tendencies into a more interested and dynamic public life.<sup>1</sup> The sincerity, or genuine

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<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt (1998) describes the public in several ways: the very appearance of the public creates the public; the public is all that is not our private worlds; it is created by humans, not Nature; the public realm is fundamentally political (an arena in which to discuss social ideas), free (from private



belief in and involvement in, of any system, particularly a political system, which is by nature social and interactive, should not be undervalued or avoided because of the difficulty involved in attempting to define and evaluate elusive levels of "sincerity". A society, seen as a machine with moving parts, is only a stale collection of those parts if the machine's movements fail to convey meaning to the user. Still, we must be wary even when "meaning" is conveyed, because meaning in a post-Foucauldian (1991) and post-Baudrillardian (Baudrillard & Glaser, 1994) world – where even desires can be reproduced by the Establishment in a way that they become "hyperreal" simulations of their essence, or what we can call sincere or genuine meaning – can take on new forms. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Baudrillard wrote that in the world of simulation, reality disappears, and from its ashes rises the hyperreal. This conception of information in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries introduced the possibility that when concepts, meanings, and creative forms are co-opted by the ruling Establishment, not only are they simplified and sterilized of both their natural emotional force and their uniqueness, but they may actually cease to exist. It is this sort of process that has enveloped public life, associations, and general notions of both local and universal community today.

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concerns), and based on action (the private realm, for Arendt, being that of property, which comprises labor and work, and the basic functions of our families and our bodies). Although her definitions of the public are comprehensive and useful (albeit sexist), I disagree with her stringent characterization of the public as altogether divorced from the private realm, where everything messy – emotions and bodily functions - remain outside the consideration of public life. This denial of the private within the public is both unrealistic, and possibly detrimental to political life. Despite her understandable concerns that work and labor have taken the place in importance of political discussions, her conclusion that the political must proceed freely and “uncorrupted” by the equalizing effects of property and the home paints a picture of an ideal political world that fails to address our entirety as humans and as citizens.

Even when the movements of a machine convey "meaning," it is difficult to say whether these meanings penetrate beyond diffusing concepts that are so much a part of American cultural identity that they are mindlessly inhaled rather than adequately digested. Today's democracy in America is by all accounts more shallow and tepid than it could be. Despite the exceptions, democratic life in the United States today overwhelmingly yields to the masses and the power of popular opinion, rather than being inspired by a true collective of individual passions. Studies calling attention to consistently poor voter turnout and the free rider problem have failed effectively to change the situation. It is as if Americans, though self-conscious enough to take note of the lack of citizen involvement in political life (and its accompanying institutions), notice only the inaction — the effect — rather than the cause of the widespread dispassion.

Those in power — the Establishment— have co-opted many facets of American public life, as can be seen in the dominance in public life of mainstream art (commodified rebellion) to the persistence of the exclusively bipartisan political process. During co-optation, elements of public life that offer alternatives to status quo ideas are gobbled up by the government/media/big business complex, and by popular culture itself, and spit out as commodities. The result is that these commodities masquerading as genuine artistic expression, *appear* as they once existed- as fresh ideas-, but their sources of free-thinking have been sterilized. Thus the meanings they disseminate become like laminated playing cards — forever in play but unchanging in character or appearance — and, despite the many possible combinations of meaning that can be played, there are clear limits well within the bounds of infinity. This ability of people to live without having to create or

find meaning on their own, has the effect of alienating individuals from their own emotions and, ultimately, from aspects of public life and from the greater human community.

The most important issue is not that American democracy and public life have, especially with the increase of technology in our lives, suffered in participatory enthusiasm and inclusivity, owing to a lack of participation in the public sphere. Rather, the greater concern is that the very nature of American democracy breeds the dangers of a conformist and complacent possessive individualism. Although there is an important Puritan and republican tradition in American political thought, it is the heritage of Lockean (1869/1988) individualism on which our democracy at least partially rests, that overwhelms our popular and political culture today. And it is this tendency which must be balanced with a force that enables us to access both our true individual beliefs and the vital sense of universal unity and community-mindedness that comes of such individual contemplation, through the language and imagery of artistic experience.

This work argues that there is an urgent need for greater support of public art projects and better access to these sources of funding. More art in public spaces would, first individually and ultimately collectively, revive and animate communal environments; create new relationships between individuals and the public; strengthen feelings of community; and foster the desire to participate in the public on the basis of new relationships to the self and to the public. Individual experience with creativity and the arts has been shown to lead to higher rates of civic engagement and interest in public

life. Artistic experience first enables access to an inherent but latent spirit of community within individuals, which can then become a desire to participate in the public realm. This link demonstrates the utility of employing art as a tool to encourage political participation. According to the National Endowment for the Arts (2007), “[By every measure, literary readers lead more robust lifestyles than non readers. These findings contradict commonly held assumptions that readers and arts participants are passive, isolated, or self absorbed.” The researchers concluded that “Americans who experience art or read literature are demonstrably more active in their communities than nonreaders and non participants. ... Thus, literary reading and arts participation rates can be regarded as sound indicators of civic and community health.” (NEA, 2007, p. 6).

Using the study’s findings, the NEA Chairman looks to the psychological processes that take place within individuals who experience art that inspires them to community life and public action: “Something happens when an individual actively engages in the arts – be it reading a novel at home, attending a concert at a local church, or seeing a dance company perform at a college campus<sup>2</sup> – that awakens both a heightened sense of identity and civic awareness. We must banish the stereotype that reading books or listening to music is passive behavior. Art is not escapism but an invitation to activism.” In December 2009, the NEA released its 2008 survey of Public Participation in the Arts and reported that educated people had been participating less since 2002 and that there are “persistent patterns of decline in participation for most art

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<sup>2</sup> According to Dana Gioia, NEA Chair, “The one alarming note in this study is that arts participation is falling among younger adults and with it most forms of civic and social engagement”

forms” In the new study, Sunil Iyengar, NEA's Director for Research and Analysis, calls arts participation a “vital form of personal and social engagement.” (NEA, 2009, p. 1).

Public art in the formal sense is art that is commissioned and owned by the state, but my here the focus is on any form of artistic creation,(most often unregulated projects) that is intended for the public and social spaces in our lives. This presence of art in daily experience can help to reconceptualize the processes and meanings within a public space, and can alert citizens to public concerns, as well as to each other’s individual fears and desires, through our creative synapses: “The public artist today engages issues of history, site, politics, class, and environment. These multiple visions may help to transform communities as they find common grounds” (Mitchell, 1992). Hannah Arendt (2006) originated the idea of the "public realm." She used it to mean a public where members meet to discuss common political desires and ambitions. My concept of "the public" speaks to this understanding, as well as to a more abstract public life that is felt in the spirit of individuals, regardless of whether or not they are physically participating in the political scene. I argue that this reinvigoration of the sincerity of our public lives must first occur so that these new relationships to the public can ultimately lead to an inspired and active political body.

Friedrich Schiller (1794/2004) argues that it is particularly the role of the artist in society to seek meaning beyond the paternalism of the watered-down symbols of popular will: “But how does the artist secure himself against the corruptions of his time, which everywhere encircle him? By disdaining its opinion. Let him look upwards to his own

dignity and to Law, not downwards to fortune and to everyday needs” (p. 52). It is key that the artistic experience as a social good is a bi-level process; first, the individual experiences art and gains access to the vital emotional knowledge that artistic action and reflection provide, and, second, that individual rebellion then affects us as members of a community and as a democratic society.

An increase in public art projects would not only create greater respect for and involvement in the community, it would also have a transformative effect on the public as viewers. Especially those not often exposed to art would have new opportunities to experience the reorganization of reality that art provides. In this way, public art would reinvigorate the American individual.

I will try to clarify the distinction between mainstream art and visionary art. I assert that, although all art has political possibilities for reawakening (through rearrangement) and engagement (through the critical thought that the rearrangement invites) the participant, there is a crucial difference between mainstream art and visionary art. Mainstream art encompasses two primary ideas. The first is that art becomes mainstream, however alternative or avant-garde it may have once been, once it is unveiled into the public realm and has reached the desire of a critical mass. This desire in our supply-and-demand-run popular culture forces a repetition of the art that yields it diluted and drained of its original effect. Once it is repeated many times among individuals in society, it loses its ability to create a fresh arrangement of our environments and our beliefs and thus cannot be truly transformative. The second is that much of mainstream art is created, from the start, with profit, not creative and political

transformation, in mind. Other works of mainstream art, as mentioned, began as transformative works, ideas, and movements; but after passing through the filtering process of dissemination into popular consciousness, and because of overproduction, oversaturation, and overanalysis, have lost or diminished their original power.

I define visionary or transformative artistic creation, following Nietzsche and Camus, as a dialectic of the irrational and the rational. All art creates participatory empowered behavior, but rebellious transformative art is the form of art where political progress can be best accessed and articulated. Camus (1951/1991) wrote that “[R]ebellion is a preliminary to all civilizations.” (p. 273). He defined rebellion first as an act of *creation* and concluded that “[w]ith rebellion, awareness is born” (p.15). Mainstream art, despite its rehearsed aesthetic rearrangements, fails to connect the viewers with questions that will engage them over time. Transformative art, especially public and social visionary art, is needed to seek out and materialize alternate possibilities for our individual lives, for our societies, and for the political systems by which they abide.

Public art encourages participation in public life<sup>3</sup> and is a key factor in the development of a “civil religion.” While that neither should be nor need be the ultimate

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<sup>3</sup> Hilda Hein (1976) aims to develop a theory that links our aesthetic experiences to our political life. She argues that there are three main theories associated with this relationship: the contrapuntal theory, which uses art to conserve the status quo by appeasing citizens into conformity; the propaedeutic theory, which argues that art is the foundation on which we build the structure and order that defines our lives; and finally the propulsive theory, which says that art functions as a critic of existing reality and is the discoverer of new forms for the future. Hein characterizes her view as accepting ideas from all three theories, while emphasizing the development of a truly “self-determining and self-transcending” self (p. 150). I struggle with Hein’s conceptualization of what she calls traditional contrapuntal theories of art. She argues that these theories characterize art as an outlet for the inevitable disorder that ultimately sustains the stability of existing daily life. By “whole” she means the status quo and therefore labels this understanding of art as conservative. I argue that, within this contrapuntal theory, if we view the “whole” as a “universal oneness”, then the disorder in art enables an ultimate order that is quite the opposite of the status quo.

goal in America, the American character is lacking poetry, empathy, and true political desire, while pragmatism and possessive individualism is encouraged at all levels of social life. Despite the invigorating nature of our recent and historically significant presidential election (which is, in itself invigorating), we are still in a thinly veiled crisis and could use an injection of true civic virtue in our society. Since the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the status quo has advanced largely undisputed. Not since the upheavals of the 1960s have there been widespread efforts to create a new politics and a society with a new arrangement of values.

Personal artistic experience does not lead directly to institutional political participation. But it expands the limits of our conception of what is possible for ourselves and for our society. Artistic experience creates action through an expanded engagement with the world. This dissertation's approach does not fault and discard the complacent last men; instead it faces them and encourages them to expand their imaginations through art by promoting public art projects.

## **Methodology**

I have consulted a wide variety of sources. Within a paradigm that links our driving political questions with the world of art, my primary focus has been on Western works of political philosophy that not only provide the basis for many of the arguments of this work, but also supply the lens through which to evaluate the multitude of potential other sources. Drawing heavily on modern and postmodern thinkers; the ideas of Tocqueville, Nietzsche, Camus, and Marcuse dominate. These thinkers are the



foundational influences of this work for their shared belief in the power of art, and their adamant refusal to accept everyday life as the Establishment (or Christian morality) presents it to us. Following the more directly political works, inquiries into the nature of art, and the role of art in society, are important sources. Relevant discussions of art and the links between art-making (and experiencing) and political action, by leading art critics and curators, as well as by practitioners of social art (the artists themselves), serve as an important point of view that both complements and contrasts with the political works.

To address the driving concerns of this dissertation- how to reinvigorate American democratic culture with new ideas and new human connections, as well as how to reignite with passion the senses and the public participatory desires of Americans- the ideas of a unique combination of theorists was called into examination. The query began with a new look at some of Tocqueville's most salient ideas as presented primarily in Volume II of his *Democracy in America*. This was important as Tocqueville is well known for his aristocratic perspective on democratic life in America, and the consequent negative characteristics, especially of mediocrity and materialism, that he locates in a culture of equality of conditions. While his clear love for fading aristocratic values is evident throughout his works, the focus here is not on whether he ultimately sides with democracy or with aristocracy. Rather, I point here to the detailed and powerful warnings he provides on the dangers that democrats may fall prey to, if citizens living in democracies are not careful to uphold healthy connections to public, and to spiritual life.

The use of the ideas in this work, that I argue are most valuable in Tocqueville's *DA*, was not only necessary to locate the ideas in this dissertation within the unique characteristics of the American context, but also to establish a theoretical basis for the argument that democratic conditions, while clearly a necessary basis for modern government, justice, and social life, also inherently breed a culture that can easily and often comfortably relax into conformity and complacency, while still reaping many of the benefits of democratic life. Beyond this, that one of Tocqueville's only solutions to safeguard democrats against these dangers is the involvement in spiritual life. Tocqueville speaks here of religion, but it can be inferred from his words that it is not the religious rules themselves that are important to combat the complacency of excessive individualism brought on primarily by a focus on commercial success (though the rules of religious life in America, he did argue, create needed structure and order, though this is another point altogether), but rather the attention and connection to otherworldly, non-material feelings and values. This valuable point created the launching pad for the argument made here that a spiritual component to everyday democratic life is needed to reawaken the spirit, and the self-awareness and self-exploration that is required in order to foster interest and participation in the development of the world outside of oneself. In this work, the access door to a spiritual life is conceived as encouragement of creativity through art. The argument follows that in order to expand the availability of art- often considered to be an elitist or intimidating hobby or knowledge- it must be available *in the public* to the most people possible.

Moving forward, in considering why art has the ability to produce deep feelings of self-awareness, innovation, and connectivity with others, the ideas of both Nietzsche and Camus quickly leap to mind. Both of these thinkers understood the vast political power involved in the sense of discovery, revolution, and humanitarian justice, that lives within art. Inspired by the true individual freedom that can be reached in denying, at least temporarily, the norms and morals of society, both Nietzsche and Camus, in varying contexts, advocated for increased self-awareness, and a more authentic and empathetic approach to questions of justice and morality. Beyond this, it was necessary to seek examples of philosophical artists who employed vivid techniques in their work that drew readers and viewers into an alternate otherworldly realm of encounter with the spiritual and the irrational. Among others, the Romantics, the Dadaists, and the Surrealists, each with their own mission in mind, exemplified the notion that valuable knowledge and insight into the human condition can be gained through creative and spiritual explorations of the irrational and the unconscious. Rimbaud's unrestrained style of poetry is an oft-noted inspiration for living by instinct, and de Sade through his subversive writing that explores the animalistic predisposition of humanity, likewise defends a morality that is individually defined, and accessed not through rationality, but rather through nature. Both as an overarching foundation and as the conclusive glue that highlights the revolutionary power of spirituality, instinct, and art, as seen within all the theorists' ideas that are explored in this work, Marcuse provides valuable insight on the many links between art and liberation of the mind through connection with the spirit.

In the course of this project I examined many recent endeavors in social and public art, with a focus on New York City over the last several years and on grassroots before highly funded ventures. I covered disciplines ranging from the visual arts to performance art and culled the most challenging and unique ideas to discuss here. The research explained here examined the developments and successes of new public creative projects and the artists who conceived and created them. Many of these projects are detailed and reviewed in several notable news and cultural sources, particularly *New York Magazine* and *The New York Times*. Using these often-updated sources as guidance, this work also aims to serve as an overview of developments in the public art world, so that we may understand better how the philosophical claims of this work are encountered in current creative projects.

### **The Argument Further Explained**

Psychologists have produced an abundance of studies on the mind processes that take place during artistic interaction to examine how it alters our psyches and why creativity makes us feel good.<sup>4</sup> The field of art therapy alone attests to the importance of these processes. Even in the mainstream, it is understood that a creative outlet is vital to a balanced life. How many times have we heard stories of a bored Wall Street financial analyst who comes alive after he (often by chance) discovers pottery, photography, or the art of cooking? This situation is most often described as the need for release in an

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<sup>4</sup> Some of the best work in the area of the psychology of art can be found in: Arnheim (1986) and Freud (2009).

everyday life that is otherwise patterned and controlled. Not only does creativity provide balance in a world dominated by reason, it can also serve as a distraction and escape from the difficult realities of life.

Some say that the creative blanket keeps us warm, just as drugs do – we can lose our inhibitions, and forget our troubles and responsibilities, at least for a short while. While this may be true, the psychological fulfillment that comes from artistic engagement has more important ramifications than the momentary joy of forget.

Forgetting takes us away from the world around us, whereas artistic engagement brings us closer to it by providing the opportunity to engage with the world on our own terms. When we create or encounter art, we may momentarily breathe free from accepted reality, but we are able to re-imagine the way that we perceive the happenings that surround us. This is what makes art inherently political, affording the ability to wield power over that which we otherwise have little or no control. Individual change must precede a change in everyday reality. We can see in the realm of art the world as we would like it to be, and we can show others the reality of new possibilities through art.

To identify the specific nature of the positive political power of artistic experience is not an easy task. The relationship between art and democracy, and more generally, between art and public life, is fruitful, though it is not often direct.<sup>5</sup> Like most relationships between realms of life that are intrinsically subjective and ever-changing, the correlation between experiencing art and experiencing a more active citizenry is

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<sup>5</sup> See works on how artistic experience influences political life, and on how art can be harnessed to political ends: Edelman (1996), Hein (1976), and Schiller (1794/2004).

difficult to simplify and cleanly categorize. Despite this relationship's resistance to easy understanding, its existence must be nurtured, not ignored.

I am not arguing that when one experiences art one is then, as a direct result, encouraged to participate in the political system. Unfortunately, there is no easy formula for determining a direct route from individual experience to an inclination or desire to take an active part in the political process or in political change. Many theorists of American politics have picked away at this puzzle. Most have concluded that people are guided primarily by self-interest and that therefore – if you subscribe to this belief about human nature – game theory adequately determines that they will most likely become a part of the free rider problem unless there are clear incentives, or rewards, for participation. Before trying to identify why or why not a person votes, we must try to understand why or why not that person cares enough about society and others, to vote.

The real question for American politics, and for the study of political behavior in general, is, how does one become more inclined to participate in public life? Besides offering external, tangible rewards for participating in the political system, it is difficult to determine why any person desires (or decides) to participate in our political institutions and processes. Ultimately, natural diversity among people, even concerning civic virtue, is the determinant for participation. In other words, some are naturally more inclined to care, and others not. It may be more fruitful to examine why an individual becomes more interested and active in public life in general. Participating in public life is a necessary precursor to participation in the system and in politics. Personal artistic experience does not directly lead to institutional political participation. Rather, art promotes action

through an expanded engagement with the world. Experiencing art can draw people inward at first, but then it leads to greater participation in public life, which ultimately leads to more democratic action (not necessarily in political processes but in political change more widely understood).

Art cannot resist its political nature. In rearranging, it agitates and questions reality. An experiment in art extracts moments and cross-sections from the landscape of life around us. Art may emphasize or de-emphasize, or invert, or show parts without their whole, or show the whole empty of some of its parts. This entirely new view of looking at something of which we already have some understanding can foster a much-needed reawakening of the everyday.<sup>6</sup> Making mention of a poem by Rilke on art, Hannah Arendt (1998) writes, “In the case of art works, reification is more than mere transformation; it is transfiguration, a veritable metamorphosis in which it is as though the course of nature which wills that all fire burn to ashes is reverted and even dust can burst into flames” (p. 168). If we believe Baudrillard and Glaser (1994) that life has become a mere “simulation” of life, then it follows naturally that art can stimulate the simulation and, in creating something new (a new perception of reality), can reattach sincere meaning to the daily transactions that have become predictable. When life is rearranged, it loses order, if only temporarily. It is in this destruction that possibilities are born.

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<sup>6</sup> See works on the transformative properties of creative experience: Booth (1997) and Fischer-Lichte and Jain (2008).

I argue that art is a political force with a natural ability to motivate participants in a variety of ways. In artistic experience, we can access a true independence and freedom, because of our ability within art to rearrange everyday reality as we please, and we can also experience known ideas and feelings in new ways, as well as gain empathy through universal insight into individual thoughts and emotions. It is emotional vision (the realm of poetry) that is able to take precedence over societal or “rational” vision, that which is generally accepted as the ‘truth’ of reality. Being able to stake a personal claim – of the spirit – over our environments and over life – we can begin to invest ourselves genuinely in the way we experience daily life. In all movement(s) of creation there is a vital component of ownership – it is an overcoming of the alienation Marx (1844/1978) described – but through the spirit, not through the mechanisms of the external economy. Hence the greater that sphere of the creation of ownership (the more often and varied it is), the more that individuals become spiritually tied to the world, and to the public life that they have now at least partially created.

Through art, we can expand our imaginative capabilities to live beyond the status quo. *True*, or rebellious art, linked with the progress of time (the material conditions), can create a stronger democracy (not necessarily direct, but community driven) that can save us from the manufactured nature of capitalist society. Capitalism is an economic system, but its philosophy inherently contains a need to encompass culture as well, and particularly a need to inspire that society to embrace capitalism. Foucault (1991), writing about the problem of dispersed bureaucratic powers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, termed it “governmentality.” He argued that capitalism had begun to be affirmed by those very



individuals it works to exploit. The fundamental basis of all politics and economics, even if they claim to be limited to their own stated spheres of power, is the individual, and consequently they will transform individuals to conform to their needs. Hence a culture is an accurate reflection of the political and economic systems it engages. In this sense, systems, whether of organization or rules, become like leaders, with egos and a cult of personality, who bewitch their followers into obedience.

Accordingly, artistic production, also does not escape the tentacles of capitalism. Artistic creation becomes part of a system simply because we live under a capitalism so omnipotent that nothing, not even our own bodies or our ideas (our art), escapes the value game. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even the most alternative-seeking ideas are quickly commodified and thus stripped of their visionary potential. My concern here is not with the proliferation and popularity of mainstream art, or with the almost instantaneous commodification (transformation from visionary to mainstream) of any object or idea that is released into the public realm, although recognition of these issues lies behind all the ideas presented here.

Some advise that experimentation not be confused with rebellion. This is a vital distinction, although it is true that rebellion often begins with experimental thought and behavior. To attempt new possibilities – to be open to the new and to experiment – is the foundation of true rebellion. If we do not try, we do not live. Not to attempt the new or the unknown is to conform. Experiments transform an unexplained field by expanding its contours. Disordering or reordering, even if such rearrangement fails to achieve its purpose, whatever that may be, or is deemed a “failure” (by an audience or by the

market), is much like a “failed” revolt that ultimately inspires political change: it has nonetheless expanded the imagination of the collective consciousness. Sometimes, a stimulating, or strange, or interesting occurrence, does not immediately and noticeably change you, but there *is* rebellion in the sensory experience, even if the subject is not fully or immediately aware of the rebellion. Revolt can happen not only in the senses but also in our subconscious; this is not the revolt of our material or rational world. If we can experience our creative selves, it is not creating beauty but creating change that is the prime transformation. It is not conformist aesthetics but, rather, rebellious art that matters for politics.

Even intellectual study of an artwork can do a great deal to expand the imagination, to tweak one’s senses and perceptions. Arts education is necessary, but visionary public art and interactive social art make the experience of art democratic and confrontational in a way that attempts to alter one's everyday view and understanding of the outside world. Confrontation with artwork inevitably alters the individual by allowing one to feel that new, alternative ideas are conceivable.

### **The Social and Political Nature of Art**

The question of what makes an object, or an experience, a work of “art” reaches beyond the concern for identifying limits on the validity of an artwork; it seeks to understand what it is about art that permits it to appear in infinite forms and dimensions – in the people, objects, and ideas of everyday life. Art, and especially the newest, most visionary ideas, is truly a reorganizing – often fantastically or poetically – of the world around us. Over the course of history, art has shown itself in so many ways that, as a

concept, it has become almost elusive – it is difficult to restrain it long enough to understand it – as the condition of existence. Art has found its way into countless sociological and psychological studies, for the very reason that art is a way to understand how people view each other, themselves, the world. We must constantly adjust for a fuller understanding of what art is endlessly becoming.

In one sense, a housewife who draws with her toddler after school is making art just as the professional sculptor with the MFA and gallery representation is. Despite there being a difference between the two situations – related both to the self-consciousness of the proclaimed artist and to the level to which the artist and the artwork rearrange our dependable perceptions – whether it is art or craft, the act of creation always holds the potential to be transformative. This fact must not be denied or overlooked.

Experience with art, particularly in creating it, is an unequivocal good, regardless of the ultimate value of the work. This is so because all creative action is a reconfiguration of reality that is necessary to access a broader imaginative capability. All art is a productive experience that engages the creative mind and spirit – at least for a moment. The problem is that much redundant art concludes the creative process with its end product, and the viewer is thus left uninspired. This is the experience with mainstream, or what can be called “plastic”, art.

We must conclude that the value of art in engendering more empowered, open-minded individuals is in its sincerity. This focus on sincere or authentic creation, rather than on the aesthetic evaluation of the end product, means that all art, despite its sometimes vacuous visionary attributes, can change an individual’s conceptualization of

reality and of established everyday perceptions, although far more slowly than truly rebellious artwork, and most often, to little political or communal benefit (sometimes even to negative effect in this sense, as mainstream art often reflects ruling ideals and images, rather than genuine rearrangements of the world and its ideas). It is only human though for us to be physically and emotionally inspired by “aesthetics.” Consider the average corporate-commissioned, large outdoor sculpture; even if it is trite, mainstream art, when standing next to it (say, a large stainless steel structure of tree limbs), you can still feel transported, affected by its sheer size. It can still break the monotony, the known structure of the everyday. This is the first-order social good of public art – that any beautification or reconfiguration of public space endows that space with social value. In other words, even a conformist work of public art can create an emotional relationship between the individual viewer and the space in which it resides.<sup>7</sup> This is the power of aesthetics – even in its regurgitated, unchallenging forms, it can inspire.

One individual, or one philosophical work, could never claim to determine the boundaries between expected experience and creative experience for all other individuals in their relationships with art and with various artworks. It is enough simply to establish that there is a way to experience art that is inspirational and self-empowering, and a way that is expected and mass produced. Both are important to public and social life; all art in the public, even conformist art, creates a stronger sense of pride and interest in the public

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<sup>7</sup> See some of the excellent works that discuss both the theory and the practice of public art over the last two decades: Finkelpearl (2001), Hein (1996), Knight (2008), and Mitchell (1992).

which is vital to a sincere feeling of community,<sup>8</sup> but it is rebellious or visionary art that encourages within people the expansion of their imaginative capabilities, their true independence (knowledge of self), and their sense of empathy. Ultimately, the presence of rebellious art on our streets brings creative and emotional knowledge into the public arena and uses that knowledge as a tool to bring about a stronger natural desire for people to care about and participate in their communities and in their political destinies.<sup>9</sup>

Some artworks and ideas rise above the rest in their rebellious and often anarchic rearrangements. Visionary artists, those who forever altered the way we perceive ourselves, and our world, and continue to influence the way in which we perceive even the most fundamental forms and concepts – from Da Vinci to Goya, Van Gogh to Picasso, Duchamp to Dali, choreographer and dancer Merce Cunningham to the avant-garde composer John Cage – take great strides in educating the participants of their art, by actively working to opening minds to new possibilities. Notwithstanding that any creation of art is inherently a form of political action in its rearrangements, there are many different forms of art-making. Functional art (which some term “craft,” “plastic,” or mainstream art) is regarded here as conformist and redundant. And, of course, there is what is termed political art. Political art conjures at least two understandings –

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<sup>8</sup> Henk E. S. Woldring, in his studies on social justice as a work of art, argues, “We have already seen that beauty is a kind of good. Something beautiful may be called good not only because it gives pleasure when known but also because it fulfills a human need; thus, we desire what will satisfy our need” (cited in Ramos, 2000, p. 289).

<sup>9</sup> See works that link civic engagement, community and art: Corbitt and Nix-Early (2003). and the highly interesting data born of the 2002 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts:(National Endowment for the Arts, 2007) and the 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts: (National Endowment for the Arts, 2009).

propaganda art, which is directly and overtly political action; and politically indirect art, which has political ramifications in that it encourages participation in life through its rearrangements. It is this latter understanding of political art that is rebellious and transformative. Art can be "political," as opposed to rebelliously political, when it directly employs historical facts or political ideas to protest or shed light on political concerns. It can be as vague as art that protests a problem such as violence against women in society, to art that is used by political campaigns and civic groups to create an organized movement or to incite participation in a specific event. Political art uses artistic experience, imagery, and language to voice a political idea or concern, in a less direct and less formal manner than traditional political appeals do.

Quite differently, transformative artistic experience does not require that the artistic experience directly invoke specific or tangible political concerns. It may do so, but it can also create a "political turn" within alienated postmodern persons through simple transformations of space that enable the ability to envision alternative and rearrangements and through imagination-bending suggestions of alternative approaches to our public spaces and to our personal and political lives. All art, whether rebellious or merely conformist, is vital to a healthy imaginative life, and all public art is a benefit to our public culture. Visionary or transformative art throws a wider imaginative net. It can serve as a prime catalyst for the individual political rebellion that ultimately culminates in a more active, thoughtful, and sincerely connected citizenry.

While it is doubtless valuable to create politically motivated art-, which raises awareness about one or many political issues, the argument here is different. Art is a

useful vehicle through which to address social and political ideas. Its seeming disconnection from non-aesthetic realms of life enables it to communicate radical ideas in a nonthreatening way. This type of direct appropriation of artistic creation is vital to political action and change and must not be overlooked (by citizens or by governments who are able to fund such projects). That said, this argument regarding the link between artistic creation and experience and political action is primarily of a different nature.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

Chapter One begins with a discussion of democracy in America today, and draws heavily on Tocqueville's (1835/2002) observations on American life in the 1830s and 1840s. His ideas concerning the role of spirituality and civil associations in American public and private life are discussed in comparison with the characteristics of these institutions and spheres today. Tocqueville argues both that the spirituality of religion and associations support each other (and that religion fosters association) in several ways, and that religion provides a necessary balance with attention to the immaterial where a focus on material pursuits tends to prevail. I then introduce the argument that art and artistic experience can replace the role of religion by providing an outlet from the "established reality" of everyday life (again, both public and private) and by enabling the self to connect with its immaterial needs and desires and thus access feelings of unity with nature and gain a stronger sense of community. Saying that with creative and spiritual knowledge one gains access to feelings of community, implies at least three interrelated ideas. First is the idea of community, which is the philosophical concept that encompasses anything outside ourselves, or the opposite of what is the individual. There

is also the concept of community, which is contained in our local cultures – the physical environment of sights, sounds, images, and voices that we encounter each day. Finally there is the overarching concept of the universal human community, which we access through the feelings of empathy and connectivity that can be gained from our experiencing through art what is felt universally in our everyday moments. The best artists and artworks capture these universal forms and ideas in ever-new ways.

Chapter Two picks up the discussion of both the nature and the role of art in society. This chapter explores Nietzsche's (1872/1967) attempt to establish, if not a definition, at least an outline of the characteristics of transcendent art and creative experience. Nietzsche's understanding of the Dionysian, or irrational, realm of human experience introduces the necessity of passionate release (the beginning of art) to provide us moments of universal connectivity and interrelatedness. It is when the instinctual Dionysian glimpse is processed, and made lasting, by Apollonian reflection, that art becomes visionary. Through organization of the alternative reality that Dionysian experience enables within a person, a consciousness change, or an expansion of the imagination, takes place. From this process emerges political praxis.

Nietzsche's conception of the union of Dionysius and Apollo as the overcoming of tragedy, or transcendent art, is traced from the early ideas expressed in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872/1967), through the more nuanced discussions of *The Gay Science* (1882/1974). I agree with the later argument that the dialectic of these two opposing realms (of life) allows for visionary thought and action. The division between art and true



art, between mainstream conformist art and courageous, sincere expressions of the spiritual and the existential, is explored.

Chapter Three discusses Camus' (1951/1991) understanding of art and its relationship to revolutionary ideas and to politics in general. He saw art as rebellion and, following Nietzsche's similar claims, as an eternal fusion of two opposing realms – those of the rational and the irrational. Camus encouraged a new understanding of individualism that encompasses a unity of all selves. To support and highlight some of Camus' themes in a contemporary setting, this chapter explores how an experience with artwork, whether on the street or within the confines of a museum, creates an emotional and philosophical change within a person that is more important to a fulfilled life, and to a political life, than is often thought. Carol Duncan (1995) and Caroline Levine (2007) provide supportive arguments for the value and power of art in a community. Duncan observes the transformative potency of the rituals that are accessed when art is experienced in museums. Levine asserts that the presence of challenging avant-garde art within a democracy keeps the democracy committed to a freedom of ideas.

Chapter Four examines the importance of dialectics in life and in visionary art, and thus also in politics. Drawing primarily on the ideas of Rimbaud and de Sade (1990), I show that the eternal tension, between what is irrational, passionate, natural, and what is rational, ordered, and a product of reflection, is the most necessary component of rebellious or visionary art. In the parallel relationship within art, there exist two interrelated aspects of art-making that demonstrate its inherently political nature. First there is the initial connection to the instinctual or spiritual realm of existence (captured in

the Dionysian moment), when the artist makes art out of found objects, empty space, everyday life. In these rearrangements of in art-making, there is creation and destruction, elation as well as meditation. Then, whether consciously created or naturally apparent, there is art's modification of reality to illuminate the universal, the existential; life as poetry. This ability of art to provide an image or a sound for the parts of the human condition that are difficult to see or describe, can be seen in works that either literally or abstractly evoke universal themes like love, death, pain, laughter, family, and work and present them in provocative new ways.

Visionary, or rebellious art, is fundamentally transgressive; it is a negation of the established reality. In reorganizing and newly envisioning the world, art provides, for the creator and the viewer, at the very least contemplation, and within this reflection lies great potential for new viewpoints and behaviors to form within the self that challenge accepted ideas and possibilities. It is often said that you can or must experience the particular in order to get in touch with what is universal. We live within a narrow field of vision but can imagine the contours of the extended image. Similarly, Dionysian dances with the particular allow us momentarily (and it can only be in moments) to transcend daily existence and *feel*, not think or organize or value or judge, but *feel* what is human. Dionysian glimpses provide universal understanding in the sense of cohesiveness and wholeness. As we expand our picture of the world and of life, the picture not only becomes more whole, but also begins to take on an entirely new form. The new image reminds us of both our ultimate and our mundane connectedness to all others, despite our learned conceptions of the importance of the individual. Schiller (1794/2004) echos the

alienating force of excessive individualism: "Eternally chained to only one single little fragment of the whole, Man himself grew to be only a fragment: ... he never develops the harmony of being." (p. 40).

We then come to Chapter Five's argument that there has been an ever-increasing move to produce public and social art. This final chapter catalogues some challenging and visionary projects over the past two years, enacted primarily in New York City, that have artistically confronted the citizens of the city. My goal is to demonstrate the various strains of the current public and social art movement and show how its many different projects all aim to contribute to individual awareness, liberation, empowerment, and community participation. Finally, I assert the need for increased private and governmental funding for not only arts awareness and the educational and cultural programs that support it, but also for accessible and open-to-the-public sources of funding for a variety of public and social art projects. Such projects would help traditionally unsupported artists and the many persons whom the art would reach on the streets, especially those who might not otherwise confront challenging art. These types of experiences build and support a community-oriented, cosmopolitan mindset.

It is vital that the American government (and the American private sector, too) fund the arts, and especially public art projects, with greater attention, generosity, and consistency than is now forthcoming. Visionary art must now become social and public in the broadest sense. It must work to awaken truly individual instinct and thought, unite communities, and challenge the false mainstream conception of the lone individual. The 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutionized the boundaries of art. Performance and installation art, the

“happenings” of the 1960s, and graffiti and outsider art became frontline discussions even in the mainstream art world. The defining movement in art for the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been to put it on the street. We must support and encourage this still evolving trend, which is vital to the revitalization and advancement of our public life and our democracy.

## **Conclusions**

The aim of the explorations in this work is to make a contribution to two main areas of political philosophy and political science in general by looking at ideas of participation and community in a democracy, and by highlighting the need for revitalizing changes that seek true freedom through art. In this way, the work seeks to be relevant to theorists in the fields of democratic participation, to practitioners of democracy in all its forms, and to artists (particular artists who value public or social art) and those who fund and organize arts organizations. Further, it endeavors to add to ongoing discussions regarding the foundations of democracy and the problem of citizen participation (or lack of it), as well as to theories of the utility of nonviolent rebellion, and revolutions, to a healthy democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Beyond the relevance to the civil society literature, challenging and visionary art in the public sphere makes available the knowledge borne of creativity to all who cross its path, and thus promotes a theory of art as a tool of liberation from everyday reality for the individual.

Art must focus on connecting members of the human community; it is the only realm able to move *beyond* physical reality and the limitations of history and the everyday. This has always been art’s power, even under circumstances where art was not intended for public consumption. Regardless of its use, art is fundamentally a re-creation

of life, a reorganization of the senses. Even before the presence of overtly impressionistic movements in art like cubism, surrealism, expressionism, conceptual art, even classical and realist painters and sculptors created images that reinvented and reinterpreted the divine as well as the everyday, so as to provoke universal emotions and experiences. Even within the realist style, visionary artists could represent transgressive ideas and emotions.

Today in the United States, and around the world as well, outside the urban centers and pockets of communities that house concentrated art worlds, the social and interactive landscape of art remains largely hidden or nonexistent. For both sincerity (genuine interest and involvement) and complementary progress, democracy must ultimately rely on a true collective of individuals – each endowed with independent reflection on participation and community – not merely the conformist and complacent “popular opinion” of Tocqueville’s (1835/2002) fears. This is what Camus (1951/1991) meant when he argued not that attention to the individual is less important than attention to the whole, but that the idea of the individual must be re-conceptualized to include a vital connectivity with, and reflection of, all other individuals in the definition of one human. Tocqueville (1835/2002) argued that conditions of equality inevitably yield control, and potentially dangerous oppression, by popular will – a new institution, a new form of tyranny, a new paradigm for understanding the structure of society – that for Tocqueville paralleled aristocracy’s hierarchical system of power and wealth. Instead of formal, de jure proscriptions for behavior in society, democracy in America created and upheld rules through elements of de facto and dispersed power. Marcuse (1970a) argued that the advanced capitalism of the 20<sup>th</sup> (and 21<sup>st</sup>) centuries not only fails to respond to traditional

Marxian class theory, it succeeds in incorporating all classes of individuals into its grasp of uniformity and sterility of desires. It is through this historical condition, these moments in the progression of capitalism as an economic system, that we must address democracy as a political system.

As Marcuse, Foucault, and others have described, capitalism has grown from a system of laissez-faire supply and demand with a militant focus on profit to one that has transferred the assembly-line perspective to the realm of the psychological. When in a democracy individual needs – private needs –are consistently felt in tandem with the majority that has created them, liberation from "established reality" is imperative if both authentic individual freedom and the desire to participate in public life are to be accessed. So, what can be said of today's democracy? What can be said for individual political involvement and empowerment when even the most private of desires are essentially controlled by the Establishment through popular culture? How can participation and the desire for change be inspired within each individual? How does art expand the imagination and thus heighten a desire for praxis and community? These are some of the driving questions underlying this work.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### EVERYDAY REBELLION: USING TOCQUEVILLE TO ARGUE THE NEED FOR A REVITALIZATION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY THROUGH ART

*Each individual allows himself to be attached because he sees that it is not a man or a class but the people themselves that hold the end of the chain.... Choosing the representatives of this power from time to time ... will not prevent them from losing little by little the faculty of thinking, feeling, and acting by themselves.*

—Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

Many thinkers in the Western tradition – Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Camus, Marcuse, Gramsci, Beauvoir, among others – have critiqued everyday life and the role both society and the state play in that reality. In various ways, they have asserted the need for an awakening of true liberty within each individual. As we seek answers to today's concerns with democratic life in the United States, it makes sense to consider the ideas of this tradition. An interesting addition to this tradition lies in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, who was more than a sociologist famous for his comprehensive observations on American life. Rather, he was a political philosopher, the first to call attention to the potential dangers to individual freedom of thought that are inherent to American

democracy, in his *Democracy in America* (2002).<sup>10</sup> Writing around the same time that Marx (1844/1978) was finishing the essays that became known as the *1844 Manuscripts*, Tocqueville intended to study America's justice system. He was a young lawyer in service to the French court after the revolution but was so fascinated by America that he stayed longer than intended to examine and experience the many different layers of American democratic life.<sup>11</sup> Some of the most salient and eloquent passages in *Democracy in America* concern the danger that individual thought, cultural and civic activity, and a genuine sense of community will collapse into the rule of a complacent and conformist popular will.

There is a crisis in American democracy today, aspects of which are contemporary and others that are age-old, that must be addressed. Further, it is not enough simply to cite the problems that repeat, such as low participation in the political process. Today's crisis of democracy is reflective of the passage of time; with age, our Republic's power grows more and more dispersed, and becomes further internalized within individuals. This increasingly invisible, yet insidious power in society, results in increasing feelings of a Marxian notion of alienation, of division among people, as popular opinion (the true power in American democracy) wheedles its way further into their very needs and desires, and the 'myth of the individual' – a key part of alienation –

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<sup>10</sup> Many texts provide interpretations of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. From examinations that place Tocqueville in the context of the history of political thought (Wolin, 2001) to those which explore various applications of Tocqueville's ideas to social and political concerns today (Masugi, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> See some of the exceptional works on Tocqueville's life, and on the story behind his enormously popular and influential *Democracy in America*, such as George Wilson Pierson's (1959) classic *Tocqueville in America*, Hugh Brogan's (2007) *Alexis de Tocqueville: A Life*, and Joseph Epstein's (2009) *Alexis de Tocqueville: Democracy's Guide*.



is maintained. Popular opinion, in the United States and almost everywhere else in our globalized postmodern world, is heavily reliant on the capitalism and materialism that created the globalism to begin with; and both globalization and popular opinion benefit from organized alienation. Tocqueville's fears about Americans' acting as a 'timid herd' from the force of equality joined with popular opinion in a democracy have been coupled with the current dominance in cultural life of a complex media structure, a focus on connectivity by way of the Internet and a level of consumerism and globalization he never could have predicted, despite his prescience.

In considering this current lackluster state of citizen involvement in public affairs, and the unique political culture of the United States that accommodates this, Tocqueville serves as a guide to understanding why and how Americans have a tendency to focus more on work than on communal and spiritual affairs, and the implications that this characteristic has on public life and on the individual psyche. Tocqueville observed that religious and spiritual life was necessary in the everyday life of the American, in order for democrats to avoid falling prey to the tyranny of popular opinion that is intrinsic to all democratic systems. The need both to acknowledge and develop our spiritual lives is critical to my primary argument- that public art can revitalize and expand individual imagination and motivation- for several reasons. First, since people are comprised equally of the inclination for reason, as much as of instinct and emotion, it is crucial to nurture both aspects of human nature. Second, with the influence of Locke's work on the development of the U.S. Constitution, as well as the work ethic of the Puritans, American political culture has focused heavily on commercial success, and the value of reason and

science, while knowledge learned of creativity and spirituality seems to play second fiddle. Third, Tocqueville's work shows us that these tendencies within American democracy both have serious consequences on the safety of true liberty, as popular opinion dominates, and that they can be confronted and controlled through experience with the otherworldliness and empathetic reminders of religion. And last, where Tocqueville employs religion in his theory, I insert artistic experience and public art in particular.

His theory of the role of religion in American public life, and consequently, in American democracy, creates an interesting point of departure for the theory presented here. In *DA*, both Tocqueville's art, and the best elements of his political theory, are a result of his ability to vividly describe almost every element of American life, both public and private, through the lens of an equality of conditions. It is his overlying belief that the fundamental experience of being regarded by society as an equal to your peers (at least far more equal than had been the case in feudal European society) creates a foundational political psychology that appears in every relationship, decision, and in the values of popular opinion. This psychological condition is both revolutionary for Tocqueville, as well as a source of dangerous widespread complacency, in that it accepts a certain inherent flux and change in life and in political conditions that allows for fresh input and fast turnover, but it also whitewashes over this potentially fresh independent thought with the suffocating thickness of the ruling beliefs of society. It is easy for Americans to fall prey to, or give in, to the already constructed ideas and values of the popular opinion in power, says Tocqueville, as they are generally more focused on individual economic

success, and the private sphere of life, to think about advancing change in the public sphere.

Although there are many exceptions, this general lack of either empathy or independent will for and in the public is reflected in the ability of most Americans to simply 'let things happen' that they largely feel they have little to no control over, rather than desire to be critical, and thus provide the fodder of true flux and change. Although the 'free rider problem' is not unique to America, as it demonstrates some basic human tendencies, Tocqueville's extended analysis of early American culture, still elucidates how the many unique attributes of American society- its newness, its ingrained survival, and commercial, spirit- come together to create an ideal environment for an excessive focus on work, and the pursuits of the individual. In attempting to understand why so many Americans fail to even vote, let alone be engaged, on their own accord, in either governmental or civil society -based actions, without tangible and often immediate material rewards, it is valuable to turn to Tocqueville's observations to explain the qualities that are common to most who reside in America. Tocqueville himself implies his observations will stand the test of time, as they are the inevitable reflection, or byproduct, of democratic governance.

In this chapter I employ several of Tocqueville's primary observations on democracy and American life to demonstrate that individual creative rebellion (for him, as exemplified through religious experience) in the pursuit of liberty plays a necessary role in American political life. Tocqueville argued that the Puritan drive for work, and the full embrace of a commercial mindset alongside the adoption of democratic goods,

creates the potential for an apathetic and conformist American people, without much perceived need for community, or an understanding of the human condition; and that this weakness could be improved through religion.

Where he used religion as a balancing force against these drives, I argue that in our modern context we can, and ultimately must, transmute the role of religiosity into that of art. I aim to show that spirituality is a political concept and that art can fill this role. Artistic experience is a more direct and more democratically accessible avenue to counter our individualistic and capitalistic proclivities. To improve the levels of civic behavior and heighten genuine feelings of inclusiveness and community within and among individuals in society, Tocqueville's arguments about the importance of religion in democracy can be better understood in the language of art, and may be reformulated as the importance of art in a democracy. This replacement of the role of religion with art has important implications for individuals, for society, and for democracy.

There is a key distinction between religious practice and behavior, and religiosity, or what can be explained as the type or intensity of your belief, that is important to the ideas presented here. To abide by a religion's rules and doctrines, is the condition of being religious, of following a religion in your everyday life. This is far different from what is understood as religiosity, or spirituality. The spiritual feelings and connections of the spirit that may, or should, arise when engaging in religious practice, is what is important to the heart of this thesis. It is not about the religious behavior but rather the emphasis here is on the depth of spiritual feeling as a result of reflection brought on, or encouraged by religious knowledge or practice. This same reflection, connection to

otherworldly values, and spiritual connectivity among creatures and people, is encouraged by art and creativity. When Tocqueville discusses the role of religion in America, his point that its indirect relationship to political life actually sustains its primary influence in that realm, and thus creates order in a society of equality of conditions, is important and holds a place in the history of American democracy, at the very least as seen through the eyes of a European. Still it is his other point about religion, the one that concerns not the rules of religion, but the knowledge of the spirit, the belief in the values of the spirit, and the seeking of the spirit within and among us all, that is relevant to what I argue here.

### **Overview of Tocqueville's Primary Arguments in Democracy in America**

In looking at American democracy, Tocqueville was interested in the perpetual tension between the establishment of equality among individuals in society, and the encouragement of liberty that naturally perpetuated difference. Within this dichotomous relationship, he highlighted the important role of religion, and both the practical nature of Americans and their tendency for frequent change, what he called “restiveness.” During the time of Tocqueville’s visit, Americans lived as pioneers, pushing forward the boundaries of the rapidly expanding physical and philosophical frontier of their land; theirs was an enterprising mindset that sustained survival and growth. It is natural that both the pragmatism and the mildness of American political culture reflected the still developing needs of a rapidly growing country; in all aspects of life, practical thinking and a focus on commerce as more significant than poetry and virtue helped to define Tocqueville’s America.

Tocqueville's overarching arguments in *Democracy in America* rested on his belief that the chief defining characteristic of this new democracy was what he called an "equality of conditions." It was this leveling of "conditions" – the equal distribution<sup>12</sup> of political benefits among citizens, and mobility across social classes – that most reflected the vast changes that manifested in the transition from a hierarchical feudal society to a nonhierarchical democratic one. This equality of conditions trickled down to bring a new face to every aspect of social, political, and economic life in America.

Tocqueville had few complete solutions to the problems he feared in democracy, although he did suggest that American democracy needed a "new political science" that would attempt to identify, prevent, and correct the potential dangers inherent to democracy, and that democracy should hold moderation as its dearest virtue. This moderation in life would be achieved primarily through both the role of religion and the role of secondary voluntary (family and friends being primary associations) social and civic associations, and by encouraging what he called 'self-interest properly understood', which can be understood as a particular definition of self-love that asserts that loving oneself naturally includes a love of all others and thus an attention to the public good, in order to combat the dominance of material pursuits. Above all Tocqueville believed it was necessary to love democracy moderately. He saw public expression as necessary to liberal democracy as protection against its internal contradictions. He concluded that the new American democracy is a delicate balance of equality, liberty, and religion. It is religion that both creates a permanent structure where an equality of conditions had made

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<sup>12</sup> Slavery, and other structural inequalities, not included.

the structure or order of society fluid and regulates the mores of American life, and that which could persuade the American mind away from commerce and labor into the realm of the immaterial. As a reminder of all that is important to human life outside of physical and material needs, religion, by supporting a life perspective that centers on the human spirit rather than self-serving pursuits, not only can push people out of the isolation that capitalism naturally lends itself to but also can encourage a higher level of independent thought. Once religion is able to discourage tendencies toward isolation and materialism, then people who have unwillingly accepted the rule of Tocqueville's tyranny of the majority while in isolation now can see themselves as members of a true human community. As a result, they will be exposed to a deeper understanding of true individuality that embraces the desires of others and of the community. We must love democracy, but in moderation, that is, rationally and pragmatically as well, Tocqueville implied.

In his book *Reason and Horror* (2001), Morton Schoolman makes an interesting argument in defense of American democracy. He believes that democracy makes individual inner exploration and awareness, and the consequent understanding of the plight of others, natural. This is indeed inherently possible in a democracy, but it brings up a perpetually two-sided characteristic of democratic culture. We must be careful and aware to promote such connectivity. Democracy also creates an environment that can make laziness, a free-rider mentality, and a driving desire for material gain, easy tendencies to fall back on. I disagree though with Schoolman that Tocqueville is negative on the notion of democracy. At the best moments in his *DA*, Tocqueville merely issues

warnings of the *possible* dangers that democratic life can yield. In seeking answers to how and why voluntarism aids democracy, Barbara Allen (2005)<sup>13</sup> applies Tocqueville's theories to contemporary politics and highlights Tocqueville as a political theorist. Allen echoes this view of Tocqueville as moderate: "[F]or him, no principle was an absolute good; even the best passions, including religious devotion, was dangerous when it became ardent and exclusive." (p. xii). America, especially at the time of Tocqueville's visit, was a land of people who were too busy working and creating a country, to write poetry. It is not surprising that Tocqueville, a young aristocrat, would lament the death of romanticism and high art in this new world of commerce and Puritan values. Some Europeans would probably agree with that characterization of Americans today. Of course, Americans after the time of Tocqueville developed several major literary, philosophical, and artistic movements – from transcendentalism to Pragmatism to jazz and the abstract expressionists – that put America on the high culture map. Nonetheless, Americans today are still largely and generally commerce and material minded.

Jon Elster<sup>14</sup> (2009) examines Tocqueville as a social scientist rather than as a political theorist. Elster asserts that Tocqueville's perspective in *Democracy in America* was more effective as an explanatory exercise than as a normative one. Elster criticizes what he sees as Tocqueville's inability to formulate a cohesive political theory regarding the effects of democracy in America. Elster cites Tocqueville's call for a new political science, which is never clearly or comprehensively described, as a key indicator of

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<sup>13</sup> Allen teaches courses on Tocqueville and relates his observations to civic involvement among the youth (middle and high school students) today.

<sup>14</sup> Elster primarily researches the history of social thought, and theories of rational choice and distributive justice.



Tocqueville's lack of effectiveness as an "important political theorist". Elster uses this point – that Tocqueville's ambitions far outweighed the theoretical soundness of his completed product – to harness and provide foundation for his primary claim that Tocqueville is an underappreciated, and effective social scientist and that his observations still have value in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Elster finds supporting evidence for his arguments in what he views as Tocqueville's tendency to be vague, speculative, and ultimately unclear. He argues that this can especially be seen in his second volume of *Democracy in America*. Elster systematically dissects many of Tocqueville's most salient observations on Americans, and shows how Tocqueville sometimes contradicted himself. Elster also at another point accuses Tocqueville of exaggerating some of his observations. He argues that Tocqueville described the key concepts of both individualism and conformity, in at least two different ways, and on the issue of conformism in democracy, to oppositional meanings.<sup>15</sup> At still other points, Elster's language is almost mocking of Tocqueville's research integrity, and he is notably concerned that Tocqueville's theories are not "testable" or transferable.

The reader of *Democracy in America* is struck by the contrast between the concrete and down to earth nature of the first volume and the highly speculative, almost sophomoric character of many parts of the second. Most of us are liable from time to time speak

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<sup>15</sup> Dick Pels (1991) has produced a salient critique of Elster's interpretation of Tocqueville.

before we think; Tocqueville often seems to have thought before he looked (Sainte-Beuve<sup>16</sup>) (Elster, 2009, p. 4)

Here we see Tocqueville both affirming the norm of self-interest among the Americans and claiming that they were afraid of admitting to act out of self-interest. No doubt some of the individuals he met corresponded to the first profile and others to the second. In one context, the latter occurred to him; and when he came to discuss phenomena where he could make explanatory use of the former he had, as I suggested in the Introduction, forgotten his earlier argument (Elster, 2009, p. 26).

Elster tells us that he aims to show us that Tocqueville's work "does indeed contain[s] exportable mechanisms" (p. 9). While I do not believe this need be or should be the exercise at hand when one reads Tocqueville, it is in this way that Elster feels Tocqueville, or any social scientist, is valuable – where he can provide *ways* to observe and understand society, not where he actually observes and understands our society as it was nearly two hundred years ago. I strongly disagree that Tocqueville loses relevancy with regard to his actual observations and theoretical warnings, and can only be useful to social science if we can pull out of his work techniques and matrices that can be repeated in various contexts.

### **The Case of the Mediocre American**

The first volume of *Democracy in America* is largely descriptive, depicting Tocqueville's journey through America's towns and cities. Here he identifies the

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, the French writer and critic who wrote between 1828 and 1869, argued that an artist's biography must be examined to achieve a full understanding of his work (Proust famously disagreed).

foundations of American democracy as equality and liberty, but not until the second volume does he analyze the effects of equality on the conditions, sentiments, and relations of everyday life. Tocqueville begins with a discussion of the direct relationship he identifies between rising levels of equality and more empathetic relations in a democracy. He attributes this relationship to several causes, among them the lack of a fixed class structure in America, the inevitability of change and movement, and the role of compassion in American democracy. He explores how the unavoidable relationship of master to servant changes from aristocratic conditions to conditions of equality. He then explores similar changes within families, in the institution of marriage, and in the equality of the sexes. Tocqueville successfully tackles how democracy and, more specifically, the middling effects of equality not only influence, but also directly alter the foundations upon which society rests. In the pages of the second volume, Tocqueville describes the dangers to liberty that a focus on equality of conditions naturally brings and tentatively discusses the need for rebellion from the potentially liberty-crushing tendencies of American democracy.

Tocqueville seeks to provide evidence for his opening claim that greater conditions of equality produce increasingly compassionate mores: “As peoples become more like one another, they show themselves reciprocally more compassionate regarding their miseries, and the laws of nations becomes milder” (p. 539). He argues that the very constraints, in both the public and the private realms, that prevent mingling among classes, are also what tightly binds members of the same class to each other in aristocratic societies. This situation is very much the opposite in democratic nations, where not only

does class structure lack a strong tie to history and tradition, but also classes are indicative of an often temporary wealth. Even the well-to-do in America are not joined as closely to each other as the members of the former aristocratic class. As a result of these close dialectic relations in feudalism, there was devotion between master and servant, but it was not the true compassion that comes from recognizing yourself in *all* others that arises under conditions of equality. Tocqueville observes, “In democratic centuries, men rarely devote themselves to one another; but they show a general compassion for all members of the human species ... they are not disinterested, but they are mild” (p. 538). He provides further additional evidence for his assertion that equality is the important variable in the transformation of mores by going beyond his experiences under aristocracy and observing the inhumane treatment of slaves in an otherwise free and equal America. Tocqueville writes that “thus the same man who is full of humanity for those like him when they are at the same time his equals becomes insensitive to their sorrows as soon as equality ceases” (p. 538).

Equality also creates a mutual need among individuals that is understood through an awareness of the many potential dangers and vulnerabilities that could befall any or all of us, with equal possibility. In other words, we are independent, but we are not alone, and we are *equal* in that way: “At the same time that equality of conditions makes men feel their independence, it shows them their weakness; ... their interest as well as their sympathy makes it a law for them to lend each other mutual assistance when in need” (p. 545). Because of frequent daily interactions with a wide variety of people across continually shifting class lines, “the social state naturally disposes Americans not to be

easily offended in little things.” (p. 562). This ability to move between societal roles, combined with the inevitable opportunities for social mobility, increases compassion (though it yields competition as well) among men. This compassion is then woven into the fabric of social relationships.

The observed tendency toward the middle alternately plagues and empowers the American landscape. But this propensity for the middle terrain in life is also, as Tocqueville says, an inclination toward a dangerous complacency and conformity in everyday life:

They willingly turn themselves away from the ideal to direct themselves toward some visible and proximate goal...Equality does not destroy imagination in this way, but limits it and permits it to fly only while skimming the earth. None are less dreamers than citizens of a democracy, and one scarcely sees any of them who want to abandon themselves to the idle and solitary contemplation that ordinarily precedes and produces great agitations of the heart. It is true that they put much value on procuring for themselves the sort of profound, regular, and peaceful affection that makes up the charm and security of life; but they do not willingly run after the violent and capricious emotions that trouble and shorten it (p. 571).

Perhaps most important is his contention that American democracy, and its accompanying tenet of equality, consistently, and in all realms of life, pushes the American toward mediocrity. Tocqueville views this development as natural to

democracy and ultimately best for all, although still somewhat horrific to his aristocratic sensibilities. This "middling effect" naturally has both positive and negative results, although for Tocqueville, the loss of certain extreme and imaginative ideas by rare individuals is acceptable when one considers the benefit that is a nation of mild and pragmatic, if sometimes conformist, democrats. This section of Tocqueville's work employs his critical arguments regarding the basis of American democracy and its accompanying mores to explain the unprecedented reinvention of social relationships based on equality. Unlike the fixed class relationships essential to hierarchical rule, democracy encourages organic, fluid connections, such as the ones we encounter in a variety of social and civic meetings, charities, and associations, that bind people to one another in a more genuine partnership that can be revised, and recreated at the will of the individuals (and not the social or political order) involved.

### **Tocqueville and How a Love of Commerce in Democracy Breeds Excessive Individualism**

Tocqueville believed that a quest for, and the attainment of, property created an independence and drive that supported liberty, but that excessive self-interest and its consequence, greed, corrupted the benefits of a focus on commerce (Drolet, 2003). As we know from the Puritans, a hard-work ethic and a desire for material success yields pragmatism and order; but, without the benefits of a complementary religious life and an active voluntary civic life such as that of our earliest European settlers, a love of commerce will create citizens alienated from their fellow citizens as well as from public life.

For Tocqueville, the American obsession with commerce created a love of liberty that was essential for the democratic state; but with democracy's accompanying tenet of equality, the American people, encouraged to succeed above all, were prone to placing political concerns behind his more important material ones (Drolet, 2003). Tocqueville argues, "Commerce is naturally the enemy of all violent passions. It likes even tempers, is pleased by compromise, very carefully flees anger. ... Commerce renders men independent of one another; it gives them a high idea of their individual worth; ... it therefore disposes them to freedom but moves them away from revolutions" (p. 609). As a result, individuals in democracies are motivated by a greedy self-interest in material comforts that precludes a desire for political change or revolution and an inability to identify properly the needs of the public. This major weakness of the democratic system creates a need for a balancing force that can alleviate the pressure of material success, educate the people, and restrain greed and self-interest. Tocqueville observed that religion achieves this balance in material- and popular-dominated American life. Religion provides the necessary link to empathetic and community-minded emotions and perceptions that become clouded by the fog of the competitive mindset of daily commercial success.

Michael Drolet's work reveals new details about Tocqueville's life<sup>17</sup> and places Tocqueville's work in context with the history of political thought. Drolet provides a similar analysis of the role of religion in American democracy. He argues that Tocqueville, following Montesquieu, believed that "religion cultivated between

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<sup>17</sup> Both Drolet (2003) and Wolin (2003) have made reference to Tocqueville's active but conflicted life as a politician.

individuals' sentiments of fellow feeling, sympathy, and benevolence. It also directed individuals' attention to spiritual concerns, obligations and considerations, and these took them beyond their daily and material preoccupations" (p. 80). Invoking Tocqueville, Sheldon Wolin (2003) argues that like democratic man, "postdemocratic man wants to be led while feeling free" (p. 570). Wolin highlights what is perhaps the primary problem in American democracy: that citizens enjoy their equal access to liberty but lack a certain "spirit of liberty" that inspires them to take active part in sculpting and preserving that liberty.<sup>18</sup>

I argue that this spirit of liberty in American democracy is linked intimately to the spirit of community that is reawakened both by religion, and by artistic experience. Feelings of community are born of truly independent contemplation apart from the popular will. When a true spirit of liberty is accessed, the feeling of universal empathy, or a spirit of community, is awakened inside the person. Religion is a portal to our immaterial world, and these intuitions work as a 'check' on our pursuit of the material, both in their ability to create the feelings of intoxication and transcendence in which we find that we possess qualities that can't be quantified or commodified. In the absence of the divisive competition of ownership, unity as a real possibility, is more readily perceptible. This was apparent in Tocqueville's time, in part because of the way religion was woven into the everyday moments of life, even political life, thus illuminating earthly concerns. It was in his day, the key reminder of spiritual life in a commerce-based

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<sup>18</sup> Wolin (2003) further asserts, "[P]ostmodern despotism consists of the collapse of politics into economics and the emergence of a new form, the economic polity. ... At home, democracy is touted not as self-government by an involved citizenry but as economic opportunity" (p. 571).



world; today it is artistic experience, and particularly public and social creative experience, that can invigorate, refresh, and connect together, all members of society through its universally meaningful rearrangements of values, and of life itself.

Tocqueville distinguishes between unrestrained self-interest, and thoughtful self-interest guided by reason, what Drolet (2003) calls an “enlightened self-interest” (p. 182). It is clear that self-interest on its own will not naturally align with the interest of the public, but a reasoned self-interest demonstrates the importance of the public good. We must balance our taste for material success with this new sort of selfless self-interest, or liberty will be at stake, argue both Tocqueville and Drolet. Likewise, the other major threat to liberty, excessive individualism, is tempered both by religious life and by an active involvement in political and social associations.<sup>19</sup> In their examination of the social capital produced by civil society today, and the relationship of civil society to the mechanisms of the state, Edwards, Foley, and Diani (2001) suggest that civic organizations create empathy among individuals, and employ the words of Putnam to illustrate their point: “associations broaden the participants’ sense of self, developing the ‘I’ into the ‘We’.” (Putnam, 1995a, p. 67). They thus foster what Tocqueville termed “self-interest properly understood,” as well as a “wider sense of a community and social purpose” (p. 34). Both the spiritual aspect of religious belief and associational life remind people of the value of that which is outside their everyday concerns and their material pursuits. Spirituality aids in the discovery of the universal, the infinite, and the eternal.

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<sup>19</sup> Mark Warren (2001) argues that Tocqueville overgeneralized the effects of associations on democracy resulting in a too simplistic state-society model, and that not all associations have the same effects on democratic life. Warren seeks to identify which associations are the most inclusive, and which best promote civic interest, participation, and leadership.

Similarly, when we associate with others, we are granted peeks into a greater sense of community as many small interactions and communications form a more interesting, and more interested, public realm.

### **Imagination and the "Spirit of Liberty"**

Tocqueville's central quandary in *Democracy in America* is how a democracy, characterized by equality can be truly compatible with liberty. Tocqueville speaks often in that volume of the "spirit of liberty," of the good that liberty possesses in and of itself. Rather than being a means, a tool to achieve certain goods, liberty can be an end all its own, a desire to create life actively, rather than to merely accept it: "[T]hey lack the taste itself for being free. Do not ask me to analyze this sublime taste, it is necessary to experience it." (Tocqueville, 1856/1955, p.205). He argues that under democratic conditions men slowly give up their liberty to an administrative despotism, both to preserve their material comfort and to ease the insecurities of the constant flux and uncertainty of democratic life.

Allen (2005) looks specifically at the role of religion in American democracy and calls attention to the vital role of imagination in preserving liberty in a democracy. She echoes Tocqueville's call for a wider imaginative capability among citizens so they may escape the tentacles of soft despotism. "Conformity originated in two ways – when "innovators" silenced themselves and when the empire ... (intellectual authority) was so vast that unorthodox ideas lay beyond the imagination. In politics self-censorship reaped any number of negative consequences, but in society the lack of imagination—the complete suppression of thought caused by "an enormous pressure of the mind of all

upon the individual intelligence” – seemed to Tocqueville far more dangerous.” (p. 166). This relationship between feelings of insecurity and the desire to yield to a greater authority is a common theme in human history. Freud (1927/1961), too, pointed to how humans have historically accepted the ‘Truths’ of religion in order to fill the void with which the inevitable existential crisis confronts us with. In agreement with Tocqueville, Hilda Hein (1976) writes: “In producing a work of art, one engages in deliberate choice, assuming responsibility for one’s decisions and their outcome. By contrast, bureaucratic society diffuses authority to the point where autonomous action all but disappears, and paternalism buffers our conduct so that we become morally and intellectually atrophied” (p. 150).

It is when intermediate bodies of local governance are eliminated or undervalued that individual liberty begins to slip into the soft despotism of centralized governmental control.<sup>20</sup> In this historically new form of tyranny, the sovereign power of the state does not exert the traditional overt force of monarchs past. Rather it slowly and almost imperceptibly embraces the mind of the individual and quietly shapes it into conformity with the whole (Hein, 1976, p. 188). “Freedom alone is capable of lifting men’s minds above ... the petty personal worries ... in ... everyday life, and of making them aware at every moment that they belong each and all to a vaster entity ... their native land. It alone

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Rahe (2009) likewise agrees with Tocqueville that the ‘drift’ toward soft despotism by way of a yield to administrative and popular authority is natural in a democratic society and must be constantly defended against. He sees this human desire for guidance as rooted not only in the ideas of Tocqueville, but also those of Montesquieu and Rousseau. Further, he concludes that America today has indeed given up true liberty for administrative control and argues that Americans must embrace a new revolution that aims to reverse this yielding of freedom to a central government, albeit his argument is of a distinctly libertarian nature: “[L]et our virtue be individual responsibility” ( p. 280.)

replaces at certain critical moments their natural love of material welfare by a loftier, more virile ideal” (Stone & Mennell, 1980, p. 378).

### **Tocqueville and the dual role of religion**

Tocqueville may seem out of place among philosophers of rebellion and critique of everyday life, but his ideas about the dangers to liberty in a democracy speak to a fundamental train of thought within this tradition. Although he did not directly argue in *Democracy in America* that Americans need to rebel, he implied as much. One of his few solutions to the dangers inherent in democracy lies in both the institutional and the spiritual nature of religion. Although it is the spirituality that religion provides for the Americans that is his most salient point, he begins by explaining how vastly different a role religion as an institution plays in a democracy than it does in European aristocracy. It is its uniquely indirect authority in America that creates needed structure in a democratic world of flux, by stressing proscribed moral behaviors and punishment for delinquencies, according to Tocqueville.<sup>21</sup>

The legal and institutional separation of church and state that is often taken for granted in this country can be understood in a new light when one considers the unique relationship of democratic life to religion in the United States. Tocqueville argued that

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<sup>21</sup> The conservative libertarian scholar Michael Ledeen (2001) examines Tocqueville’s assertion that the various elements of American democratic life are kept in balance, excessive individualism avoided, and liberty protected, by Americans’ strong religious beliefs and by their desire for a decentralized government that encourages local governance and an active role in voluntary associations. He argues that American democracy has evolved significantly from the world described in Tocqueville’s observations close to two centuries ago. He asserts that today’s political life is distinctly and self-consciously separate from religious life and belief. This move away from religion in the public threatens the precarious balance of relationships that Tocqueville described. Ledeen also cites the importance of associational life but does not identify a decrease in voluntary public participation (a claim often made in contemporary democratic theory) as a threat to liberty.

religion creates balance by adding a necessary element of spirituality and community to an American everyday life of practical and commercial minded hard work. In America, there is a national tendency for the material and the earthly that breeds individual not collective progress. Accordingly, Tocqueville said that there is a dire need for the presence of the immaterial in American life. Specifically, religion acts as a shield against excessive individualism by providing access to that which is other worldly, and by allowing for connection with feelings of an eternal universal whole.

Unlike Barbara Allen, (2005), who takes an activist approach to Tocqueville, Matthew Maguire (2006) is a historian whose work reflects his interests. His text on Rousseau and Tocqueville focuses on the role of imagination in connecting everyday life to the infinite and eternal. Maguire argues,

Tocqueville develops a dualistic and quasi-Pascalian anthropology in which transcendence, including freedom, is explicably defined in opposition to the material cosmos and the desire for secure comfort and earthly well-being that shapes the modern opinion. Yet this dualism in Tocqueville persistently resolves itself in favor of those forces opposed to transcendence, against Tocqueville's stated intentions (p. 13).

For Tocqueville, religion provided balance and served as the stabilizing force (married with popular opinion) that prevented the constant flux of democratic life to devolve into chaos. But the influence of the immaterial is particularly important when

one considers how vital a desire for community interaction, world view, and ultimately associations can be for a vibrant and ever-changing American democracy.

In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville put forth several foundational arguments regarding spirituality and religion in general and the unique role that religion plays in America. In the second half of his work, Tocqueville's discussion of religion parallels his changing intentions from the first to the second main section of his text. In the first part, he established that, under the competing conditions of equality and liberty in a democracy, the role of religion is vital to order and well-being. Beginning in Part Two of Volume I, Tocqueville describes how vastly different a role religion plays in social and political life under conditions of aristocratic hierarchy and under conditions of democratic equality. The primarily commercial nature of this new democracy fueled in the American people a pragmatism that craved the balancing force of spirituality. Americans had come to embrace religion with open arms, despite its many rules for the everyday.

Tocqueville observed that religion in America plays a fundamentally *indirect* political role – ruling by the superego (popular opinion as ego ideal) rather than by laws and bureaucracies. “Christianity therefore reigns without obstacles, on the admission of all; the result ... is that everything is certain and fixed in the moral world. ... So the human spirit never perceives an unlimited field before itself; however bold it may be, from time to time it feels that it ought to halt before insurmountable barriers” (p. 279). He observes how, although state and church remain separated in American political life, religion exerts “its real power” (p. 283) by its very deliberate exclusion from political institutions.

He described religion in democracy as being opposed to aristocracy and as garnering more devotion and being more powerful in the lives of people when it is unconstrained by institutions and official positions of authority.

Tocqueville observed how religion draws a tight circle around the boundaries of the American democrat's imagination. It is imagination that enables new ideas, participatory desires, and, ultimately, revolutionary action and change.

The imagination of Americans in its greatest leaps has therefore only a circumspect and uncertain step. ...These habits of restraint are to be found in political society and singularly favor the tranquility of the people as well as the longevity of the institutions,"... At the same time that the law permits the American people to do everything, religion prevents them from conceiving everything and forbids them to dare everything (pp. 279–280).

### **Tocqueville's Ultimate Fear: The Squelching of Individual Liberty and the Advent of Soft, or Administrative, Despotism**

Tocqueville wrote that “the same equality that facilitates despotism tempers it; we have seen how, as men are more alike and more equal, public mores become more humane and milder; ... tyranny in a way lacks an occasion and a stage. ... passions are

naturally contained, imagination bounded<sup>22</sup>, pleasures simple”(p. 662). Marini (1991) argues that “Tocqueville’s analysis is, in the fundamental respect, primarily theoretical. It involves nothing less than the attempted reconciliation—on the level of political history—of the inherent tension which exists between the public and private; the general and particular. In the process he hoped to forestall the worst aspect of democratic life, the tendency to administrative despotism” (p. 270).

Tocqueville explains how the excessive possessive individualism that develops out of the equality of conditions (and the equal access to opportunity for wealth) of American liberal democracy slowly eats away at the natural human emotions of compassion. Without the ties of empathy, a sole focus on material pursuits drives men apart: “Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all others: ... he is beside them, but he does not see them; he touches them and does not feel them; he exists only in himself and for himself alone” (p. 663). It is when we focus on material gains that individualism is naturally logical, and it is when excessive individualism sets in that a person becomes susceptible to domination by the majority will.

When Tocqueville defines the political authority of the majority will in American democracy, his description brings to mind Hobbes’ (1651/2009) also vividly visual explanation of the Leviathan as one man consisting of many other men. This imagery captures Tocqueville’s primary argument that in a democracy the most dangerous opportunity for tyranny is within the people themselves who seek freedom:

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew Maguire (2006) argues that Tocqueville identifies the expansion of imaginative capability within individuals as the way to counteract the oppressive power of popular opinion in a democracy.



[T]he sovereign extends its arms over society as a whole; it covers its surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules through which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot clear a way to surpass the crowd; it does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them, and directs them;[...] reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd (p. 663).

Tocqueville's language is noticeably strong in those passages, and strikingly visual; the reader can almost taste his disgust with American democratic complacency born of greed; we can feel his fear and his voice rising as his argument progresses.

Our contemporaries are incessantly racked by two inimical passions: they feel the need to be led and the wish to remain free. Not being able to destroy either one of these contrary instincts, they strive to satisfy both at the same time. They imagine a unique power, tutelary, all powerful, but elected by citizens. ... They console themselves ... by thinking that they themselves have chosen their schoolmasters (p. 664).

Tocqueville was largely devoted to understanding the effects of equality on the conditions, sentiments, and relations of everyday life. He employed many of his fundamental arguments regarding the basis of American democracy and its accompanying mores to explain the unprecedented reinvention of social relationships in

this new land based on equality. He wrote that, unlike the fixed class relationships essential to hierarchical rule, democracy encourages organic, fluid connections that bind people to one another in genuine partnerships that are revised and recreated by the will of the people, not the social or political order. In this same vein, in an environment of equality, religion becomes linked to people's faith not by force and material promises but, rather, by individual acceptance of religious faith (and its mores) alongside the institutions of democracy.

Tocqueville observed that religion in America functions as the everyday constraint on boundless individual liberty (even in the realm of the imagination) through its complement, the power of mass opinion. It exists apart from institutions, is "an invariable disposition of the human heart." (p.409) and is seen as a necessary part of democratic life, embraced with self-conscious determination. "I do not know if all Americans have faith in their religion...but I am sure that they believe it necessary to the maintenance of republican institutions. This opinion does not belong only to one class of citizens or to one party, but to the entire nation" (p. 280). Religion, by providing fixed answers, stabilized the newly free American society, but at the same time, by providing access to feelings of a universal whole, it also worked to protect against the excessive individualism that is a natural danger in democracy.

Following his initial assertion in Volume I that in America religion rules de facto, or without the aid of laws and institutions, Tocqueville develops this argument in Volume II to explain how religion captures the hearts and minds of Americans: "In America religion itself has so to speak set its own limits; the religious order there has remained

entirely distinct from the political order, in such a way that ancient laws could easily be changed without shaking ancient beliefs” (p. 406). This quote demonstrates Tocqueville’s belief that, whereas the government could make laws, religion created and regulated morality and served as a check on politics, policies, and the law. In this way, religion banished the grave dangers of excessive liberty. In Tocqueville’s eyes, an excess of freedom was breeding ground for perpetual change, revolution, and, ultimately, anarchy. Tocqueville had already seen that the prominent characteristic of American democratic life was the constant flux he observed in labor relations, family relations, and almost all aspects of life. If it is flux that defines relationships, and ultimately society, then this movement must be played out on a foundation of order. Without such a foundation, Tocqueville worried that this new, already successful democracy would cease to function smoothly. While religion provided systemic order, it was its other powers – to provide access to immaterial questions and desires and to universal emotions – that would keep democracy fresh and independent thought truly free. Religion provided spirituality and compassion for others in daily life that sustained a necessary balance among individuals in a nation built on the hard work of pragmatic, commerce-minded democrats.

Tocqueville offered insight into the nature of revolutionary behavior by observing that Americans, unlike the French, for example, never had a democratic revolution and thus never felt the paradigm shift (and sudden true freedom) of a crumbling belief structure: “There are no revolutions that do not disrupt ancient beliefs, weaken authority, and obscure common ideas. Therefore every revolution has the effect, more or less, of delivering men over to themselves and of *opening a wide and almost limitless space*

*before the mind of each*” (p. 406; emphasis added). This, perhaps more than any other of Tocqueville's observations, holds the key to understanding American life. Tocqueville asserts, that despite the freedom that equality yields, there is little true individual freedom of mind in America. Interestingly, he seems to despair of this lack of independent spirit almost as he points out the dangers of too much individual freedom: “Individual independence can be more or less great; it cannot be boundless. It is true that every man who receives an opinion on the word of another puts his mind in slavery; but it is a salutary servitude that permits him to make good use of his freedom.” (p. 408). In similar fashion, he spoke of the role of mass opinion as both a liberty-suffocating force, and as the vital glue that ensured the stability of the country.

Tocqueville argued, “The same equality that makes him independent of each of his fellow citizens in particular leaves him isolated and without defense against the action of the greatest number” (p.409). This is one of Tocqueville's paramount fears. The public has a singular power among democratic peoples. This is what he wants to argue in *Democracy in America*.

It does not persuade [one] of its beliefs, it imposes them and makes them penetrate souls by a sort of immense pressure of the minds of all on the intellect of each. In the United States, the majority takes charge of furnishing individuals with a host of ready-made opinions, and thus it relieves them of the obligation to form their own. American political laws are such that the majority reigns over society, which greatly increases the empire it naturally exercises

over the intellect. For nothing is more familiar to man than to recognize wisdom in whoever oppresses him (p. 409).

No individual or groups of individuals can, whether on the basis of class or wealth or even legitimate political power, ever claim to have any inherent authority over knowledge. Still, Tocqueville observes that under conditions of equality, the collective society, or popular opinion, does assert authority over societal knowledge and beliefs. His warning of what he termed a "tyranny of the majority" – that the power of popular will does not need to use force to oblige belief but, rather, that it “penetrate[s] souls” – is strikingly anticipatory of C. Wright Mills’ (1956) arguments that the power of authority in America is based not on force but on bureaucratic manipulation. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville wrote, “One can foresee that faith in common opinion will become a sort of religion whose prophet will be the majority” (p. 410). Equality births popular institutions based on the assumption of equal individuals and the complementary oppression of these individuals by the mass: “I see very clearly two tendencies in equality: one brings the mind of each man toward new thoughts, and the other would willingly induce it to *give up thinking*” (p. 410, emphasis added). This complacency extends into all aspects of life: “[In American democracy]... majority right had passed into ‘the smallest habits of life’” (Drolet, 2003, p. 87).

Tocqueville asserts that “men cannot do without dogmatic beliefs” (p.417). In other words, man cannot live well with too much freedom of any sort. For the sake of a stable democracy, observes Tocqueville, the masses must not be existentially curious. Rather, they can rely on the safety of the ready provision of knowledge. These are two

interrelated points. Tocqueville does not trust the unstable nature of democracy without religion to rein it in and provide the necessary “master.” That is, the master–slave relationship integral to aristocracy must reinvent itself in all political systems. The fixedity of religion is practical, useful, comforting; it saves people from existential crisis, from the void of true individuality. Religion serves as a moral check on desires for excess and greed – society’s source for the superego. Democracy fundamentally allows for more freedom of choice, and, when in combination with the laissez-faire nature of capitalism, more individual material gain. In the new world, religion replaces class structure as a limit on human desire and greed. It supports the democratic and commercial interests, especially those of the majority (which are ultimately the interests both of government and of religion as well). The influence of religion, and its dissemination into the mass, works in tandem with majority opinion to prevent revolution.

Tocqueville, himself a pious Christian who believed in the necessary authority of religious values, brought to light the distinctly new role that religion played (and arguably still plays) in American life. He wrote that, upon his arrival in the United States, it was the religious air of the country that first intrigued him. The Founders had created the separation of church and state to make certain that the extreme nature of religious beliefs would not hurt a government based on equality. In the process they ensured that religion would play a strong role in everyday life because of its very separation from government. As the editors write in their introduction to the 2002 translation of *Democracy in America*, one of the, if not *the*, defining characteristic of Americans, according to Tocqueville, is that they “suffer from individualism.” It is apparent throughout both

volumes of the work that “individualism” is a complex phenomenon; it is at once natural, a privilege, a threat, and an oppressor. Americans’ private isolationist tendencies become even more threatening when seen in conjunction with the flux that is also inherent to democratic society.

Tocqueville revered the novel and indirect role of religion and religious mores in American democratic life. He observed that religion, despite its explicit separation from the state in American government, must nonetheless adopt a new role that engages popular opinion (and its supremacy in daily life) so as to create stability, both in government and in society, under the new conditions of equality. Tocqueville observed that, by the time of his visit, American religion had moved away from a focus on traditional theology (aristocracy and *the next life*) to an attention to morality (dictated by religion) in this life. Accordingly, the representatives and leaders of religious institutions had also perfected their careful separation from institutional public life while maintaining less explicit but ultimately more influential power over the inherently interrelated but still distinct realms of society and mass opinion.

Tocqueville saw religion in America as a stabilizing and disciplining force. It is in this sense that is the first institution of American public life. It creates order and balance where there is great potential for excess. Democracy fundamentally allows for more liberty and thus more freedom of choice and seemingly boundless individual gain, so in the transition from hierarchy to equality, religion replaces class structure as the limit on human desire. The rules of religion, and the simplified ‘truths’ of mass opinion, work together, to prevent revolutionary desires from forming in the minds of citizens.

Tocqueville valued religion as the replacement of the rigid class structures that existed under aristocracy, but he equally found it valuable as an avenue to an expanded imaginative capability and to a sense of universal community among individuals. Although he was by all accounts a democrat and praised the importance of freedom, he was also fearful of the limitless boundaries of true freedom – that is, freedom that is unconstrained by religion. Tocqueville observed that freedom in American life was largely expressed through the drive for commercial enterprise, pursuits that separate people from their collective instinct.

The problem of excessive individuality concerned Tocqueville greatly, and he rests the brunt of his solution on the power of religion. He made a strong case for spirituality as an elevation of consciousness. He greatly valued the ability of religion to elevate individual desires and curiosities beyond material concerns to the realm of the immaterial. In American democracy, religion as spirituality prevents an excess of individual sentiment, because the foundation of all religion is transcendent universality; religion as an indirect public institution provides society with a prescribed morality and a uniformity of behavior that favors order where democratic conditions fail to provide permanent structure. Both of these benefits create community where it threatens to dissolve. As the freedom to consume, acquire, and achieve, and, with it, material success, are highlighted under democratic conditions, religion, both as individual spiritual experience and as public institutional presence, creates a more active desire to pursue the development of the human spirit and the human community. It is this spiritual role of religion that provides the basis for the argument I make here. The knowledge born of



spirituality must be reconceived not as the product of religious participation, but as the benefits of artistic encounters, and in particular public artistic experience, in American democracy today. In the creation of a public minded and participatory citizenry, this spiritual knowledge is as vital today, if not more, because of the high levels of consumerism and commodification, as it was in Tocqueville's America.

### **Replacing Religion with Art in Today's Democracy**

Following, Tocqueville's assertion that a uniquely indirect role of religion was needed to create balance in a democratic society based on an equality of conditions, I argue that art, particularly public and social art, is needed, perhaps more than ever, in America today. Artistic creation and re-imagination highlights, reflects, and distorts our most universal emotions and desires and in its varied public forms is accessible to all, free of charge. Although spirituality, like creativity, is freely and individually accessible, a religious structure inherently excludes and limits; whereas an artistic structure, that is, art displayed in museums and galleries, though it can be exclusive (at least for its very physical enclosure of the art), is released from its bounds once placed in our streets, our parks, and our buildings. With genuine spiritual inclusivity serving as our guide, creativity must be nurtured among Americans today, and among all democrats. The spirituality of artistic experience, and the knowledge it produces, must be encouraged through the creation and support of public art projects. Increased occurrences of public art challenge the generally higher valuing of conformist aesthetics by the public, and more importantly, simply places thought-provoking and rebellious art in our everyday public lives. The knowledge gained through creative encounters is born within us, but the

nature of this knowledge rests primarily on transcendent and universal ideas and emotions, that alert us to an expanded realm of possibility for everyday life and a greater empathy with others. Public art's occurring in the open and free spaces of our daily lives yields an easier and closer connection between how we perform our routine habits and how we express and understand our higher spiritual desires.

Just as Tocqueville revered a religion without hierarchical bounds and elitist rules, this work encourages the freedom of public art as an alternative to our increasingly commodified and digitized lives. Artistic experience needs to be freed of its elitist constraints within institutional walls and its elitist myths, which discourage the average person from taking part in artistic life. Public art is located in public spaces rather than in such delegated spaces as museums, galleries, symphony halls, and libraries. It is un-elitist; is often unregulated or less regulated than artworks housed in conventional spaces and is thus accessible to more people more frequently; and is experienced within the moments of their everyday concerns, rather than in those moments they have specially designated to “visit” art where it is likely they already have an expected experience in mind.

It is clear that by advocating mixing democracy with religion, Tocqueville did not mean the hierarchical religion of the *ancien* regime, but, rather, a new, distinctly American understanding of religion as exemplified in the Puritan belief that religious life is intertwined with political life. Tocqueville did not believe that a specific religion ought to be mandatory, like Rousseau's (1750/1993) civil religion, but rather that religious life should be fluid, without permanent structure, and chosen willingly, much

like the nature of democracy itself, and the political, economic, and social relationships it creates. This quality of the religion he admired in America is also present in artistic experience, which, spiritual as it may be, almost always appears to be more innocuous in society than the forces of religion or government, despite its possible active engagement in these other realms.

Tocqueville simultaneously revered and feared the forces of democracy. Like historian George Bancroft and other early American thinkers, Tocqueville, the French aristocrat, believed that in the course of history, democracy was both inevitable and natural. He greatly admired American democracy and the American people, but he also worried that this still new system could be dangerously corrupted by its inherent weaknesses. As natural as was the development of American democracy itself, it was also natural to this particular political system that certain cultural traits develop within individuals and communities along with the democratic practices. An excessive love of material well-being, the excessive spiritual isolationism that Tocqueville called “individualism,” and its complementary “general apathy,” all ultimately contribute to a tyranny of the majority (tyranny of public opinion) and, beyond this, a situation of soft or mild (also called democratic or administrative) despotism. This was his greatest fear – a situation in which control is exerted not by overt force but through more insidious avenues to the mind. He warned that the strength of American public opinion could subtly, yet to devastating effect, subvert true independent thought among Americans themselves.

Tocqueville argued that, because American democrats tended to focus on the pursuit of individual material gain they were also prone to becoming complacent and conformist, traits he asserted were most prevalent in, and most dangerous to, the continued freedom of American democracy. When we fall prey to the pursuit of excessive materialism we are led naturally to excessive individualism, which then leads to apathy – we are comfortable enough staying home with our material possessions<sup>23</sup> to distract us from considering public involvement and new possibilities for our lives. If we believe that material accomplishment and wealth is the Holy Grail, then what incentive is there to seek community and political involvement? While this mindset may have served frontier living, it also leaves us vulnerable to the invisible, yet encompassing, grip of soft despotism. Tocqueville affirmed the need to nurture the emotional realm of life that could awaken the senses of “middling” Americans that had been muted and relinquished to the sway of popular opinion, by excessive attention to the quest for the material, and the pragmatic, and the rational.

Many philosophers, particularly of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g., Baudrillard & Glaser, 1994; Hardt & Negri, 2000; Marcellus, 1969; see also Lefbvre & Moore, 1991), have lamented the difficulty of inspiring revolutionary ideas in people living complacently in the comfort of advanced capitalist republican representative democracy. "But men who live in an ease equally distant from opulence and misery put an immense value on their goods. ... the number of these ... small proprietors is constantly increased by equality of conditions. Thus in democratic societies the majority of citizens do not see clearly what

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<sup>23</sup> This is not unlike Herbert Marcuse's (1969) "Great Refusal" arguments of the 1960s.

they could gain by a revolution, and they feel at each instant and in a thousand ways what they could lose from one” (Tocqueville, 1835/2002, p. 608). This far-sighted observation identifies the problem of complacency among citizens of a capitalist democracy. Connection with the immaterial opens our minds to that which is universal and breaks down the boundaries between us as individuals. In this way, the immaterial can bring a revolution of the mind.

The ability to imagine revolutionary ideas is key to maintaining vitality and progress. Revolutionary ideas may not lead to revolution, but they can help foster in people the desire to take on a more active role in affecting change in their communities. There is little reason for Americans, then and now, to pursue a truly community-minded everyday life. Nor is there always clear incentive to work through, alongside, or even without the institutions of the state to change their government or their conditions of life. To counter this complacency, Tocqueville’s argument is revived here.

We must add spirituality and recognition of the immaterial to our material desires. A desire for the immaterial and for existential answers is as natural as the capitalist pursuit in conditions of liberty and equality, but it is how one addresses and shapes this desire that matters. Religion seizes on the human desire for boundlessness and oneness, but public art, and especially rebellious, visionary art that challenges the majority will, could fulfill this role in a more accessible way. Like religion in Tocqueville’s vision of America, today it is art that can free the imagination to envision change and to access the universal feelings that foster empathy for each other and an involvement in communal life. Artistic encounters can alter, distort, and re-envision our everyday worlds. These

reconfigurations of reality expand the boundaries of our imaginations and encourage in us desires alternative to what is present in the majority's will. These new desires, by their very existence, challenge the constructs and limits of everyday life. When these new desires are accessed through artistic experience, the consequent rebellion reawakens political will within individuals in a liberal democracy.

Tocqueville keenly recognized man's natural existential yearnings. Despite these observations, as well as the many notes he made on the threat of "soft despotism" by the all-powerful body of mass opinion, he maintained his theory of balance and advocated the protection of the status quo upholding the stability of democratic conditions. In a powerful passage (p. 662-665), Tocqueville described popular opinion in America as an organism that looms over the everyday in both public and private life. Popular will, though intimately linked with religion, greatly surpasses in influence both old-world religious institutions and the rigid moral expectations of an aristocratic hierarchy. This influence permeates even the very desires and expectations of individuals. In other words, under the power of the popular will, individuals become replicas of each other, varying only in gradations. His words here are strong, wary, and almost revolutionary in spirit. One is moved by his warnings against this new monster of the collective. In the concluding section of his text, Tocqueville delves deeper into understanding the body of popular opinion that he sees permeating American life and harshly indicts the lack of independent thought in America: "Above these an immense tutelary power is elevated, which alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyments and watching over their fate...[I]t renders the employment of free will less useful and more rare; it confines the action of

the will in a smaller space. Can it not take away from them entirely the trouble of thinking and the pain of living?" (p. 663).

### **Some Observations on Foucault and Tocqueville**

Tocqueville's conception of the way the beliefs of popular opinion infiltrate even the very wants and needs of individual Americans, anticipates Michel Foucault's (1991) arguments a century and a half later, on the diffusion of governmental power. There are in Tocqueville's claim that "[i]t seems that if despotism came to be established in the democratic nations of our day, it would have had other characteristics: it would be more extensive and milder, and it would degrade men without tormenting them" (p. 662) strains of what Foucault was to argue in the 20<sup>th</sup> century about the silent dangers of dispersed power. Tocqueville "described how the majority had 'degraded' itself, its enlightened self-interest reduced to a coarse, untutored passion." (1835/2002) Further, he warned of the "the omnipotence of the majority", and Drolet (2003) points out, was novel in arguing that the majority will in a democracy represented a new kind of political authority. Tocqueville "characteris[ed] it [*the majority will*] as a custom, a *social* phenomenon, an internal element of democracy. [This] enabled him to move beyond more traditional accounts of majority rule which focused exclusively on majority political power or authority" (p. 87).

Despite his striking admonishments of the weaknesses of democracy, Tocqueville concludes that to preserve the system, we may not want to question mass opinion. Rather than "rock the boat," he accepts that Americans concede to the authority of the majority, for it enables ease in everyday democratic life. In *Democracy in America* he explains

how religion under conditions of equality co-opts public opinion, and vice versa, because true individual freedom is a threat to both regulatory enterprises: “public opinion is never, therefore, their enemy: rather it supports and protects them, and their beliefs reign both by the forces that are proper to them and by those of the majority that they borrow. ... religion succeeds in struggling to its advantage against the spirit of individual independence that is the most dangerous of all to it” (p. 424).

Tocqueville seems to recognize the potential revolutionary power of the influence of the immaterial and worries that Americans may suffer from a detrimental complacency, but he falls short of encouraging actual change. Above all, he is an advocate of balance and order and recognizes the many positive ways religion creates structure in the “loose” and ever-changing everyday American experience. It is religion that maintains stability by preventing excessive materialism, individualism, and apathy among Americans, but it also contains the potential to disrupt this same stability and balance by seeing beyond individualism to revolutionary ideas of community and human unity that could potentially change the foundations of democracy.

Today we still need the influence of the spiritual to “wake us up” individually and ultimately, collectively. Artistic experience can replace religion as a way to access the spiritual in everyday democratic life. Religion aims to connect to oneness with the greater universe, but artistic experience can access that same existential desire by challenging and rearranging what we take for granted so that we can more easily recognize new possibilities in everyday life. Before people feel the need to join civil associations, there must be a spiritual or artistic unifying experience that leads them to want to associate



with one another. With the capitalism has come the now widely accepted claim by Robert Putnam (1993, 1995) and others<sup>24</sup> that the 20<sup>th</sup> (and certainly the 21<sup>st</sup>) centuries have brought on the demise of civic associations and other indicators of political and social community. This demise coincides with the technological advances of modern industrial capitalism and the rise of the middle class. These forces work together to falsely separate society into a collection of seemingly free-standing and competitive individuals. This "myth of the individual" is supported by both democracy and capitalism – democracy, because of its reliance on an equality of conditions, and capitalism, because of its insistence on (and need for) rational behavior, its inherent selfishness and survival of the fittest foundations, and its focus on the importance of material gain.

One of Tocqueville's most notable observations in *Democracy in America* is of the overarching middling quality of American life. Equality and liberty are in perpetual tension; equality levels the playing field whereas liberty allows difference. This is Tocqueville's overarching theoretical concern. The liberty that democracy guarantees provides fertile ground for capitalism, which then puts the emphasis on the individual and on material satisfactions. Despite the domination of the individual and of material things in American everyday life, Tocqueville still astutely observed the survival of that almost indescribable universal feeling of curiosity about the spiritual world, about a realm beyond the everyday that is alive in all of us.

### **Some Observations on Freud and Tocqueville**

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<sup>24</sup> Foley and Edwards (1996), and Tarrow (1996) argue that Putnam misses Tocqueville's key point that civil society must have a free and supportive political context.

Tocqueville's observations, especially those concerning the idea of dispersed power in the form of soft despotism, anticipated the ideas of many of the leading thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from Marcuse to Foucault. Some other connections between Tocqueville's work and the ideas of contemporary thinkers are less direct. Sigmund Freud had little to say about democracy but elucidate the way individuals – ultimately the building blocks of society – understand their own spiritual and rational beliefs and desires.

Freud famously argued that we choose religion as adults to replace our fathers. Freud (1927/1961) described religion and our need to believe – in God, in anything – as a fantasy, as our need to find otherworldly protection and stability (through the paternalism of religion and its institutions) in a world of fear, loneliness, and chaos. “The origin of the religious attitude can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness.” (p. 19).

In my "Future of an Illusion" I was concerned much less with the deepest sources of the religious feeling than with what the common man understands by his religion – with the system of doctrines and promises which on the one hand explains to him the riddles of this world with enviable completeness, and, on the other, assures him that a careful Providence will watch over his life and will compensate him in a future existence for any frustrations he suffers here (p. 21).

But his critics reminded him that this feeling of boundless eternity (“a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole” [p. 12]) comes before the reasons for the existence of religion that psychoanalysis can provide. Freud’s critic argues that this “oceanic” feeling is the real source of "religious sentiment", and that this feeling is simply that, and not an article of faith<sup>25</sup>: one can “rightly call oneself religious on the ground of this oceanic feeling alone, even if one rejects every belief and every illusion” (p. 11?). Influence by Nietzsche’s concepts of the *overman* and the will to power, Freud saw great value in the role of powerful people who reject illusory truths in favor of true freedom of thought – literally an avant-garde that can transform and lead mass society. Although it is clear that not everyone can achieve or comprehend independent freedom of thought to the same extent, it is this sort of reawakening and rejection of simple truths that can yield more interested and empowered individuals, who then come together to form a more actively participatory society.

Decades before Freud’s influence over the 20<sup>th</sup>-century mind, Tocqueville had recognized man’s natural need for the immaterial, although he connected this need for the immaterial with the needs of a democratic political system based on equality. Even with a very different perspective, Freud (1930/1961) nonetheless agreed with Tocqueville that “[r]eligion has clearly performed great services for human civilization. It has contributed much towards the taming of the social instincts. [But not enough.]” (p. 47?). In an aristocracy, where all men and women are not subject to the same opportunities (equality

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<sup>25</sup> But Freud (1930/1961) defends himself by saying that his main intention when writing "Future of an Illusion" was to understand how the everyman understands religion, not to uncover the deepest sources of those religious feelings.

gives rise to the individual drive to acquire, which then gives rise to the rule of the *material*), Tocqueville believed that a strict class structure maintained order in society. Tocqueville asserted that religion in a democracy achieves two divergent goals. Religion is both a way to structure the constant flow of democratic life and an access route into the emotional realm of life that is often brushed aside in commerce-focused America.

Tocqueville believed that Americans needed to nurture society, not only individual satisfactions, and to be reminded of this through the spiritual experiences that religion encourages, in order to create balance within the materially focused American democrat. He correctly identified the natural human desire for some understanding of, or simply a connection to, the realm where our immaterial aspirations and confusions can be attended to. In one of *Democracy in America's* particularly insightful moments of psychological analysis, Tocqueville identified the relevance of existential feelings to individuals and to society: "Alone among all the beings, man shows a natural disgust for existence and an immense desire to exist: he scorns life and fears nothingness. These different instincts constantly drive his soul toward contemplation of another world, and it is religion that guides it there" (p. 284). Tocqueville used the same base argument as Freud did –that man is naturally and inevitably aware and fearful of his own existence – but they took it to different places. The spiritual and religious structure that Tocqueville not only admires but deems necessary in a democracy is the same religiousness that Freud argued sedates man, and prevents him from living an actively political life. They both understand and draw attention to the important role that spiritual life and religion play, both in individuals and in society and democracy, but they come to opposing

conclusions. Still, both thinkers seem to imply our interdependence as humans, and the need to recognize this in order to move democracy, or civilization, forward.

Freud (1927/1961) described well man's need and desire for religion but attributed only political and social values to this universal yearning for religion. Despite his belief that reason cannot supersede the primacy of our passions, he failed (and admits to this failure himself and cites his lack of connection to this "oceanic" feeling personally and his adherence to science) to give this common, and in many ways defining, emotion its own space, to allow it to stand on its own as a primal need. Both Freud and Tocqueville ultimately cite as the reason religion exists – man's inevitable crisis of existence – has to be considered in relation not only to religion, but to all areas of life where the spiritual and sensual realms can be accessed. This is the point, in both Tocqueville and Freud's very different arguments, that not only a place, but an important place, for art in society becomes apparent.

## **Conclusions**

The desire for what is immaterial looms much larger than does religion – it is a defining cornerstone of human existence, and it is *because* of this primal longing that religion holds the primary role in society. In this same vein, before people create and join civil associations, they must encounter a different shade of the same feeling that propels them to come together. This feeling can be created, supported, and fulfilled by art. Art, then, fosters a desire for connection with the human community. This connection creates the motivation for action and change in daily life that supports this new understanding of unity.

I argue that the immaterial – whether it is religion or art – can also foster a new understanding of self and humanity that enables the creation of a community-minded revolutionary consciousness. Tocqueville was no communitarian, but he valued recognition of the human community for its power to create balance in the everyday life of American democrats. Our experience with art creates new needs that propel us to desire and be able to imagine, realities beyond the given conditions. Art, particularly public and social art, primarily because of its accessible nature, promotes a more imaginative, and in this sense revolutionary, consciousness, that strengthens democratic life by empowering individuals with the desire to enact change.

Visionary art in the public arena encourages a spiritual jolt within passerby that for a moment, often in the middle of a busy day, pushes away within individuals the daily concerns and yields them to the power of feeling the universal pains and joys that art so easily and naturally evokes. True liberation from the majority requires an expansion of the imagination beyond the system's prescribed limits, and visionary art brings out in people the desire for, and the ability to perceive of, new and expanded possibilities for everyday rebellion. Such deeper knowledge of ourselves, our imaginative capabilities, and the creative rebellion this supports, could incite total social revolution, but, more importantly (and more commonly), it begins the project of awakening the individual consciousness to the liberation of independent thought and morality, and to the crucial empathy for others which this independent thought naturally leads to. In the 1960s, Herbert Marcuse (1969/1970) introduced his theory of revolution through art and created a space for similar arguments. It is not a change in material conditions (Marx's

(1844/1978) argument that we need to replace capitalism with communism) that will bring recognition of the human community about, but, rather a fostering of the eternal dialectic of art and reason as exemplified through visionary art. The universal and transhistorical experience of art can engage the participatory and revolutionary (in the sense of being able to imagine and desire change and alternatives) consciousness within individuals, and finally, within society.

Art cultivates the spirit – one's inner life – and with this attention to the knowledge that is within, one finds the importance of connection to the world outside of them. This great benefit of a creative life is the sense of community (empathy) and other-worldliness (that there are vital needs and desires beyond the everyday of practical concerns). Once the myth of the individual has been dispelled, people can be free, without having entirely to disavow material desires, to embrace their interrelatedness (without fear that they will fail in society) with each other and with nature. Individuals will be able to approach their relationship to society in a new way, with as much, if not more, of the participatory determination they use in their individual pursuits of material wealth. While we perceive ourselves to be alone, our rational interests determine for us that we do not want things to change if they are good enough for our daily lives, but, once we come together, imagination will cast its net wider, as the entire landscape of human endeavor will have been broadened. This opening of the imagination allows for and encourages more active and consistent participation in public life by supporting change (and even major change) without fear of total disorder.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### THE COUPLING OF THE DIONYSIAN AND THE APOLLINIAN: THE EVOLUTION OF NEITZSCHE'S DEFINITION OF TRANSCENDENT ART

*An amoral artist-god who wants to experience, whether he is building or destroying, in the good and in the bad, his own joy and glory – one who, creating worlds, frees himself from the distress of fullness and overfullness and from the affliction of the contradictions compressed in his soul.*

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

*The modern stage, at least in its predominant bourgeois realism, reflects the limited and barren spiritual landscape of modernity. The hopes for transcending this situation lie in a rebirth of tragedy through a reconnection with the spirit of music and with myth. For modernity, however, the gods have aesthetic principles, art having in a sense replaced religion.*

– M.A.F. Witt, *Nietzsche and the Rebirth of the Tragic*

As a young philologist in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Friedrich Nietzsche situated the ancient Greek god of sensuality, Dionysius, symbol of all that is instinctual and chaotic within the self, at the core of creative human experience and at the center of a critical and



fulfilled life. Rather than deny its vital importance to an understanding of Greek tragedy and Greek culture in general, Nietzsche elevated the Dionysian (and its expression in tragedy and the Dionysian festivals of excess) to a realm of experience that existed on an even plane, as half of a whole system, with that of Apollinian order and reason (and, in his time, with the grand narratives of the Enlightenment). The generally accepted 19<sup>th</sup>-century attitude and scholarship on ancient Greek culture (and likewise on modern life) had fundamentally misunderstood the ancients' legacy by sublimating, so to speak, evidence of raw passions in Greek art into an appearance of pure Apollonian reason, harmony, virtue, and order.<sup>26</sup> It is precisely in the unity of the two opposing drives that Nietzsche discovered the foundations of what he deemed the highest art form – tragedy, or true transcendent art. Nietzsche argued for a revival of, and new appreciation for, the tragic in society to serve as the vehicle by which to transcend everyday life and the falsely absolute values of Christian morality through a positive and willful authentication of life. This discovery of tragic knowledge would result in the rebirth of the individual and the reawakening of culture. But, unlike Nietzsche's contemporary Arthur Schopenhauer (1818/1969), who first acknowledged the importance of pain and pessimism to human existence, Nietzsche reformulated tragedy (and the doctrine of eternal recurrence) to become a positive and life affirming, rather than a nihilistic and debilitating, vision for the future in a godless world.

This chapter examines the Dionysian drive, as well as its foil and complement, the Apollinian consciousness, and their dialectical dance of artistic creation. In dialectics one

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<sup>26</sup> This dominant view was heavily reliant on Johann Winckelmann's (1764/ 2009) *The History of Ancient Art*.

sees life as a perpetual resolution of contradictions within concepts that are composed as dichotomous relationships that alternately come together and twist apart in an eternal dance. This dialectic provides an understanding of existence that assists in consciousness change. It is vital that encounters with Dionysian fears and passions, also akin to the notion of the taboo, or the "unclean," or (to use Julia Kristeva's, 1984, term) the "abject," be incorporated *into* the rhythms of everyday life and that these work *in opposition to* the routinized structure of contemporary mass image mediated consciousness, or the reiterations and simplifications of "plastic aesthetics." Following Nietzsche's (1872/1967) argument that the Greeks, to cope with the decline of their civilization, needed true Dionysian tragedy, I argue that contemporary 21<sup>st</sup>-century life in America, with its myriad luxuries and mass-negotiated experiences, has been in a decline of true Dionysian experience. As has been man's inclination at least since the Enlightenment and the invention of capitalism, adherence to reason and individualism has edged out the value of sensual and spiritual knowledge in all areas of life. Today, individual experiences, potentially possessed of true freedom, are often repressed, by the force of popular will and become part of the plague of the conformity of mass experiences. The universal character of many emotions and experiences has been exploited, as the middling quality of popular opinion dulls the extremes of experience and forms a tepid and simplified "social" concept of the experience that is consumed by individuals in democratic society, who then, somewhat misleadingly, believe they are the authentic possessors of those emotions.

When we draw a connection between creativity and feelings of empowerment and empathy for others, the link takes several steps. When we tend to our spirit, we press pause on pragmatism and on everyday urgencies, and allow ourselves to focus on the embrace of the melodic words of poetry, of music. These feelings often bring deep calm, sometimes long stored-away sorrow. These emotions, felt through the senses, access both joy and pain; creativity (like it is the intention of religion) enables the individual to feel not only for their particular situation, but for the universal joys and pains of the human experience. The more frequently that we can access such emotions, the more we are exercising a healthy attention to our inner worlds, and to our truly free passions, which then illuminate knowledge that is gained from the spiritual experience of rebellious art. For Nietzsche, art could properly focus both on the valuable knowledge of the senses and instincts, as well as on the intertwined relationship of this knowledge to our rationality.

Both Nietzsche and Camus have a style of writing that feels melodic, or rhythmic, aiding you to feel the sensuousness of the unfiltered passions they want to revive in individuals, and in society. For Nietzsche, true art, and true philosophy, encourages the individual viewer to interpret it, and to consider its meaning, in their own personal way. In his own work, he presented his philosophy in spurts of thought, or aphorisms, not as a systematic and unified theory. A unified theory would falsely imply coherence in philosophy that could not be if it accurately reflected on the complexities and divisions within life, and the Self.

Nietzsche believed, in line with anti-Enlightenment writers like de Sade and Rimbaud, that a focus on the body, and on bodily sensuous experience, is a necessity of

forward-thinking philosophy, and of a new understanding of morality that is borne of experience, not the church, or science for that matter. He did not intend to say that the mind was not important to the Self, but that the mind could not create what it does without the experiences of the senses- that the mind is borne of, and intertwined, with the body. This is in contrast to viewing the body- and sensory experience- as a separate, and less important, entity, from the mind, and from rational experience. Nietzsche's overarching point in his philosophy is that man must face his animal instincts, and in the face of a meaningless world, forge his own moral path using art as his only guide. Nietzsche saw in art the same oppositional tension as he found in the Self. Artistic experience reflected the union of this un-resolving tension, and thus was the only source of authentic freedom and meaning for the individual. Although he was clearly influenced by the Romantic tradition, he did not believe that art should function as escapism from life, but rather that one could live meaningfully through art, and actually re-create life from the creative perspective.

I propose the need for the encouragement and development of true Dionysian release – of true tragedy – among individuals on a mass level and the creation of visionary (tragic) art, in defiance of a contemporary society that is ever-more highly routinized and image-ized. Art, by definition, is an expression of an alternative reality. This is the vital distinction between art and aesthetics. I argue that “art” is Socratic by nature; it implies a constant questioning and resolution of contradiction. Aesthetics, or mainstream art, is entertainment, or the beautiful (see Cahn & Meskin, 2008; Cazeaux, 2006; Hofstadter & Kuhns, 1976). This need to encourage visionary artistic experience is

in response to a society that thrives and expands largely on the promulgation of appearance-based experience that seeks to dilute lived reality. At least since the middle of the last century (Marcuse, 1969), seemingly visionary or taboo experiences are regularly stripped of their tragedy, their transgressive power, and thus their authenticity and connections to the truest moments of existence; in this way, important human emotions and experiences are reduced to a shallow and contrived universality.

Notwithstanding that consciousness change is necessary to revitalize and reawaken, first, individuals' true freedom of thought and, eventually democracy, it can begin with small transformations – with the desire to confront true life rather than take the easy road and accept mere images of life. Only after people reopen access to the knowledge of Dionysian spirituality can they be powerful against the disciplining tentacles of our image-ized culture. The energies of the "will to power" provide opportunity for those who are strong enough to accept Dionysian power. With the harnessing of sensual and spiritual power, of suffering and of compassion, we can begin to see the truths of human connectivity and universal human experience. Then we can revitalize the latent community-minded American spirit and pave the way for a stronger and more participatory, democracy.

With the passage of time, the Apollinian sublimation of Dionysian experiences has expanded and become perfected. By sublimation, following Freud (1930/1961), is meant the redirecting of potentially destructive raw passions. These chaotic instincts are transformed into more positive, constructive actions and also repressed into the recesses of the self. The primary form of sublimation today dilutes the reality that is necessarily

Dionysian, especially its most taboo facets, and transforms true passions into simulated passions into Apollinian illusions and images. These simulations serve the dual purpose of 1) strengthening the desire for constantly increasing choices and depth of experience in the consumerism of our capitalist society and 2) further alienating us from our personal Dionysian moments (of love, sex, aggression, pain) by creating the appearance of our having felt Dionysian transcendence, which may simply have been a purchased image (and it is always an image of an experience. The result is a sort of false consciousness).

We need to be aware of our increasing ability, made possible by the vast number of choices aimed at us, not to ‘face life (reality)’ as individuals,, as we must also be aware of the ramifications of possessing and using such ability (Barber, 2008). A new understanding of our shared experiences, such as of happiness and of individuality, must be created. This new understanding can create a life of happiness if we understand happiness to mean the comfort of stability (for Nietzsche (1872/1967), a lack of change meant a lack of life), but not if we understand happiness to mean thriving in the phenomenal experience of everyday life, complete with its discomforts, cruelties, and pain. Accordingly, we need to confront the issue of change of consciousness in everyday life, particularly through the use of art and festivals to create life that is in harmony with both the Dionysian and Apollinian elements. Artistic creation, and likewise consciousness change, are self-overcoming. As political theorist Julia Kristeva (1984a) explains, through creativity, we can confront the valuable human experiences that may be taboo in collective life or that may be filtered through popular opinion in a way that they lose their transformative potential: “the artistic experience, which is rooted in the abject it

utters and by the same token purifies” (p. 17). True confrontation with horror, or the abject, results in a purification of existence that replaces Platonic essentialist truths with a freedom to create the cadence of the everyday.

Nietzsche (1872/1967) believed that the true art of tragedy could serve as the tool by which to create meaning in life where the fallacy of universal values has been positively confronted. Martha Nussbaum (1991/2002) explains Nietzsche’s underlying belief that we must face the meaninglessness of life with positive and willful determination, a determination to create. The other key part of this idea that the inevitable and inherent meaninglessness of the order of the universe, engenders the need to pursue meaning elsewhere – meaning that is truly independently created and experienced, not merely accepted as a hand-me-down truth. On this issue of meaning creation in a meaninglessness world, Julian Young (1992) elucidates Nietzsche's belief that the only true meaning that can be experienced in life is the connection with, and dependence on, all others, in the face of a lack of universal, and God-given, ideals.

Matthew Rampley (2000) echoes the claim that Nietzsche’s ideas about art are inseparable from his confrontation with the tragedy of nihilism: “[H]e accords to art the *potential* for functioning as the counter-movement to general nihilism” (p. 215). “[Art], for Nietzsche, is constituted less by artworks and more by the state of artistic creativity” (p. 219). Rampley points to Nietzsche’s belief that we must reform our aesthetic practices in our ever-evolving culture because we are constantly called on to overcome ourselves so that, “aesthetic reform opens the way to cultural revolution.” (p. 215). He further argues that Nietzsche, although greatly influenced by the romantic tradition of thinkers

like Schiller and Novalis, did not believe merely that aesthetic reform should take place because of the lack of transcendent values in popular cultural aesthetics, but with an existential bent, he believed that aesthetic renewal could serve as an antidote to a meaningless world.<sup>27</sup>

Nussbaum (1991/2002), in her explorations of Schopenhauer's influence on Nietzsche, argues that Nietzsche always denied "[that] we can [could] understand the role that works of art play in human lives, or even adequately explain our particular judgments of beauty and ugliness, without connecting these to human practical needs—and needs that are directed toward living and affirming life, rather than toward resignation and denial." (Nussbaum, 1991/2002, p. 55). Further, she argues that in art "we find life *justified*: that is, having abandoned all attempts to find extra-human justification for existence, we can find the only justification we ever shall find in our very own selves, and our own creative activity" (Nussbaum, 1991/2002, p. 59). She focuses on Nietzsche's argument that in the face of existential crisis and uncertainty, the empowerment of creation builds freedom and will.

Young's (1992) influential study on Nietzsche's philosophy of art<sup>28</sup> considers Nietzsche's beliefs about art as occurring in several stages but argues that the last parallels the first, thus creating a circle of thought. Young argues that art, for Nietzsche (and this is true for Camus' philosophy as well), saves us from our own existential anxieties. Young writes, "The psychological basis of altruism is sympathy – feeling the

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<sup>27</sup> Rampley, M. (2000). *Nietzsche, Aesthetics and Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.216.

<sup>28</sup> The first study of its kind to appear in English.



same kind of concern for the well-being of another that one normally has for one's own – and the basis of that is the altruist's ... inarticulate, 'intuitive' realization that the *principium individuationis* is an illusion” (p. 9). Further explaining this point, he echoes both Camus and Nietzsche: “[The] realization that I am the only being that exists but that every other individual is this 'I' too” (p. 9). Young (1992) is most interested in Nietzsche's assertion of the myth of the individual, or the fallacy that our selves are independently created and defined. Nietzsche, like Camus, believed that true freedom and independence comes at least partly from the recognition of fundamental similarities and interdependencies.

### **The Birth of Tragedy**

Through a genealogical exploration of the history of the Greek tragic form, Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872/1967), critiqued how repressed and misguided 19<sup>th</sup>-century German society had become. In his early, dense prose style, he introduced life as formed by a dialectic, with the comfort of reason, science and culture (society) on one side, represented by Apollo, the god of restraint and harmony, and, on the other, Nature, with its unrestrained passions and instincts, represented by Dionysius. These two life forces complement yet actively restrict each other.

Nietzsche believed that existence is not about eternal and universal truths, but rather is the constant struggle of many competing "will[s] to power" and a "continuously manifested representation of the primal unity" (p. 45). Nietzsche proposed that the early tragic Greek chorus functioned as the expression of that which is universal in the human spirit through the body-, and thus life-affirming Dionysian experiences.

Nietzsche argued that the Dionysian side of human life has been largely denied and apprehended, whereas the already-filtered Apollinian side of life is encouraged in society. Accordingly, the love of reason and conscious knowledge – from Socrates and Plato to Descartes and Kant – has dominated society and the cultural evolution of humankind. Enlightenment's faith in reason as Truth and Science and scientific progress as salvation has, like a veil, hid from our everyday view “excess *reveal[ing] itself as truth*” (p. 46).

Thus Nietzsche presented Socrates as both the problem and the answer. Socrates' influence destroyed the union of Dionysius and Apollo in early Greek tragedy with his love of reason and the conscious mind. Nietzsche asked, “Is the resolve to be so scientific ... perhaps a kind of fear of, an escape from, pessimism? A subtle last resort against truth?” (p. 18). Despite Socrates' fear of pessimism and the unknown of art, Nietzsche admired the strength and courage of Socrates (a man ahead of his time) and was interested in the “artistic Socrates” as a model for life. This combination of a rigorous, transcendent critique and free artistic passion is what Nietzsche seems to have conceived of as the path for a true visionary, for the philosopher of life, for the artist of progress. In his “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” which precedes the text of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche mentions that his own artistic Socratic expression “had a knack for seeking out fellow-rhapsodizers and for luring them on to new secret paths and dancing places.”

The Dionysian drive has many functions, according to Nietzsche. Perhaps most importantly, it allows for a healthy and vibrant social life by providing an outlet for repressed and restrained urges that, if held inside, could damage the health of the self or could ultimately dissolve the union of individuals that is culture (Apollinian). Dionysian

urges are not simply unrestrained emotions and passions, they are desires for the abject, the “boundless and cruel longing to exceed all norms” (p. 10), the antirational yearning for spiritual life, for deep release, for dance, for song. On Dionysian occasions, we allow ourselves to disregard conventional boundaries and limits by experiencing natural animalistic urges for violence, pain, pleasure, and creation (and its counterpart destruction). In the process, Nietzsche argues, we experience transcendent feelings of freedom and mystical understandings of human unity and wholeness, and oneness with Nature. In the 1998 film *Pleasantville*, the citizens of a fictional 1950s television suburban town live in a Puritanical, black-and-white world of reflected images, restraint, perpetual happiness defined by stability and relative to nothing else, and an almost complete lack of change – anti-life living, for Nietzsche. It is only when knowledge of sensual pleasures begins to spread in the community that people are reborn in color, with all its accompanying ecstasy and pain.

Kristeva (1984a) defines the Dionysian, or a similar, concept as “‘abject’” – not only what it feels like but according to its transgressive role in consciousness: “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite (p. 4). Kristeva, inspired not only by Freud and Lacan, but by Georges Bataille too, seeks to increase interest in, and understanding of, our universal and unifying connections with the abject, the bodily, the instinctual, what she terms the semiotic. She argues that the abject can be found in the universal human feeling of visually and sensually observing our own bodily mortality – an experience both exciting

and revolting. In abjection, there is lapse in meaning, leaving only feeling. Kristeva associates the abject with the maternal; she says that when we part from our mother in birth we experience the initial abjection of the maternal that creates our self-identity and brings us into the symbolic (not semiotic) realm of life. The semiotic and the symbolic are two poles of the dialectic of life, which Kristeva argues must balance each other.

I argue that these poles can be seen as parallel to the Dionysian and Apollonian relationship. The semiotic is prelingual, corporal, whereas the symbolic is referential, is of knowledge and reason (Kristeva, 1984a). Poetic language, which I would call visionary – the unification of the Dionysian and Apollonian – for Kristeva (1984b) mediates and confronts the universal contradictions in life. The best art, for Kristeva, explores that which is natural, taboo – the abject.<sup>29</sup>

The abject is experienced when we are confronted with the body in death, in birth, in illness and decay, in excrement, extreme pain, and loss of control. The abject is regularly pushed from public sight and into private repression and concealment. We fear and quarantine our diseases and our garbage, our blood and our bodily waste. Yet the abject, Kristeva explains, provokes a semiotic response, a valuable addition to the symbolic- in our everyday lives.

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<sup>29</sup> In 1993, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City exhibited a show titled *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art*. Included in this genre, of creativity is extreme performance art that employs various forms of the abject, such as a deceased body or rituals of cruelty or suffering, as well as the use of bodily fluids, such as blood, feces, urine. Some of the notable artists whose works were exhibited in this show are Louise Bourgeois, Carolee Schneemann, Cindy Sherman, Kiki Smith, Robert Gober, and Paul McCarthy, among others. Some artists have employed abject materials and ideas to provoke and transcend the comforts of our everyday lives; others are conscious of the simple shock value and even humor that may be contained in the abject. Although theoretically the abject is significant, and while some artworks are able to capture the transcendent moments of abjection, many others seem too-easy, "plastic" imitations of truly subversive experiences, and often their effect is silly and trite, rather than transformative (Cotter, (1993).

## **The Union of Apollo and Dionysus**

The Apollinian consciousness needs the Dionysian energy. “Apollo ...shows us how necessary is the entire world of suffering, that by means of it the individual may be impelled to realize the redeeming vision.” (1872/1967) The primal unity relies on the assistance of illusion; art seeks to understand and interpret. We need chaos to impel us to create, and out of pain comes the desire for beauty through the ordered nature of illusion. We are saved, as from the abject; it sculpts comprehension and veils us from a confusing and painful reality:

Apollo, the god of all plastic energies ... ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy. The higher truth, the perfection of these states in contrast to the incompletely intelligible everyday world, this deep consciousness of nature, healing and helping. ... But we must also include in our image of Apollo that delicate *boundary*, which the dream must not overstep lest it have a pathological effect (in which case mere appearance would deceive us as if it were crude reality). We must keep in mind that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions (Nietzsche, 1872/1967,p. 35; emphasis added).

The Apollinian consciousness, in seeking order and regulation through restraint, promotes an atomistic understanding of life through the “delimiting of the boundaries of the individual, measure” (p. 46), whereas the Dionysian drive, in revealing human desires

and emotions, also reveals a mystical unity or oneness among humans and Nature. This unified vision is very different from the artificial harmony of society; rather, it seeks a spiritual unity that is less about peace than it is about authentic living.

Throughout his life and his writings, Nietzsche argued that the reigning Christian system of morality had created and rationalized a false dichotomy between good and evil that simplified and thus misunderstood life. It was in *The Birth of Tragedy* that Nietzsche first called for life (and likewise art) that is 'beyond good and evil'. It is dangerous to follow the teachings of Socrates that if art is to be beautiful it must be of the consciousness (intelligible, "good"). Instead, we must not deny how instinct and the unconscious can (and should) fuel the creation of art (and the creation of life), wrote Nietzsche.

True art is an expression of our universal and instinctual responses, our inner worlds, of the unsafe, or of the taboo. It is for release, for catharsis, and, ultimately, for education, both for the artists and those viewing and experiencing the art. A true visionary artist expands the limits of our experiences, while simultaneously demonstrating our common bonds: "This Dionysian artist ... exalts Life when he honours her with his love; and in exalting her, exalts humanity as well. For the mediocre, simply because they cannot transfigure life in that way, benefit extremely from looking on the world through the Dionysian artist's personality. It is his genius that, by putting ugly reality into an art-form, makes life desirable" (Ludovici, 1971, p. 51). This artist is a sage, a teacher, a healer: "[There] is a special kind of consciousness or perception which is uniquely aesthetic. Anything which is a genuine work of art must be created out of this

state, created with the intention of prompting and aiding the recreation of a similar state in the mind of the spectator” (Young, 1992, p. 10).

Use of the symbolism of laughter, and its development as a concept, is abundant in the work of Nietzsche and other thinkers such as Kristeva, have followed course. Laughter, with its spontaneity and guttural powers, is the perfect representative of the Dionysian release- of the self, pouring out in unstoppable waves: “Céline – who speaks from within ... So his laughter bursts out ... the gushing forth of the unconscious, the repressed, suppressed pleasure, be it sex or death” (Nietzsche, 1872/1967, pp. 205–206). Nietzsche’s main project was to elevate the importance of the unconscious: “You ought to learn the art of *this-worldly* comfort first; you ought to learn to laugh. . Laughter I have pronounced holy: you higher men, *learn* – to laugh!” (pp. 26–27). But not all of what mass society terms or believes is ‘art’ is either true Dionysian expression or true tragedy (visionary art). Nietzsche clarified this through his distinction between tragedy – true transcendent art – and the plastic arts. Art that is plastic (Apollinian) is concerned only with images and appearances (dreams, appearances of appearances) rather than with lived experience.

The aesthetically sensitive man stands in the same relation to the reality of dreams as the philosopher does to the reality of existence ... these images afford him an interpretation of life, and by reflecting on these processes he trains himself for life. It is not only the agreeable ... images ... the serious, the troubled, the sad ... the whole divine comedy of life, including the inferno, also pass before

him ... he lives and suffers with these scenes- and yet not without that fleeting sensation of illusion (p. 34).

Artistic creation (true tragedy) comes both from recognition of the importance of the Dionysian realm, and from the healthy tension of the two life forces.

Nietzsche argued that intuition can access a deeper knowledge than philosophy can offer because instinct and passion operate beyond words and conceptual organizations and can articulate the universal core of human love and anguish. In later works, after *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche extended his argument against both the omniscience of rationality and a strict Christian morality. Nietzsche viewed traditional morality as hostile to life.<sup>30</sup> At times in his writing, he is almost physically disgusted by Christian morality's function in society as a shield from the pain and suffering of everyday reality. He feared that a morality that relies on promises of a better, truer, other life is "the beginning of the end ... because life *is* something essentially amora" (p. 23). First in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886/1989) and then in *The Genealogy of Morals* (1897/2009), Nietzsche denied a system of absolute morality<sup>31</sup> and encouraged his readers to be self-reliant and live according to self-creation, without the constraints of the morality of the masses. Quoting from his *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1891/1968), he wrote:

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<sup>30</sup> Notably, Stauffer and Bergo (2009), in their recent work on the links between Nietzsche and Levinas, argue that despite the seeming opposing nature of the ethical thought of the two thinkers, there are important overlaps between them: "Both [thinkers] radically reevaluate the traditional ground of ethics and morality, and, further, both are united in their appreciation of the risk that nihilism poses to ethics and to life in general"(p. 1).

Similarly, von Vacano (2007), examining the similarities between the political theories of Machiavelli and Nietzsche, argues that for both thinkers "truth is to be approached from an artistic perspective" (p. 111).

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche officially proclaimed the "death of god" in *The Gay Science*. (1882/1974)..



“[A] philosophy that dares to move, to demote, morality into the realm of appearance ... as delusion, error, interpretation, contrivance, art” (pp.22–23). Similar to Camus’ (1951/1991) notion of a "rebellion of moderation," which must be created in response to the nihilism bred by the absurdity of the human condition, a desire for *life* was Nietzsche’s vision of a meaningful way to live in a meaningless world.

Before a man can create in true (the ultimate) freedom, “[h]e must first be an annihilator and break values (Nietzsche, 1891/1968, p. 228). Nietzsche’s later writings were often focused on the artistic creative *overman* versus the slave morality of the herd, or the masses. This hierarchical conception’s inherent elitism should not distract from Nietzsche’s correct understanding either of the importance of the visionary (in and for society) or of the problem of consciousness change for the philosopher or artist (philosophical artist) – you can never reach everyone. Similar to Nietzsche’s willful *overman*, Kristeva’s (1984a) notion of the "deject"

never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines – for they are constituted of a non-object, the abject ... impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the deject is in short a *stray*. He is on a journey ... the end of which keeps receding. ... And the more he strays, the more he is saved. For it is out of such straying on excluded ground that he draws his *jouissance* (p. 8).

Kristeva argues that the abject, not unlike the animal instinct of Nietzsche’s Dionysian, cannot be understood rationally, through the mind. Rather, it must be felt, experienced, smelled, touched: “It follows that *jouissance* alone cause the abject to exist

as such. One does not know it [the abject], one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion” (p. 9).

### **Nietzsche's Evolving Definition of the Dionysian Realm of the Self**

In a footnote to Nietzsche's (1882/1974) *Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann warns readers that any reader of Nietzsche's work must be aware of his progression as a thinker, particularly concerning his understanding of the Dionysian realm. Kaufmann writes that Nietzsche's early works employed a very different understanding of Dionysius from those in his later works (after *Zarathustra*) (p. 33*In*). He argues that in his early writings, namely, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872//1967), Nietzsche viewed the Dionysian as being in a dialectic with the Apollinian forces in society; later, he situated the Dionysian in opposition to both the Romantic, and the Christian approach to life. Kaufmann asserts that the Dionysian impulse of the later books was entirely unified with the Apollinian drive, while Nietzsche's initial ideas about the neglected Dionysian realm of the body and instinct, in *BOT*, asserted its relationship to, though also its distinction, from its opposing drive. In Nietzsche's later works, this view changed as he began to view and define true Dionysian expression, and true artistic expression (the “artistic Socrates”) as a convergence of the Dionysian and Apollinian realms whereby Dionysian urges are informed by thoughtful creativity. It is also clear from his writings that Nietzsche disliked both the energetic Romantic fondness for drink and reckless abandon, and the slave morals and ascetic nature of the Christians. To pit the exalted Dionysius against these two extremes tells us that the heart of Nietzsche's theory lay in the middle-ground or cross-fertilization of the two. In this dialectical approach, Nietzsche seems to adopt an

Aristotelian mean method where the message for morality, and for progress, is that we can locate a healthy balance in our lives between our two most dominant natural instincts- to understand, and to feel with abandon- by tempering Dionysian disorder and rearrangements, with Apollinian order.

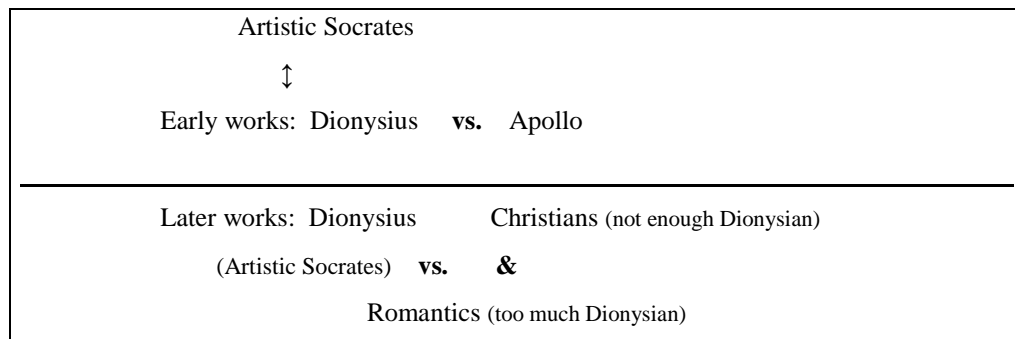


Figure 1

When you experience the Dionysian, you lose your subjectivity and gain a glimpse of universal oneness. The Apollinian realm, by its nature, encourages individual subjectivity; the subject–object relationship exists only in language, or in society (in the Apollinian sphere). In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872/1967), where Nietzsche clearly contrasts Dionysius with Apollo, he does not especially admire the excesses of the Dionysian realm on its own, as alone guidance for life. Rather, he declares a union of the two parallel realms of life in his description of the “artistic Socrates” (p. 92). This artist-philosopher, rigorous yet emotional, was a true visionary, able to use Dionysian moments in a critical (through rationality) fashion in society, that is, for action. Nietzsche aimed to examine “*the problem of science itself ... presented in the context of art – for the problem of science cannot be recognized in the context of science – a book [The Birth of Tragedy] perhaps for artists who also have an analytic and retrospective penchant ... to*

*look at science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that [perspective] of life*” (p. 18). Kaufmann discusses the later characterization of Dionysius as "superabundant" (filled with life) as opposed to the guilt or “resentment” (anti-life) of the Christian (p. 331n). The Dionysius of the later work seems to be a reflective version of Nietzsche’s earlier idea of the God. The initial conception of Dionysius was simpler, characterized as the ruler over a realm of complete disorder and natural chaos, while his later images of the same God depicted the ruler over a liberating artistic drive that uses the transcendent qualities of "truly facing life" through creativity and lived experiences, to pursue critique and change within the individual, and also society. In this sense, Nietzsche’s vision of a union of tragedy and the “artistic Socrates” carries through to his later ideas, where the notion of the Dionysian represents such a union.<sup>32</sup>

Nietzsche was disdainful of the Romantics in general and of the Romantic propensity to believe devoutly in the expression of wild and primal release, often in the easily accessible form of intoxication, as a road to truth. In *the Birth of Tragedy*, he called such romantic art “a first-rate poison for the nerves, doubly dangerous among a people who love drink and who honor lack of clarity as a virtue, for it has the double quality of a narcotic that both intoxicates and spreads a *fog*” (p. 25). Although I would argue that many of the Romantics, the poet Arthur Rimbaud in particular, despite their wild behavior and seemingly "aimless" journeys, were aware, if only subconsciously, of the need for the interjection of the reasoned Apollinian viewpoint into their artistic ventures

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<sup>32</sup> Witt (2007) argues that in Nietzsche’s final works the importance of the Apollonian drive is reduced, in comparison with its valuation in his first work, although he affirms that “Nietzsche never abandoned his anti-Aristotelian stance, which privileges suffering over action and the aesthetic over moral” ( p.26).

that exalted the irrational. Dionysian feelings exist so that people can throw off the cloak of reason for a moment and feel the world without the rules and symbols of society. Yes, the young Rimbaud lived a life of dangerous and self-destructive excess. But Rimbaud's notion of the visionary poet as a driving force of history was a concept that relied on the need to reflect on the chaotic and transcendent moments of Dionysian experience, in order to truly fulfill its claims; and Rimbaud, on several occasions, alluded (1869-1891/1975) to this dialectic- that reason must be overcome to experience the truly free and creative, but that reason can also process and create genuine knowledge from instinctual and artistic experiences.

Despite such objections, Nietzsche (1872/1967, 1882/1974, 1886/1989, 1897/2009) rightly observed that it is in the mixing of the Apollinian and Dionysian drives that we find political theory and a source for political action.<sup>33</sup> In other words, it is only when we dispense with the notion that anti-societal expressions of individual passions can change or move society forward] – , a claim that was supported by 19<sup>th</sup>-century thinkers from the Marquis de Sade (1795/1990) to Rimbaud (1869-1891/1975)– that we can begin to make real use of art as a force counter to politics and especially mainstream culture. It is noteworthy that Nietzsche, one of the men most associated with bacchanalian revelry, the idea of immorality, and a desire to live above or beyond the norm, was cautious in recommending that one live through true art. Although clearly that

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<sup>33</sup> This connection between art and political health is distinct from the view described by Jeanne M. Heffernan (2000) in her examination of art as a political good, where she highlights Maritain's ideas regarding the relationship between art and politics. Quoting Maritain (*Art and Scholasticism*, 1924), Heffernan asserts that, "Art plays a critical role in the life of virtue: art teaches man the pleasure of the spirit and frees him from a preoccupation with pleasures of the flesh" (p. 42).

he was excited by his discovery of the importance of Dionysian experiences to political and social life, he also made clear that misuse of a discovery (or rediscovery) of a vibrant inner world could be fruitless as well as dangerous. Although Nietzsche (1872/1974) pointed out the destructive and painful struggle of human existence, he urged his readers to affirm life and face these aspects of life bravely, to fight nihilistic urges with an enthusiastic will to power.

It is important to remember that the Greek god Dionysius did not simply live with reckless abandon. She taught of truths that came from our passions, our bodies, from what is *individual* to each of us. Henri Lefebvre (1991), the French humanist/Marxist philosopher and sociologist, coined his version of this approach to life as the "art of living." Like Nietzsche's concepts of the *overman* and the eternal return, the art of living, presupposes that a person sees his own life – the development and intensification of his life – not as a means to an end but as an end in itself. It suggests that everyday life become a work of art and 'the joy that man gives to himself.' Further, he alludes to the threat of Apollinian sublimation to the Dionysian project, as well as to the power of visionary art to enable unity among people and nature: "[T]his will not be reducible to a few cheap formulas...[they are] a shallow wisdom which will never bring satisfaction...the [true] art of living implies the end of alienation" (p. 199).

Lefebvre wrote of the importance of the Dionysian festival to healthy ancient rural peasant communities: "In celebrating, each member of the community went beyond himself, so to speak, and in one fell swoop drew all that was energetic, pleasurable, and possible from nature, food, social life, and his own body and mind. Festivals differed

from everyday life only in the explosion of forces which had been slowly accumulated in and via everyday life” (p. 202). The rituals left men and women liberated: “[T]he festivities would end in scuffles and orgies” (p. 202) and completely exhausted: “No aspect of himself [the peasant], of his energy, his instinct, was left unused” (p. 207). He argues, and his approach is part of the argument I am making in this paper, that, with the development of industrialization and modernization in general, the true Dionysian nature of these festivals has faded, leaving little more than superstitious repetitions of the traditional experiences, with people taking part in rituals only for the belief that it can aid the profits on their crops, Lefebvre argues, not for how it can provide needed true release, and in this way, liberation.

In other words, Apollinian image and appearance have replaced the true connection with joy and suffering that historically maintained the health of the community. “Rituals and symbols ... have tended to dispossess human actions of their living substance in favor of ‘meanings’” (p. 209). It is indeed true that ultimately, all images, or reflections – described rather than felt – of intense human emotions and experiences pale in comparison with the indescribable pleasures and intensities of actual experiences. The ever-increasing mass manufacture of release leads to a sterilization and routinizing (in the Weberian sense) of potentially true Dionysian experience.<sup>34</sup> This dilution of experience, and of rebellion and nonconformity, is a common occurrence in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century world that thrives on transforming what is alternative and anti-societal into

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<sup>34</sup> Caroline Levine (2007) writes of the turn in the 1960s, “Turning rebellion into a devious kind of conformity, advertising took the edge off the unsettling power of radical and dissenting outsiders.” (p. 17).

its opposite – an order-affirming (and ultimately capitalist) activity (Barber, 2008; Frank, 1998; Hinderliter, Kaizen, Maimon, Mansoor, & McCormick, 2009). Art is interested in progress and history. For it to function as a deciding force in society, rebellious creation must straddle intuition and reason by blending transcendence and critique.

The Apollinian realm demonstrates our propensity for reason, and in the reflection and order of reason, it also becomes the world of appearances. It is our natural desire to shape the chaos, confusion, and sensuousness of Dionysian experiences into something palatable. Since the 1960s, the hippie culture has, for the large part, grown up and tuned back in to society, or in the rarer cases, fled society completely and gone underground. In the following decades, though, with the smell of hippie culture still lingering, a new term developed for hippies who loved the intoxication and escapism of bohemian life, but not the true political rebellion– who enjoyed the free love, but not the truly free mind. This new “hippie-lite” became synonymous with people who had the appearance of hippies but who had adopted the look mostly to enjoy the reckless abandon of drug experimentation without awareness of the political and social consciousness of the true revolutionary ‘hippie’ (*VHI Rock*, 2006). This type of “watered-down” identity naturally sprouts where there is initially a strong lived experience. Powerful experiences are exciting and mysterious. No matter how one might describe, draw, or sing about such an experience, it can never be satisfyingly understood without your actually living in those moments. We can remember, and even try to describe, the sublime, but try as we may, one cannot adequately articulate Dionysian feelings through everyday symbols because



doing so would be an attempt to relive Dionysian emotions *in terms* of Apollinian reason, which is not possible.

Marcuse (Kellner, 2007) argued that in the difference between true visionary or critical art and mainstream aesthetics that attempt to imitate true art the key is the experience of a true Dionysian moment. Even those mainstream artworks that *appear* avant-garde fail to recapture the creative force of the original and are thus merely an empty vessel of what was once transformative art. “What originally started out as an authentic cry and song of the oppressed black community has since been transformed and commercialized into ‘white’ rock, which by means of contrived ‘performances’, serves as a orgiastic group therapy which removes all the frustrations and inhibitions of the audiences, but only *temporarily* and without any socio-political foundation” (p. 229).

Similarly, *New York Times* art critic Ken Johnson (2010) argues that the institutional art world has become overwhelmed by what he calls "contemporary academicism." This genre of art-making employs various elements of important and revolutionary ideas within the Western art canon. It moves them from their original contexts to new environments and creative confrontations. As Johnson points out, this appropriation of avant-garde artistic tropes may be seen as revolutionary in its own right, and in some ways it is. But, he argues, the “wild new beauty and freedom” that accompanies visionary creation is compromised by the routine enactment of its particular driving creative idea; eventually, I maintain, ever more quickly the visionary and transformative power of the original revolutionary work softens into mainstream assimilation.

It is because many of these Dionysian moments cannot be easily understood that there is both a natural human impulse to provide that experience in an accessible form and a complementary capitalist desire to market and package this same experience. What we lose is our ability to live in the moment, to live to the fullest by feeling as much as possible. “In the end, our only difference is our unwillingness to have a face-to-face confrontation with the abject. Who would want to be a prophet? ... prefer to foresee or seduce; to plan ahead, promise a recovery, or esthetize; to provide social security or make art not too far removed from the level of the media” (Kristeva, 1984b, p. 209). When these two impulses meet, there is a successful market for whatever kind of alternative Dionysian experience one can imagine. But this marketed experience, lifestyle or, more simply, party or artistic idea, fails to replicate the experience accurately.

Kristeva explains the problem of re-creating the passions of the abject: “Would he then be capable of X-raying horror without making capital out of his power? Of displaying the abject without confusing himself for it? Probably not” (pp. 209–210). The experience that marketed the appearance or reflection – or, as Kristeva would put it, the X-ray – of the true Dionysian experience. The result is a mere image, an end result obtained without the process of creation, without the Nietzschean primal unity. It is in this vein that Nietzsche (1872/1967) called Wagner a “Romantic.” Nietzsche (1882/1974), like Rousseau (1750/1993), who argued against mainstream arts, derided Wagner and other artists who pander to the “common man” for being overly theatrical and dramatic, yet utterly status quo.

Open any city newspaper in the major cities in America and you will find a variety of radical avant-garde visual art exhibits, cutting-edge dance and music performances, ecstasy-fueled raves, and ritualized contemporary urban festivals of debauchery. There is evidence of such Dionysian life, existing both underground and in venues that are open to the general public, that takes place all over the world, but this is primarily found in urban areas (especially in the bigger and more diverse cities) and on university campuses, which in many ways resemble the diversity and often complementary liberal nature of urban life. It is largely in these experimental communities and areas, that unique, and anti-establishment artistic experiences expand our imaginative and empathetic limits and encourage community-consciousness, rather than the individualism that is encouraged by the increasing routinization and image-ization of everyday life under current global capitalism (Lash & Lury, 2007; Ritzer, 2007, 2010).

Nietzsche called on us to cast aside the temptation of mass society's postmodern nihilism in favor of a constantly self-criticizing and self-reflecting individualized system of morality. This "will to power" in the face of existential crisis is a fundamental reinterpretation of the Enlightenment itself – to think for oneself and to act for oneself as much as is possible, true autonomy. Most systems of morality assume that there is an objective source of moral knowledge, be it a Christian god or the aristocratic morality of the ancient Greeks. These systems base on these gods their justifications for these rules and their ideas about how the rules ought to be obeyed. Nietzsche (1882/1974), for whom independent individual morality was only possible after the "death of God," warned us

not to engage in any totalizing discourse, to confront life passionately, and to follow our own paths by way of artistic creation.

### Conclusions

In our time, a less hierarchical possibility for ethics is a pluralism of many coexisting individualized personal ethics. Nietzsche (1886/1989) suggested an alternative to a fixed or universal moral basis for practical life in the form of true moral individualism. In contemporary philosophy, Agnes Heller (1989, 1999) (among other postmodern thinkers) advocates an “ethics of personality,” that her colleague Mihaly Vajda (1999) has summed up as a free ethics that contradicts the way that traditional moral philosophy tries to prescribe how people should behave: “Be yourself! Follow your own destiny!” Many thinkers talk about the end of “grand narrative(s)” and big “Truth” sounding board(s) for moral life. Instead they admire Nietzsche’s call for constant self-critique and creation. Instead of becoming an “-ist” or trying to develop a new “ism,” Nietzsche (1891/1968) asks us to think “personally,” to find our own way: “One repays a teacher badly if one always remains a student. ... Now I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when you have all denied me will I return to you” (p. 190). In response to Schopenhauer’s philosophy, Nietzsche (1872/1967) wrote, “Is pessimism *necessarily* a sign of decline, decay, degeneration, weary and weak instincts? Is there a pessimism of *strength*? An intellectual predilection for the hard, gruesome, evil, problematic aspect of existence, prompted by well-being, by overflowing health, by the *fullness* of existence?” (p. 17). “How should we then ... explain the origin of the ... *craving for the ugly* ... the origin of tragedy? Perhaps *joy*, strength, overflowing health,

overgreat fullness?” (p. 21). Nietzsche (1882/1974) pointed out that the Greeks had grown more outwardly optimistic at the very point that their civilization began to dissolve:

a society in which corruption spreads is accused of exhaustion...while the comforts of life are now desired just as ardently as warlike and athletic honors were formerly ... the ancient national energy and national passion ... have now been transmuted into countless private passions and have merely become less visible...Thus it is precisely in times of “exhaustion” that tragedy runs through houses and streets, that great love and great hatred are born, and that the flame of knowledge flares up into the sky...for they carry the seeds of the future...corruption is merely a nasty word for the autumn of a people (pp.96–98).

We find ourselves in a similar situation today. Our culture, in a dialectic with the free markets of capitalism, has reached a point where money can purchase almost anything. What’s better than buying a material object? Some would say that buying a service, or an experience, or, better, a taboo experience is even more exciting. From the Reagan years of the 1980s, and Nancy Reagan’s “Just say No” antidrug campaign, to the antismoking crusades of Elizabeth Dole and others, the last 30 years have seen a “cleaning up” of society. Suddenly it is the 21<sup>st</sup> century in America and cigarette machines are virtually extinct; there are smoking bans everywhere – in airplanes,

restaurants, even bars, and many schoolchildren can no longer snack on soda or other sugary foods in their cafeterias. Most would not disagree with these governmental and societal measures that provide safer and cleaner environments for us. Nonetheless, besides the obvious advances in health care, what do these sanctions say about our culture? Our fear of the "abject" and our societal need to order it and package it appealingly (make it image-ized) makes it more difficult for people to confront the true Dionysian realm, but that we fear the abject, and the body in general, also makes it all the more important to confront our fears, and our own abjection.

Dionysian experience is vital to the visionary need and capability to see beyond and ahead. It is not possible to teach until you learn, and Dionysian experience engenders the ability for one to be a spiritual teacher, to facilitate progress outside of science. It is important to create, encourage, and experience art that is both intoxicating and thought-provoking, and in this way demonstrates the sensuous and rebellious Dionysian spirit and instinct and opens it to the world. True art presents the particular experience of the artist fearlessly, knowing the particular is also the universal, so as to conjure a similar experience within all who then confront the art. The emotion that embraces every listener of transcendent music, or viewer of an evocative performance or of a painting that seems alive, or reader of vibrant and pungent poetry, guides them to that too often ignored or sublimated terrain of our inner worlds, the realm of the Dionysian. It is difficult to describe well in words how it can feel to be suddenly filled with joy through music, or reawakened by art, or simply calmed by a beautiful, transcendent image of Nature. These are moments that can provide relief from everyday pressures, but more importantly, they

are that which remind us- in our instinct, our gut, our heart- both that indescribable, non-rational feelings *can* change us, and that there is a ‘spirit of life’- a feeling of being bodily and sensuously alive- that all people feel at some point or other, and that connects us to each other. Nietzsche (1882/1974) heralded the dawn of postmodernity with his perspectivist ideas and denial of essentialist reified truths. His recognition of the importance of Dionysian destruction and creation to a healthy, balanced life acknowledged both the importance of art in society beyond aesthetics and the need for a confrontation with our individual inner passions through visionary art. Only then can we live an authentically free life.

Art, for Nietzsche, is intrinsically related to morality and to political life. Art is born of transgression and taboo – the crossing or elimination of boundaries. Freedom and unity are revealed in the destruction of fences, in the forging of a personal moral path. This freedom is essentially the existentialist “opening up” that Nietzsche (1886/1989) addressed by espousing positive self-overcoming. He knew that the path of such courage in the face of the looming threat of nothingness is a struggle to follow. But if it is difficult, then the visionary artist needs to be brave; he or she can create life, and make history. Aesthetic rebellion through a unity of the Dionysian and Apollonian drives is for Nietzsche the only response to the knowledge that our societal foundations of absolute values are human-created and ultimately false and, at the same time, the route through which to pursue political change and the encouragement of alternative views on universal ideas and situations.

### CHAPTER THREE:

## CAMUS AND THE TRANSFORMATIVE NATURE OF ART: ART AND PUBLIC ART AS INVIGORATING ENCOUNTERS

*Art realizes ... the reconciliation of the unique with the universal of which Hegel dreamed.*

—Albert Camus, *The Rebel*

*The end, the aim, is to make thought - the power of man, the participation in and  
the consciousness of that power - intervene in life in its humblest detail ... more  
remote than the means, the aim is to change life, lucidly to recreate everyday life*

— Henri Lefebvre , *Critique of Everyday Life*

Art, it has been said, is a reflection of its time. The discipline of art history tells us that the study of the history of art should include an examination of its historical environment. This assertion, coupled with the claim that public art museums and the rituals experienced within them provide rich fodder for understanding society and its many relations and interactions, shows us that art is, indeed, inseparable from the public sphere. If we turn this idea around, we can see not only that much art is created in response to society, but also that society is shaped by the values and knowledge born of creative endeavors. Art revives us as individuals and invigorates the spirit through its ability to expand imaginative boundaries and reveal universal human ties. A healthy society – democracy itself – ultimately relies on the participatory inspiration and consequent political will of individuals. This individual will, to be truly free from the



dominating values of popular opinion, can be accessed and developed through rebellious and visionary artistic experience. Our postmodern world is not only globalized, but technologically sophisticated. While this state makes communication, trade, and travel more efficient, it also burdens people with almost constant stimulation, the need to rush, and the encouragement to work harder. This is particularly the case in the United States, where democracy has, from its beginnings, been intimately tied to a spirited and pragmatic work ethic and a capitalist ethos, rather than to poetry and community life, despite the influence of the Puritans (Young, 1966).

Artistic experiences, particularly social and public visionary creative encounters, are vital sources of *life*, of quiet moments, of chaotic rearrangements, of confrontations with taboos, of affirmations of innate unity and interconnectivity. These opportunities to create our own "realities" in the creative realm, however temporarily, make possible true liberation. For Albert Camus (1951/1991) and his philosophy of creative rebellion, this need to rebel against popular opinion and society is highlighted by the multitude of status-quo injustices.

I submit that more frequent and in-depth experiences with art, first, enable a healthy liberation from alienation, isolation, and mainstream beliefs; and, second, following Camus, they will reveal the basis of true justice- the chains of human unity. This chapter examines Camus' concept of creative rebellion. His argument, especially as seen alongside contemporary arguments regarding the transformative properties of art on individuals and on communities, makes clear that, although art cannot be the final answer to our political problems, it should be explored as a way to excite people and encourage

them to be critical. From Camus' (1951/1991) argument about rebellion through of art, it logically follows that wider access to public art encourages such rebellion. Rome over the centuries is a prime example of a city that paid close attention to aesthetics and especially to art in the public sphere, with the result that shared public pride was heightened. The beauty, and the disorder, of art can create within people the genuine feeling of inclusion and interest in public life.

Camus is perhaps best known for his literary explorations of the absurdity of the human condition in novels like *The Stranger* (1942/1988) and *The Plague* (1948/1975), and plays like *Caligula* (1944/1962). His directly philosophical and political essays, beginning with a vivid description of absurdity in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942/1983), and a call to individual creative rebellion in *The Rebel* (1951/1991), explored this human desire to seek meaning in our existence. For Camus, when we confront a world devoid of such meaning, it is best to enjoy life subjectively, rather than objectively according to the commandments of a false god, and to understand that life is meaningless and hence the quest to give it meaning is absurd. When people are no longer willing to accept the values of society, they are likely to rebel. Camus (1951/1991) described the yearning to rebel, its necessity, its rewards, its potentially dangerous consequences, and the truly individual nature of freedom, both in society and within the human condition.<sup>35</sup> Camus, writing at the midpoint of the last century, amid copious horrors created by power-hungry tyrants and oppressive modern governments, seems to have been almost desperately searching for an answer, or a better yet solution, that would limit and prevent the forces of human

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<sup>35</sup> For an excellent overview of Camus' philosophy of rebellion in Friedman (1970).

destruction and (re)teach governments and individuals the benefits of moderation. Seeking to explain why rebellion is a natural human proclivity, Camus described the ever-present tension between reason and imagination, and asserts that in the act of individual aesthetic rebellion we can achieve a crucial moderation between the two realms. Instinctual Dionysian and rational Apollonian forces ultimately limit each other and work together to enable the rebellion of visionary creation.

I propose, that in order to combat the lack of energy, the lack of feelings of full inclusion on the part of the citizenry, and, ultimately, their lack of participation in today's democracy in the United States – and to enable more and more individuals to gain access to alternative conceptions of everyday reality through creative reconceptualization, and likewise, to become closer to a sense of universal unity and true community – we should explore the encouragement of more frequent, and broader-based, artistic experiences in our outdoor public spaces. If we consider Camus' (1951/1991) ideas about the power of rebellion through art alongside other arguments contending that artistic experience can be a transformative ritual, and that there is a liberty-preserving role for art in democracy, we can summarize these connections in the four parts I describe next. A desire to question our existence, and to access uninhibited passions, is natural to the human condition, but this drive is also naturally stifled by the dominance of reason, and the materialism and conformity of popular opinion, and thus needs to be especially encouraged. This rebellion is best accessed through artistic experience and best developed through public art. A visionary revolt limited by its inherent moderation, as experienced by many individuals,

can culminate in an overall (re)awakening of American democracy through the invigoration of public culture with feelings of empathy and community.

### **Camus, Duncan, and Levine on the Power of Art**

Duncan and Levine each provide a foundation for a key part of the process described above. Levine shows us, in the American context, how much art can challenge and question a democracy and its culture, and argues that the liberty that Tocqueville worried was at stake in democratic life, could be preserved through the existence of visionary artworks. Working on a different angle of this question of the power of art, Duncan looks at how we feel in the presence of art, and the myriad rituals that play out within us, and among the art and its other viewers. Her work shows that museums are a place of spiritual experience, not simply education or entertainment. With this assertion that experiencing art is otherworldly, the main argument in this work that public art is the prime vehicle for democratically encouraging inner reflection in people, gains traction, as public art encourages ritualistic experiences not just in a museum, but on the way to work, or to school, as well.

If we look at Camus' assertion that there is freedom and empathetic justice contained within rebellious artistic experience, alongside these contemporary ideas presented by Duncan and Levine, we can see both how Duncan employs Camus when arguing that art is ritual, and how Levine similarly does so in her belief that the existence of what Camus would call rebellious art, maintains freedom and independent thought in American society. When we consider Camus' belief that the individual could experience true liberation in the form of universal empathy and independent thought, that the thought

be truly independent, and the experience likewise 'authentic', is the key to the rebellion that yields liberation. Camus means liberation from both the unjust realities of life, and the suffocating embrace of a popular opinion that too often allowed for tyranny.

Art alters and reinterprets time, place, the body, emotions. All art, indeed, *life*, itself ultimately comes down to choice and interpretation. To create something new from the material of the everyday is both to acknowledge the characteristics that define our social lives and to attempt to change them, at least temporarily. Camus (1951/1991) described this relationship between art and everyday life:

To create beauty, he [the Rebel] must simultaneously *reject* reality and *exalt* certain(of its aspects.) Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it (p. 258). ... It [Art] is born of a mutilation, and of a voluntary mutilation, performed on reality (p. 265). ... "Through style, the creative effort reconstructs the world, and always with the same slight distortion that is the mark of both art and protest (p. 271).

The framing that creation relies on does not allow you to deny reality completely, nor can you ever claim a truly objective understanding of it. Camus believed that formalism (abstraction) is an attempt at rejecting reality entirely but that it can never succeed in this goal because, as long as you are capturing real life, there is always a boundary to which you can abstract it. Realism can attempt to affirm only reality. "Realism cannot dispense with a minimum of interpretation and arbitrariness. Even the very best photographs do not represent reality; they result from an act of selection and impose a *limit* on something that has none" (p. 269). Neither the purely irrational nor the

purely rational exists; although these extremes can be momentarily accessed, they always meet between these extremes within a dialectical relationship.

It is also necessary to reconcile the inherent individualism of artistic creation, the inevitably unpublic aspect of creativity, with its role as mediator between the particular and the universal and between the self and the community. Artistic endeavors begin within the individual mind and spirit, in that even the most publicly created works have their roots in the ideas of individuals. Visionary art evokes an ability to comprehend the self to be like *all* others, to perceive the self as universally constructed, but creation is ultimately a solitary affair. In other words, it is important to examine how an individual artistic experience translates into a more active participation in life, and thus in society. Making and experiencing art can draw you further inside yourself, and it should begin this way. Experience with art should create reflection *first* and ,with the new possibilities that the knowledge of art yields, enable you to explore needs beyond the material and the individual and, ultimately, lead to a desire to connect with the collectivity of selves within each of us.

Further, I am not implying that experience with art will necessarily make you a “better” or more generous or more tolerant person. Because all art is transformative, in that it transforms an object, or an emotion, or a space, it expands the imaginative capability and is thus valuable in the development of a more interested and active citizenry. In destroying the expected to make way for new approaches, artistic experience opens doors both within and outside the self. This is increased with visionary rebellious creation.

By nature of its symbiotic relationship to the public sphere, and its reliance on human interaction, public and social art is in a constant dialogue with society beyond that which is possible either for art that is housed in museums or for solely object-based art. Camus (1951/1991) argued that visionary or rebellious artworks inspire a transformative experience for both creator and viewer that enable access to true liberation and justice. To place his ideas in a contemporary American setting, and to explore the effects of transformative art that is created and displayed in the public arena, we briefly turn to the work of Caroline Levine and Carol Duncan before returning to Camus' ideas.

Several researchers have produced studies indicating a link between public art and ideas of community, a recognition that art is a transformative force in political science and art history literature, not only in philosophy, and an understanding that examining the relationship between art and politics is an interdisciplinary effort (Corbit & Nix-Early, 2003; Edelman, 1996). These studies demonstrate the contemporary appreciation of the ability of art, particularly public art, to serve a political role. Some have looked at the spiritual results of interaction with art and others, examining art's vital relationship to democratic conditions, have advocated provocative and challenging art as well as the avant-garde. Duncan (1995) tells us that museums create a stage for important spiritual rituals between artworks and their visitors, and among the visitors themselves as they experience the artworks. Levine (2007) defends the role of the avant-garde, or the visionary, as a check on democracy's pledge to freedom. These two very different approaches to the study of the relationship between art and political life blend well to help illustrate in the contemporary context that art is vital to democratic life and that

experience with art can be transformative. These arguments, taken together, they form the foundations of the point I am making here. Duncan illustrates why and how looking at art in museums, and artistic experience in general, can be transformative and spiritually invigorating and how artistic ritual affects our relationships and interactions with those around us. Levine also speaks of the power of art, but she aims to show how it can support the needs of freedom in a democracy. In a discussion of the dynamic role of art in our social and political lives, and by demonstrating the need to view our political problems through an interdisciplinary lens, it is my hope to bring art out of a restricted aesthetic space.

In this work, I suggest that the role of visionary art (and art in general), especially when placed or created in the public sphere, counters Tocqueville's (1835/2002) claim that religion in a democracy provides an easily accessible path to expand the political awareness of individuals by working as a balancing force against the individualistic capitalistic tendencies of American culture. My argument is an inverse of sorts of Levine's (2007). Rather than viewing the existence of avant-garde art as a check on cultural freedom, and proof that a democracy is as free as it claims to be, I see interaction with art, especially visionary art, as, following Camus, inspiring a rebellion within individuals that creates a more active and interested citizenry by creating moments that value the immaterial and the universal, as opposed to the material and individual needs of everyday democratic life.<sup>36</sup> Exposure to public art creates in people an expansion of the

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<sup>36</sup> Marcuse (2007) wrote, "It is always concerned with history but history is the history of *all* classes. And it is this generality which accounts for that universal validity and objectivity of art which Marx called the quality of 'prehistory' and which Hegel called the 'continuity of substance' from the



imagination, particularly in the capacity to conceive of new and revolutionary possibilities in general, and in achieving a closer connection to truths accessed through intuition not intellect, especially the recognition of the unity of all selves, and ourselves in others, as an alternative to the reigning liberal worship of materialism in America.

### **How Art Can Nurture Individual Transformation and Challenges to Society**

In her study on the history of avant-garde art in the United States, Levine (2007) aims to explore the cross-influences and relationships of aesthetics and political life. She explains her motivation:

We are used to telling ourselves that the arts need the protection of a flourishing democracy in order to survive. But in fact, the opposite is at least equally true: *democracies require art* – challenging art – to ensure that they are acting as free societies. Democratic citizens have gotten into the habit of believing that theirs are the freest societies in the world. But political theorists since Alexis de Tocqueville have warned that democratic governments can actually work *against* freedom. Intent on imposing the will of the majority, democracies are inclined to repress and silence nonconformist voices. And since majorities can – and do – decide to squelch unpopular expression, democratic societies always run the risk of becoming distinctly un-free societies. So: how can democracies guarantee freedom (p. x).

Levine believes that we need to challenge mainstream norms in the tradition of the artistic avant-garde. “Since the beginnings of the avant-garde in the late nineteenth

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beginning of art to the end – the truth which links the modern novel and the medieval epic, the facts and possibilities of human existence, conflict and reconciliation between man and man, man and nature” (pp. 229–230).

century artists have claimed that they are helping to liberate society through their resistance to majority rule.” (p. x). Rather, they most often stir up unconventional norms through shock value, pushing the majority to become aware that their will is not absolute. Although the avant-garde period is supposedly over, Levine argues, its philosophical challenge to mass culture and beliefs will never die: “[T]he idea that art represents a struggle for freedom ... remain[s] surprisingly robust and influential. In fact, whenever art works are contested in the public sphere, artists and arts advocates leap to invoke the revolutionary, heroic, marginalized figure of the avant-garde artist and set that oppositional figure against the idea of the ‘people’” (p. x). For hundreds of years, arts controversies have rested on the struggle between democratic majorities and deliberately provoked outsiders. Levine terms this the “logic of the avant-garde” (p. 3).

Over the centuries,<sup>37</sup> it has become accepted knowledge that artists serve an important role in observing, questioning, and critiquing society. “The critical autonomy and rebellion associated with the avant-garde have come to serve as a kind of default definition of the social role of art. ... Art that intentionally shocks and unsettles majority preferences seems to set itself...against the will of the people. (p. 11). In contrast to the philosophical point of view, Levine’s social historical work demonstrates how important a function art can serve in society, and specifically, in American democracy. She shows

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<sup>37</sup> Although the term avant-garde is highly debated, Levine emphasizes the original roots of the word, meaning the front line or vanguard. By the 1870s and 1880s the label began attaching itself to artists who were a deliberate group of outsiders – “celebrating the margins, advocating an overturning of conventional aesthetics. More specifically, they were reacting against conservative art sponsored by national academies. ... Within this context they praised art that was embattled, filled the term with its original military connotation: “artists saw themselves not only as innovators, but as warriors against the status quo, doing battle with the present in the name of the future, provoking radical change through rupture and destruction so that a new world could come to take the place of the old” (pp. 5–6.).

how, throughout the last century in particular, the creation of visionary and controversial art not only forced political and social change (particularly with regard to censorship laws in America) but challenged the limits of prescribed democratic individual freedoms. The ability of rebellious art to question and to create constantly shifting alternatives for human political life becomes even more useful when joined with the idea that individual artistic experience is transformative for both creator and viewer. Together these two ideas mean that art can first question society, and then invite viewers into a sensory or spiritual moment that is vital to developing more publicly participatory and community-minded citizens.

Duncan (1995) believes that the experiences of art can be both transcendent and transformative for the spectators. She places her argument in the context of the museum, though her underlying assumptions about the “ritual” power of art are valuable in many other contexts. . Her high regard for the ability of art to affect and change people echoes the ideas of both Camus and Nietzsche. Duncan contends that museums are not merely well-designed structures in which to store art,<sup>38</sup> rather, they are places for “ritual” or some form of transformative or spiritual activity and thus not unlike the experience of traditional places of worship. The key to, or heart of, her argument is that viewing and interacting with art (and the architecture that it is housed in) is a transformative individual experience. Instead of viewing a museum as many different objects brought together to be looked at separately, she sees the “totality of the museum as a stage setting” where all

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<sup>38</sup> Duncan argues that since art museums first began to be funded and built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, they have ever increasingly grown in size, number, wealth, and power as “sites of cultural activity”. p. 1).

the visitors (and it is to be presumed, the art they are viewing) participate in one ritualistic “performance (pp. 1–2).

Duncan references the sociological studies by Pierre Bourdieu in the 1960s where he, in collaboration with Alain Darbel, interviewed hundreds of people and, using that data, concluded that “art museums give some a feeling of ownership and belonging while they make others feel inferior and excluded” (p. 4). She uses their study as support for her premise that art museums function as a places for ritual.<sup>39</sup> She argues that if this was not true, then visitors would not, as they do so often after spending time in an arts institution, feel emotions related both to their esteem and worth, as well as feel changed after interaction with others (those participating in the ritual with them). If the experience of experiencing art in a museum was simply about observing and learning- using reason- then people would only gain access to information about the aesthetic and educational appeal of the objects of art on view; they would not leave so often feeling noticeably happier, or sadder, or simply more in touch with themselves and others.

I agree wholeheartedly with Bourdieu and Darbel’s thesis. In fact, my fundamental arguments in this study could not stand on solid foundation were it not for the problems of exclusion inextricable from all institutions, including those of art. Despite this belief, as with Duncan’s self-conscious aim, I do not focus explicitly on the valid concerns with institutionally presented and maintained artwork, or with institutions

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<sup>39</sup> She uses their conclusions as the basis for her more far-reaching arguments. Bourdieu and Darbel argue that their work shows how vital class is to the ritual of the art museum. Duncan does not disagree with the sociologists, but she does examine the ritual experience of the museum more fully and with attention to more than just the class relations that are enacted within its walls.

(as a sociological or political category) in general, though I begin with an understanding that institutions by nature of having to make the choice to enter them, exclude people, while public outdoor spaces are more inclusionary.

Of course, art museums are public places open to all, but this is only a reality to a point. If we begin with Duncan's main thesis – that art museums are places of ritual and participation, not simply of observation – then a natural next step is to claim a fundamental place for public and social art (that is, art taken out of the institutional context) in the building of community feeling, a desire to participate in social and public (and therefore political) life and in democracy. “Its [Duncan’s book’s] larger argument is not simply that art museums are ritual structures, but rather that, *as ritual structures*, museums are rich and interesting objects of social and political history.” (p. 6). Our culture identifies religious buildings, such as churches, temples, and mosques, as different from secular buildings like museums and courthouses. This “religious–secular dichotomy,” Duncan says, structures “much of the [our] modern public world,” (p.6) but it should not be seen as natural or intuitive. Rather, she explains, this dichotomy itself has historical and man-made roots in Western life. The classification began with the Enlightenment movement’s attempt to use the new discoveries of science to weaken the power of the Church over society and public thought. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, this goal had become a reality and since then it is secular–rational, verifiable truth that reigns as “objective” truth in our culture; religious truths are only for those who choose to take them on.

Art museums, Duncan continues, are “secular,” both because they are organized by “scientific and humanistic disciplines” and because they are said to be caretakers of our cultural memory. She, however, claims that ritual, despite its usual association with religion, is actually at the heart of the art museum experience (p. 8).

Liminality, a term associated with ritual, can also be applied to art museums. It was used in the anthropological writings of Victor Turner to indicate a mode of consciousness outside of or “betwixt-and-between” the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending. His category of liminal experience had strong affinities to modern Western notions of the aesthetic experience – that mode of receptivity thought to be most appropriate before works of art. Turner recognized aspects of liminality in such modern activities as attending the theatre, seeing a film, or visiting an art exhibition. Like folk rituals that temporarily suspend the constraining rules of normal social behavior (in that sense, they “turn the world upside down”), so these cultural situations, Turner argued, could open a space in which individuals can step back from the practical concerns in social relations of everyday life and look at themselves and their world- or at least some aspect of it- with different thoughts and feelings (p. 11).

Duncan cites Swedish writer Goran Schildt who has noted that museums are settings in which we seek a state of “detached, timeless and exalted” contemplation that “grants us a kind of release from life’s struggle ... and captivity in our own ego” (p.14). Referring to 19<sup>th</sup>-century attitudes to art, Schildt, notes Duncan, observes “a religious element, a substitute for religion” (p.14). He succinctly identifies and describes the birth of the study of aesthetics, and explains its natural relation to religion.

The eighteenth century's designation of art and aesthetic experience as major topics for critical and philosophical inquiry is itself part of a broad and general tendency to furnish the secular with new value. In this sense, the invention of aesthetics can be understood as a transference of spiritual values from the sacred realm into secular time and space. Put in other terms, aestheticians gave philosophical formulations to the condition of liminality, recognizing it as a state of withdrawal from the day-to-day world, a passage into a time or space in which the normal business of life is suspended. In philosophy, liminality became specified as the aesthetic experience, a moment of moral and rational disengagement that leads to or produces some kind of revelation or transformation (p. 14).

Duncan asserts that art museums are sites of transformative ritual that enable people to achieve liminal experience – to move beyond the psychic constraints of mundane existence, step out of time, and attain new, larger perspectives” (pp. 11–12). If we transfer the context of this argument about the transformative power of art from the museum or gallery to the truly public realm of our outdoor spaces, it can be argued that art that creates social interaction and appears on our streets is transformative. Therefore, when it appears in our everyday lives and in our everyday places, often with the element of surprise, it encourages new ways of feeling and thinking about that with which we are already familiar. More than art viewed inside museums, public art is a faster, more

democratic, and more physically encompassing way to access and harness the unifying and liberating power of artistic experience.

For Camus (1951/1991) the ultimate meaninglessness of existence, coupled with the horrors of human injustice, meant that people needed to experience creative individual rebellion truly free from all societal constraints, not the traditional, institutionalized revolution he saw in his lifetime. He argued that genuine change, and true freedom, must be felt within each person if it is to create new needs that reflect universal unity and community. He knew that artistic and creative experience held a unique ability to reinvent the world according to individual desire and opinion and that this rebellious reinvention could expand imagination, which was vital to an active political life. Art created or displayed in public as well as creativity conceived and experienced socially seem a natural extension of Camus' beliefs regarding the function of art in society.

### **Camus and the Desire for Order**

Camus' theories, following both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, all began with the tenet that *the* fundamental human desire is to understand and order one's own existence and place in the universe. He believed that our inability to comprehend our own existence and purpose, produces in us and in society a deeply rooted frustration that leads to a variety of paternalistic style myths, beliefs, and organizations. These ideas act as both a protective shield from the lack of absolute meaning in this world and as a source of clear and fixed answers to the mysteries of existence and to the goals and decisions of our everyday lives. Camus (1951/1991) wrote, "Man ... tries in vain to find the *form* that will



impose certain limits between which he can be king . Religion or crime, every human endeavor in fact, finally obeys this unreasonable desire and claims to give life a *form* it does not have” (p. 262).

In the quest for meaning, it is inevitable that people looked, first, to religion and, later, to science as providers of “objective” knowledge and truth. It was evident to Camus that neither the oppressive rules of religion nor the misleading reliance on rationality that science espouses, can bring us to the most important "truth," accessed through intuition,- and that, because we are defined in relation to one another, each of us contain all others within ourselves. Camus feared regimes, such as Communism, that attempted to deny the spiritual aspect of life in favor of reason and a material-centered life. Denial of spiritual and sensory life, can lead only to desperate and tyrannical leadership. This denial would also separate us from each other, and cause a generalized lack of interest in public life and eventual abrogation of the importance of public space, essentially taking the social concept out of “socialism.”

Camus argued that rebellion, “in order to remain authentic, must never abandon any of the terms of the contradiction that sustains it” (p. 285). “Refusal and acceptance, the unique and the universal, the individual and history balance each other in a condition of acute *tension*” (p. 273). To illustrate the similarly unending opposition within rebellion, he used the example of the tension between equality and liberty that exists within any democracy: “Absolute freedom mocks at justice. Absolute justice denies freedom – To be fruitful, the two ideas must find their *limits* in each other” (p. 291). As a master needs his slave and the slave his master, rebellion must be truly free but also

should be limited and balanced with a reasoned moderation. Otherwise this rebellion can threaten to run to its limits and devolve into exhaustion or, worse, tyrannical power: “[According] to Camus, if the absurd is not to degenerate into moral nihilism it must rehabilitate itself in the light of revolt and that if revolt is not to deteriorate into a regime of tyranny and oppression, it must remain conscious of its origins in the absurd premise” (Foley, 2008, p. 4).

Robert C. Solomon<sup>40</sup> (2006) makes the point that Camus effectively used the character of Meursault in *The Stranger*, not only as an expression of individual struggle in a meaningless world, but, more importantly, to show how much humans rely on their ability to reflect, dissect, and evaluate their thoughts and decisions and how, throughout the novel, his antihero declined to consider the value of his feelings. Solomon speaks to this second point when he shows how for Camus, experience and reflection, formed a universal dualism, a dialectic:

So *The Stranger*, I want to suggest, is a book of phenomenology, but it is in particular a book about the problematic relationship between the phenomenology of experience, and the phenomenology of reflection. Meursault, one might say, lives his experience, albeit shockingly limited, without reflection. This, I want to suggest, is what makes him so “strange” to us (p. 12).

Solomon challenges the scholarly debates on the “honesty” of Meursault about his feelings. He asserts that Camus’ Meursault was neither lying in his indifference to the

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<sup>40</sup> Solomon is best known for his work on existentialism.

truth (Conor Cruise O'Brien, 1970)), nor was he simply being painfully "truthful" (Camus', (1942/1983), own commentary on *The Stranger*) to his emotions. Solomon takes on the very way we understand the idea of feeling, or emotion. Solomon argues that "The emotions...sustain the "fundamental projects" of our lives..." (p. 113). He believes that our ability to judge a situation is essential to our forming emotion related to it. That is, he believes that we access what we know as feelings only during the process of, or once we have considered the value of, an experience. Solomon argues that Meursault failed to exhibit actual feelings (at least in the first half of the book) because feelings need to be processed and assessed, and Meursault lived only in experiences. Consequently, he could not have been anything so deep as "truthful" "because he never reaches that (meta-) level of consciousness where truth and falsity can be articulated. Moreover, he does not even have the feelings, much less feelings about his feelings, to which he is supposed to be so true" (p. 15).

Solomon also points out that this duality in Camus' philosophy is parallel to Sartre's (1937/1960) earlier ideas about reflective versus prereflective experiences. Sartre's argument was similar to Heraclitus' claim that one can never cross the same river twice. It also resonates with Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, which states that we can never get as close as we would like when observing atoms because the closer we look, the more we change what we are attempting to understand. The precise examination of some phenomena is thus impossible and self-defeating. In the field of quantum physics, the result is that if you achieve an exact assessment of one characteristic of an

atom, you simultaneously lose the ability to gauge another key characteristic. This can be viewed as a metaphor for life.

Sartre believed that once we leave the purely pre-reflective state and we infuse our experiences with the reflection of history and science and morality, we have forever altered the original experience, and possibly diminished the power of knowledge. This idea is important to Camus' project because he believed that life plays out in dualities and that experience and reflection create each other; they should also limit each other so as to sustain rebellion. Individual aesthetic rebellion was, for Camus, the sole response to the meaninglessness of our external worlds and to the tyranny and injustice that plague modernity. Rebellion demonstrates our connection to, and reflection in, the struggles and celebrations of all others and thus works towards a universal and humanist understanding of justice. It also opens access to vital intuitive, not reason-based, knowledge.

### **Camus and the Eternal Tension between Reason and Desire**

The Enlightenment began with what social theorist Max Weber (1930/2002) termed, "the disenchantment of the world," which stressed that society be grounded in science and technology. This rationalization of society signaled for Weber a loss in spiritual life. The overwhelming scientific and technological advances in modern life and the acquisitive individualism of capitalism combined to create an increasingly pragmatic and rational modern Western man. Following Weber, sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959/2000) elaborated the ruling ideas and persistent legacies of the Enlightenment tradition:

Our major orientations – liberalism and socialism – have virtually collapsed as adequate explanations of the world and of ourselves. These two ideologies came out of the Enlightenment, and they have had in common many assumptions and values. In both, increased rationality is held to be the prime condition of increased freedom. The liberating notion of progress by reason, the faith in science as an unmixed good, the demand for popular education and the faith in its political meaning for democracy – all these ideas of the Enlightenment have rested upon the happy assumption of the inherent relation of reason and freedom (p. 166).

Romanticism became the first “re-enchantment program” to challenge the main tenets of the Enlightenment. The Romantic Movement challenged the primacy in society (and in our collective knowledge base) of reason, science, technology, and industry by defending the vital importance of sensuality, instinct, spirituality, and poetry. In fact, in the view of the Austrian experimental and conceptual artist and theorist Peter Weibel (2005), intellectual movements thereafter have repeatedly attempted to overcome this “crisis of disenchantment.” He explains that “the dispute between enlightenment and absolutism, between sensualism and spirituality, between rationality and religion is evidently not over: It continues, albeit under different presuppositions and conditions” (p. 1020). He is pointing here to the same recurring primal dialectic in the human condition that Camus (1951/1991) grappled with – the conflict between our desires and our rational

thought, our desire to live in poetry and our inclination for order and pragmatism, our capacity for empathy and our inevitable tendency toward selfishness.

These tensions are all part and parcel of the same larger division between the self that plays out on the personal level but is equally present on the political and economic levels as well. In a liberal democracy, and in its natural spouse, capitalism, this fundamental human conflict is encouraged – by the system, whose aim is to be rational and pragmatic. Olivier Todd (1997) emphasizes Camus' trust in aesthetic knowledge and in the phenomenology of experience, even early in his life, as can be seen in his quote from Camus (1933/1968): "I put Dreams and Action ahead of logic, because I see logic as pure intelligence, empty and to be despised (Todd, 1997, p. 21). For example, when Camus (1933/1968) compared the Europeans, and specifically the French, to the Algerians who inspired and invigorated him, he accused the French of being "civilized," or too reliant on reason, and implied they could learn from the creativity and sensuality of his favorite African nation: "The opposite of a civilized people is a creative one" (p. 89).

Similarly, Camus exalted the moderation by which by which the Greeks had lived: "Equity, for them [The Greeks], supposed a limit, while our whole continent is convulsed by the quest for a justice we see as absolute" (p. 149). In the same essay Camus pit the Greek sense of limits, and acceptance of ultimate ignorance, against the egoist and power-hungry Roman conquerors. He indicted the souls of these Roman leaders as vulgar and compared them with his fellow Europeans: "Our reason has swept everything away. Alone at last, we build our empire on a desert. .]We turn our back on nature, we are ashamed of beauty" (p. 150). Further on, Camus drew on one of his

recurring themes, that of the vital difference between revolution and rebellion. It is the moderation itself, exemplified by a connection to the universal human condition that creates the freedom of visionary creation: “Both the historical mind and the artist seek to remake the world. But the artist, through an obligation of his very nature, recognizes limits the historical mind ignores. This is why the latter aims at tyranny while the passion of the artist is liberty. All of those who struggle today for liberty are in the final analysis fighting for beauty” (p. 152).

Camus’ (1951/1991) analysis of rebellion as exemplified in the artistic vision begins with a discussion of man’s natural and inevitable desire for order in a world without absolute meaning. This crisis of existentialism, the very problem of attempting to understand the value or significance of our own existence, has plagued man since the beginning of time and is inherent to our species. That this problem even exists, and that it is at the foundations of the philosophical endeavor, is evidence of man’s natural desire to understand his place in the greater world and his need to seek his own freedom. It is in rebellion from the justice that is accepted in everyday society, said Camus, that we attempt to forge a path to a more true freedom. This is a healthy human drive that propels civilization forward. It is this rebellion that should be encouraged, but it is required that it also be internally limited by the only measure of justice that Camus espoused – empathy stemming from the recognition of the common ties among all of us. The rebel should seek freedom without taking away the freedom of others; without allowing one rebel’s quest for freedom to devolve into tyranny. This necessary rebellion is a breath of fresh air for the rebel, but that breath can blow up into flames as it gathers the steam of actual

political force and the desire for total revolution. “The novel is rebellious because it refuses reality. It is not an evasion; it is an obstinate effort to refuse the world as it is, and through its recreation, to find man’s destiny therein” (Hanna, 1958, p. 140).

This reasoning can be taken a step further. Camus was wary of the power of rebellion. Without moderation, rebellion can become revolution, and it is revolution – when one ruling power is actually replaced by another – that he feared, for it reins in the freedom of rebellion and shapes it to the liking of the new regime. I maintain that it is useful to move away from the tragedies of totalitarian revolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to a focus on individual moral and spiritual rebellion and revolt. Public and social art, as Camus suggested 50 years ago, is a natural companion to rebellion. By allowing it to prosper freely and consistently in the public lives of Americans, we can hope to release more and more individuals into the exhilaration of their own personal rebellion while limiting the ability of any one rebel to control the future of any other. This is not a call to limit revolution – for such limiting there is always a place in history. It is, rather, an encouragement for personal revolution to take precedence over societal revolution.

John Foley (2008) contends that Camus was not an existentialist and thus is very much misunderstood. Foley writes that Camus, in line with existentialists like Kierkegaard, believed that there is lack of meaning in the world. But he did not believe that one had to ascribe meaning despite this truth, nor that life is worthless. Rather, this acknowledgment of meaninglessness provided a revolutionary new perspective on our lives. Foley says that Camus’ solution for the problem of nihilism lay in a revolt of limits, mediated by the very same absurdism that gives birth to nihilism: “[According] to



Camus, if the absurd is not to degenerate into moral nihilism it must rehabilitate itself in the light of revolt and that if revolt is not to deteriorate into a regime of tyranny and oppression, it must remain conscious of its origins in the absurd premise” (p. 4). Although Camus may not be best characterized as an existentialist, he was concerned deeply with lifting the veil from existential fallacies and seeking within individual liberated creative experience, a source of empathy and true power and justice.

It was important to Camus that there are no moral absolutes. Rather, he believed that the only necessary moral foundation for a just society is the recognition of a common bond among all people, a bond based on such universal experiences as empathy and suffering. “The rebel pursues unity not through religion or morality per se, but through the assertion of human solidarity based on a common human condition. This principle of human solidarity constitutes the basis of the unity<sup>41</sup> desired by the rebel, a unity Camus sees articulated in syndicalism and in certain forms of social democracy, such as the Scandinavian model” (p. 76). Camus believed that the rebellion needed to overcome alienation and engage unity must be one of internal moderation: “The idea of a “philosophy of limits” neatly evokes both the limit beyond which the rebel insists the master not pass, and the sense that the values on behalf of which the rebel rebels are not absolute values” (p. 79). Further elaborating on this point, Foley writes, “Crucially, according to Camus, legitimate rebellion seeks neither absolute justice nor absolute freedom, but seeks to institute a regime of relative values, wherein relative justice and relative freedom can be enjoyed” (p. 85). For Camus, absolutism in any sense was a

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<sup>41</sup> “His] refusal to “take sides” can be interpreted as the action of an “independent radical.” (Foley, 2008, p. 84).

fallacy to avoid. Absolutism invites teleology rather than open evolution and tyranny rather than public forum.

### **Re-imagining Individualism as Unity and Community**

Camus (1951/1991) wrote that rebellion reveals our true nature, which is an understanding of our commonalities and the ultimate spiritual unity within the human condition: “Every act of creation by its mere existence, denies the world of master and slave” (p. 224). The act of creation thus allows for the emergence of Marx’s (1844/1978) concept of species being, or the idea that within each individual exists the totality of the human species, that within each of us is the whole. This idea, not unlike Rousseau’s (1762/1993) reverence of societal unity asserts that our interconnectedness as human beings should carry more weight in political society than does the predominant preference for the plight of the individual citizen. Both Marx and Rousseau saw capitalism – for Rousseau, the original introduction of property into society – as a corruptive and competitive force that feeds on a focus on individual life. A fundamentally social understanding of life, and of progress, threatens the individualistic foundations of the liberal capitalist system and encourages a humanistic alternative to an everyday existence guided primarily by science and technology.

In a quest to challenge and counteract the over-rationalized and tyrannical forces in modern 20<sup>th</sup>-century life, Camus asserted the power of art and aesthetic rebellion to bring about change within the individual spirit. Such an inner change, which acknowledges a universal unity among living beings, could prevent the ultimate self-destruction of civilization. Camus believed that a revolution within individuals that

stressed a universal spiritual connection among man could be accessed and pursued through the creative experiences of art. He explained, “Rebellious art also ends by revealing the “*We are*” (p. 275). Later, Camus revealed the truly revolutionary component of his theory: “[T]he ‘We are’”<sup>42</sup> paradoxically defines a new form of individualism” (p. 297). Camus argued that “[w]hen he [the Rebel] comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something in him which does not belong to him alone, but which is common ground where all men – even the man who insults and oppresses him – have a *natural community*” (p. 16). He elaborated on the primary difference between the fruitless search for meaning in human existence and the development of individual rebellion through artistic experience. “In absurdist experience, suffering is individual. But from the moment a movement of rebellion begins, suffering is seen as a collective experience” (p. 22). Hanna (1958),<sup>43</sup> and Sagi (2002)<sup>44</sup> both agree that Camus’ notion of rebellion suggests a universal unity among living things that supersedes material concerns: “[In] all revolt there is a metaphysical demand for unity which, going unsatisfied by the conditions of the world, attempts to build a universe which will satisfy this demand” (Hanna, 1958, p. 138). This new understanding of individual needs, and the fulfillment of those needs through relation with others, means that “[f]or the rebel, harmony is harmony with the other” (Sagi, 2002, p. 107). The goal in the revitalization of everyday life is not to deny the value of individualism, especially

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<sup>42</sup> “Works from *The Rebel* era represent a subversion of Cartesian solipsism, placing “we” before “I” and culminating in the development of the concept of solidarity” ( Sagi, 2002, p. 1).

<sup>43</sup> Hanna identified key overlaps among the ideas of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Camus. He suggested that they all worked in opposition to the modern world of reason and technology.

<sup>44</sup> Where Sagi founded the University’s program for hermeneutic and cultural studies.

as exemplified in the political doctrines of individual rights and liberties, but, rather, to re-envision the concept so that it rests on the doctrine that within each of us is the collective; by attending to our own rational, even selfish, needs, we are implicitly attending to the needs of all others, to the needs of the collective.<sup>45</sup>

All philosophical inquiry, at least in the Western tradition, inevitably returns to the quest for truth. People never tire of searching for ‘truth’ in the complexities of life. Rather than seeking absolute truths through reason and science, people can locate truth by putting faith in the unconscious – in what is hidden, secondary, denied, unknown – to reveal important new truths. The keenly politically motivated social conceptual German artist Joseph Beuys (Harlan, Ed., 2004) touched on this idea when he argued for social revolutionary change through a development of the faculty of creativity and imagination: “By this I mean that such a formula would no longer necessarily be the result of thinking, as in classical philosophy, but would reflect the need for something that is attainable only through *intuition, imagination, and such higher forms of thought*” (p. 14).

Similarly, the American transcendentalists (Emerson, 1893/1921; Thoreau, 1849/2001), as well as Marx (1844/1978), and Rousseau (1762/1993), have all discussed a more communal understanding of the traditional liberal notion of individualism. The Transcendentalist movement in this country encouraged a retreat into solitude, to leave, at least temporarily, the stifling embrace of popular opinion and better access the ultimate

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<sup>45</sup> Dave Beech (2004), one of the three members of the critical and public and socially minded art collective *Freee* based in England, notes similarly, “Collaborative independence ... is a form of independence that does not delude itself that autonomy (self-determination) is equivalent to isolation (the myth of the self-created self). The ‘self’ of self-determination is understood, within collaborative independence, to be co-produced with others.”

unity of the human community. Emerson's (1893/1921) concepts of the Over-Soul and the One Universal Mind evidence his belief that, if a person can withdraw from society (and from reason) far enough to be able to experience his own perception of ruling concepts and values, he will feel a stronger sense of unity and understanding with his fellow man, as well as with nature. Following Tocqueville, Emerson understood the need to shake Americans out of their complacent conformity, and he knew that an accessible and truly free way to "opt out" was through art, poetry, and literature. Camus (1951/1991), in a very different context, similarly believed that creating and experiencing artistic rebellion, "transcends the individual, [and] ... allows the *whole being* to come into play" (p. 17). In other words, they both argued that people seeking new and truly free possibilities in life should explore beyond the rational procedures, goals, and dreams, of modern life and find the spiritual knowledge that nurtures human connection.

They maintained, as I do, that engagement with art enables the growth of vital knowledge through the senses and emotions. Sensory and sensuous experiences, whether in art or spirituality, are a link between ourselves and the world. The tension in political thought between Lockean liberalism and Jeffersonian republicanism is paralleled by the tension between capitalism and socialism (or social democracy) and between apathetic individualism and community and civic-mindedness. This balancing of drives exists in our political, economic, and social lives and separates us into opposing camps. Now more than ever, the support and creation of public (placed in the outdoors) and socially-interactive artwork is needed to encourage inner individual revival. Art has always held the power of re-envisioning and reawakening, as it interprets our everyday reality in new

ways. This power could be harnessed for the spiritual health of individuals, and for the benefit of a vibrant and participatory society. Art should be increasingly available to everyone by becoming part of our public spaces and our public lives.

### **Knowledge Gained from Poetry, Myth, and Emotion**

Much can be learned from instinct, imagination, and fantasy. Artistic experience can connect us to these feelings, help us to access genuinely free individuality, and enable us to understand more completely our connections with and vulnerabilities to others. Bruno Bettelheim (1977) believed that the surreal and the mythical hold an important place in the intellectual and emotional development of children. He saw that children could, through the symbolism and abstraction of myths and fairy tales, access, and try to understand, painful ideas and experiences in a healthy way. Citing Greek philosophy, he wrote:

Plato – who may have understood better what forms of mind of man than do some of our contemporaries who want their children composed only to “real” people and everyday events- knew what intellectual experiences make for true humanity. He suggested that the future citizens of his ideal republic begin their literary education with the telling of myths, rather than with mere facts or so-called rational teachings. Even Aristotle, master of pure reason, said: “The friend of wisdom is also a friend of myth" (p. 35).

Freud (1930/1961) too reminded us that rational thought and behavior is rational only to a point; all so-called rational thought *must* confront the realm of irrationality

contained within the subconscious self. In this sense, art can be viewed neither simply as oppositional to reason (as the realm of the irrational), nor only as the aesthetic or the beautiful. Rather, art can be understood *as* reason, as an alternative source of knowledge, as a more "genuine" (implying congruence along a common human bond) form of rationality. Touching on a similar idea, Beuys (Harlan, Ed., 2004) explains some of his philosophical motivations in creating art, and specifically, his varied "social sculpture(s)":

For several years, I have been working with a formulation of "the aesthetic" that goes back to its origins as the opposite of "unaesthetic" or numbness. From this perspective, aesthetic comes to mean "enlivened being." This not only turns the contemporary usage of "aesthetic," as something rather ... superficial, on its head, but links such "enlivened being" to ... the ability to respond! So this overcoming of numbness and enlivening of being can engage one, make one internally active, mobilize people's imagination (p. x).

In accord with Novalis (1798/1997) and Schiller (1792-94/2004), Beuys believed that artistic experience contains the potential to create necessary and revolutionary change in society and political life. He developed his idea of 'social sculpture' throughout his long career, both by creating revolutionary performance and installation-style participatory artworks and through his active and popular lecture schedule, which continued even after his dismissal from a sculpture professorial post at the university in Dusseldorf. For Beuys, social sculpture meant that all of life is art and every living being,

an artist. He created sculptures that redefined the physical boundaries of classical sculpture through performance, installation, and participatory requirements. He symbolically used natural materials in his artwork (for example, honey to him represented the bees' natural sense of community, and gold, which indicated strength and connectivity with nature) to display the Earth's many organically communal phenomenon, as well as the quite natural, for Beuys, need for a sense of universal community among people (Ray & Nisbet, 2001; Mesch & Michely, 2007). Many of his most famous works, such as the *Honey Pump*, required human interaction to make them "work." Beuys (Harlan, Ed., 2004) believed that 20<sup>th</sup>-century society was in need of reform and revival, and that the growth of individual rebellion through art and creativity could positively affect the perspective and spirit of individuals: "It is something that Beuys, as well as others, like Bertolt Brecht, emphasized in different ways. Both developed a range of strategies that seek to mobilize us internally, to disrupt: to 'scratch on the imagination,' as Beuys often put it, enabling us to become internally active and engaged." (Harlan, Ed., 2004, p. x).

### **Public art as political aid: The example of Rome**

Camus (1942/1988, 1942/ 1983, 1951/1991), argued that in our postmodern era, when it is so difficult to put one's faith entirely in either science or religion and when



reason and justice have consistently failed in the social and political sphere, the creative realm is the only truly free avenue to the evolving needs and desires that create a more genuine and more humane world. It is only natural that the transcendent and transformative powers of art need to be encouraged. Public and social art is the contemporary answer to the revitalization of the materially satisfied Americans who regularly accept mass opinions rather than authentically seeking the experiences for themselves. Public art not only creates change within the viewer, it also supports a public pride in the beauty and the rearrangements, of the community landscape.

Rome is an exemplar of the power of public art to create and nurture alternate possibilities for everyday life, and especially new feelings of community within individual consciousness. The Romans embody the philosophy of public art. In most daily activities within the city, even today, attention to beauty and detail is a part of everyday, public life.<sup>46</sup> The shared public art that largely defines Roman culture cuts through social and economic divides, and can be seen everywhere in the city and beyond. That Romans even today readily affix their identities as citizens on a shared pride of the art and architecture that adorns the city cannot be simply a the legacy of an egalitarian government structure (the democratic republic, did, after all, give way to a dictatorial Empire with the ascent of Julius Caesar). The Roman Empire's public displays of art – many utilitarian, some grandiose, for commoners and for the leadership – gave all

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<sup>46</sup> Much of the great art in Rome is housed not in world-renowned museums like the Vatican, but in the many churches scattered around the city. From the Bernini sculptures and Caravaggios in the great Santa Maria del Popolo, to the Velasquez paintings that adorn the front nave of even the humble chapel near the Piazza da Spagna, transcendent artworks can be found not within crowded and regulated museums, but in quiet and public churches. This placement of art enables truly public access to them.

Romans a sense of unity and pride, and these markers of the community, and of the city's past glory, is still very much a part of everyday life in Rome today.

Perhaps the greatest single contribution of the Roman Empire to the history of Western art is their vast imperial theft and the resulting use of the “found” art to build conglomeration art from their pirated collections. As victors abroad, the Romans acquired from the foreign peoples some of the most beautiful and influential objects representing their cultures and histories. At home the conquerors displayed those works publically. These were exhibited to create among the public the perception of a strong and expanding empire — a new, composite culture and history. In addition, epigraphic writing was able to reach a different sector of society than did traditional literature by adorning the most quotidian and communal of objects.<sup>47</sup> Epigraphs differed from “the norm” in that different materials were used create them (both to write with and, especially, to write on inasmuch as these inscriptions were written on everyday objects). Epigraphs functioned in this way as a form of public communication and truly public art.

In contrast, the Communist and Fascist regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century all encouraged a barren aesthetic that devalued not only public spaces, but also public life. The architecture designed and built under these regimes displays an aesthetic that was considered by many to be ugly (all sharp lines and boxes, little curvature and grace), as well as uncomfortable, and uninviting. It is a great paradox of Communism that its (at least initial philosophical) intentions of community – of *socialism* – were quickly lost

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<sup>47</sup> Epigraphy is the study of epigraphs or inscriptions, in order to study the culture in which they were created.

through lack of political freedoms, as well as through the complete discouragement of public life and spirituality (of the human community). Today, 20 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the countries of the former USSR still suffer greatly from the lack of inviting public spaces. Parks, squares, and streets were severely neglected and allowed to become run down. Rather than nurture *socialism*, these regimes managed to uphold one of the prime tenets of capitalist ideology – individualism. Under Communism, people mostly stayed at home, and the notions of public art and a pride in public culture (certainly closer both to what Marx (1844/1978) had in mind, and Rousseau's (1762/1993) desire for a “civil religion”) remained largely unexplored. Those who resisted the prescriptions and proscriptions, especially the organizers of the 1989 Velvet Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe, that began with the destruction of the Berlin Wall and ended with liberation from decades-long occupation by the Soviet Union, had to do so by actively rebelling quietly and without control of the public sphere, rather than in the public ways of the Ancient Romans.

Citizens of the Roman Empire followed different religions, but all participated in the public culture of Rome (Coulston, J. & Dodge, 2000); Hibbert, 1988; Hintzen-Bohlen, 2008; Langenscheidt, 1998; Stambaugh, 1988). The love for public life and its traditions was encouraged by those in power as a community-based religion and an essential part of state life. Even the most utilitarian of objects in Roman life – for example, the weights that hung on the ends of the scales at the market, were designed in the images of women, men, and various divinities, rather than in functional and simple shapes – were creatively crafted to call attention to the beauty and pride that

can be seen in even the smallest public moments of everyday life (Stewart, 1993). These were not the scales of the emperors. They were the machines used in the daily lives of the common people to measure out grain and other household items at the many markets. One wonders, how did the high value placed on everyday objects affect society, and especially on daily life within that society? The Romans were certainly strong and unified (first as conquerors and assimilators of the pre-Roman Etruscan tribe, then as the Empire, and, of course, as the eventual world center of Christendom). It is not a stretch to hypothesize that their desire for consumption of, and great respect for, the aesthetically beautiful (sometimes the ugly or grotesque, but even then beautiful was both a unifying element born of pride (in the artworks) and pleasure (of being surrounded by them in daily maneuvers) and a motivating force to succeed as an empire and coalesce as a community.

In looking to the culture and public experiences of the Romans, I am not stressing here their celebration of, and devoutness, to the state. This idea that the use of art in the everyday and public lives of citizens encouraged an interest in, and a love of the public, is a valuable corollary argument to the main one made here that artistic experience enables revolt from the rationality of everyday life, and awakens a true independence of thought within the individual. Art by its nature re-creates and enhances life, so even mainstream, or redundant artworks that are present in our public spaces can bring happiness (and anger too). Public art projects can, and have historically, as can be seen even just from the existence of so many sculptures in public squares that honor fallen military heroes and honored heads of state, celebrate the leaders and practices of the ruling regime, and

the ruling culture. Still today, the majority of public artworks that critique and question the Establishment are guerilla efforts, by lone individuals, or smaller organizations and galleries, rather than well-financed projects. Art that is housed and experienced in our public spaces has great opportunity before it- it can (mostly) freely access the public at large, in the midst of their daily lives, and put before them, or involve them, in challenging activities and dialogues.

So while all art in the public truly serves the good of a more vibrant public life, and the good of making more beautiful or more interesting our public spaces, that alone is often not enough to create a true connection to our inner raw emotions. This is illustrated well with the case of the Romans- public art was largely a monument to the state and to civic life, and it also served to create beauty, and in that beauty create an essential pride in the community, but most of the examples of Roman public art do not draw attention to inner struggles, joys, taboos. Although some do, that is the work of another project entirely. Largely, Roman public art was a corollary of state life, and still today, it is a reminder of the great accomplishments, and the great artists, of Rome.

When I speak of visionary art, in the vein of Nietzsche, Camus, and Marcuse, I am speaking of artworks that search for emotions and knowledge beyond current and mainstream ideas and values, both within art history, and more importantly, in society and government. These creative ideas are the result of the independent exploration of thought that art provides through its ability to turn the mind inward, and to release some of our inhibitions and societal structures in order to feel and think free of the necessary constraints of civilization. This was certainly not the endeavor of the Romans in making

art an important part of the celebration of the state, though the example of Rome demonstrates how strongly the presence of art in the public can change the way it feels to live within that city, and within that culture and community. Art that is created and displayed in the public sphere produces feelings of pride, inclusion, and the feeling of being a part of something greater than oneself. This is valuable in and of itself.

## **Conclusions**

Like Sade, or Rimbaud, or Thoreau and Whitman in the American scene, Camus (1951/1991) argued that true individual freedom could be awakened and encouraged through creative experience. He believed that rebellion begins with urge for justice and human dignity. Camus, fearing the violent and power-hungry excesses of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, maintained that the way to combat these injustices was willful individual revolt through creative feeling and expression but, he warned, successful revolution can become tyrannical, therefore defeating the original purpose of the rebellion. Accordingly, his concern is not necessarily about replacing an entire government system, but rather that the rebels seek both true freedom and a perspective that balances the needs of justice with the needs of compassion.

All healthy societies need the wisdom of instinct, of nature, and of true freedom. Involvement with art creates the desire and the ability to rebel. Camus explains the link between experiencing true individual freedom through art, and the consequent empowerment, and healthy self-awareness that develops in the individual. Once this link is established, it becomes clear that people who have become more "free" who have reexamined societal ideas, become empowered by their newly found individual will.

They then are inspired to participate in the collective beliefs of society, the same values of the popular will that they once swallowed whole. Camus believed that we are perpetually faced with the absurd search for meaning in our own existence. This quest inevitably fails, for there can be no "objective meaning" that we somehow have to discover. So it is absurd to continue to search in vain rather than approach our existence from the perspective of concrete experiences.

Some who are rationally and materially focused often disapprove of others' affection for philosophy, and for poetry. Instead, they encourage action, because, they claim, philosophy is the antithesis of action. Marx (Thesis XI, Theses on Feuerbach, 1845/1978) said that the philosophers have only interpreted the world, and now it was time to change it. But it is too simple for us to believe that we act when we leave the realm of thought. Camus (1951/1991) said (making his own interpretation) that life moves too fast and encompasses too much for it to ever be captured by any single act of creation. Reality exists only in description, thus demonstrating that even the most exciting advances in science cannot capture the constantly changing character of human emotional and spiritual existence.

Camus reminds us that all creation is a choice, a cropping of the full picture. This is particularly true in action, whose sheer physicality constrains it to borders and limits set by space and time. It is when we read and write – to escape, to learn, to process – that we can attempt (if only as an illusion) to transcend the often rigid borders of action in favor of traversing the streaming river of history and fantasy, of desires and dreams.

Camus determined the division between revolution and rebellion to be that between a mere shift in institutional structure and values and the almost anarchic (though still with inherent limits of the dialectic between instinct and order) individual freedom. This is the difference between merely redesigning and replanting assigned truth(s) and absolute values in a new home or system, and the growth of true freedom through individual creative thought and action.

The rebel is not someone who always says no; he or she is someone who always can say no, and who knows this. And a rebellious politics is a politics that is alive to this possibility, that remains tolerant and open to dissent and insurgency, offering manifold opportunities for the revision and reconstitution of social life<sup>48</sup>. Yet at the same time a rebellious politics is self-limiting; rebellious political agency acknowledges its own partiality and provisionality and proceeds with caution, anticipating the opinions, objections, and even opposition of those others with whom the world is shared. It is this ethos of openness, this refusal to privilege existing conventions, rather than any particular institutional arrangement or electoral procedure, that makes rebellious politics supremely democratic (Isaac, 1992, pp. 141–142).

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<sup>48</sup> Ian Shapiro, (1990). *Political Criticism*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press. p 265-298.



Revolution performs a lobotomy on a ruling system and fashions a transplant of its insides from the very material of the system to be replaced (the new, however new is defined in terms of its comparison to the old); this is a case of institutions succeeding institutions. Rebellion, very differently, has to do with the creation of new horizons for the mind – the formulation of a new individualism based in the spiritual collective. In accessing and re-bringing to life particularly deeply-felt emotions for the world to experience, artists seek to express the unity of the whole or the universal. This is why a good book or an affecting sculpture or painting “extracts ... the tentative trembling symbols of human unity” (Camus, 1951/1991, p. 267). In doing so, it moves us, creates empathetic emotion and transcendent reasoning (if this is really reasoning at all but yet is something beyond instinct). In the perpetual crisis of our existence, in our unrelenting (even unselfconscious) desire for order and meaning where there is none, the recognition of similarity – of our features and desires in another, in all others – in these glimpses of unity, we find at least momentary refuge from the confusion and meaninglessness of everyday and philosophical life. In a world without meaning, human unity (and unity with Nature and the inanimate too) provides great meaning. Not that spiritual unity can fully give us the order we crave (so perhaps this whole notion of meaning is suspect); but it creates conditions whereby we can look at our reflection in a mirror and see the whole world staring back at us.

It is silly, and beside the point, to attempt to separate thought and action, or to prove one’s value over the other. Although each of these two realms of life has its own space and purpose, their simultaneous tension, and affinity for one another, keep them as

two halves of a whole. Without visionary or rebellious thought, there cannot be visionary action. Action is what keeps us alive, makes us animal, allowing us to glimpse the purely emotive. It is as vital as breathing. Still, a life of pure action (particularly a life that aims to change and transform through action –a “political” life in the truest sense) leaves us tired and worn, unable to sense, anticipate, and alter the future. Rimbaud’s (1869-1891/1975) “visionary” artist (Nietzsche, (1872/1967) too, says this) balances the irrationality of Dionysian with Apollonian reason. We must process our instinct to give it strength and longevity. It was in writing about his experiences that Rimbaud became a visionary. To lose oneself entirely in thought and in the ordered reflections of the written word is as undesirable as living a dissolute, drunken existence. And perhaps here I contradict myself, or draw a circle with my words, but it is also true that there is action in thought, action in the act of writing, even in reading another’s writing. The distinction between the two need not be drawn too deeply; it should be a dance, not a battleground. Action encourages us to think, and reflection encourages us to act.

**CHAPTER FOUR:**  
**VISIONARY ARTISTIC REBELLION:**  
**RIMBAUD, de SADE, AND THE PROGRESSION FROM CHAOTIC**  
**CREATION TO CONSCIOUS POLITICAL ACTION**

*His body! the dreamed-of liberation, the collapse of grace joined with new violence!*

*All that he sees! all the ancient kneelings and the penalties canceled as he passes by.*

– Arthur Rimbaud, "The Genie"

Ever since Socrates and Plato (2000, G. R. F. Ferrari, Ed. & T. Griffith, Trans.) first proclaimed their fear of the ability of visionary art to expand the imagination and declared the threat it posed to order, politics and, accordingly, to Plato's ideal republic, Western philosophical thought has struggled with the balance between these two realms of life.<sup>49</sup> In the modern era, Rousseau (1750/1993) and others have echoed Plato's view that art can be destructive to politics. The Romantic tradition formed in reaction to the domination in modern culture of a viewpoint that favored order as the ultimate goal. The dominant belief was that this goal could be reached only through the reason and science that the Enlightenment movement and the French Revolution had brought to the forefront of modern intellectual and moral life. Romantic thinkers like Rimbaud and de Sade

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<sup>49</sup> "For complex reasons, philosophers have feared art (rather in the way in which, fearing female sexual power, society has evolved ways of keeping women in their 'place')" (Danto, (1998b, p. 134).

presented a clear need for individuals to confront their irrational selves. They argued that our instinctual emotions and desires are a source of important knowledge, both about ourselves and about society. They both recognized that many experiences can never be explained or understood through reason. Only by denying the language of reason can we be truly free. Without the constraints of the order and limited vocabulary of reason, experiences can be felt with our individual senses rather than with our societal-based learned rationality.

Art, I have been arguing, continues, and should actively be supported in this, to move out of its assigned spaces of museums, galleries, symphony halls, and theaters, in order to inject its knowledge into the public spaces of our everyday lives. There are at least two primary considerations in this task. First, an expanded definition of visionary art holds that it is the product of the dialectical relationship between sensuousness and rationality. The core spirit of rebellious art consists in a dialogue between our emotions and senses, on one side, and reason and reflection, on the other. Second, are the characteristics of “visionary” art and its potential as a transcendent force within individuals, and as a progressive force in society. The general acceptance of mass opinion, and of popularly supported accounts of experiences, prevents rather than enables, vital knowledge of human universality and vulnerability. The recognition of a whole universe of which we are but one part is necessary to the desire to participate in community and in politics because it alerts us to our own susceptibility to a variety of human ills and reminds us that those dangers are common to all.

In the creation of art, the intention, and the process of reflection that the artist experiences, is equal in importance, if not more so, to the aesthetic result. To look only at the end product of artistic expression is to miss the emotions and intentions that lie in the complex web of intersecting gazes involved in any artistic interaction. Art is not merely a material end-product of creativity and skilled craft; it is also not simply that which is aesthetically pleasing or entertaining. These are two connected but distinct points. The first regards the importance of the artistic process (versus the result), beginning with the idea. The second refers to the transcendent properties of art and hints at the societal dangers of mainstream art. What connects these two points is the role of ideas and imagination in art-making.

Much of Plato's (2000, G. R. F. Ferrari, Ed. & T. Griffith, Trans.) philosophy focused on the difference between appearance and reality. He felt that all art was appearance and provided escapism from the reality of reason and knowledge and thus from politics. Among his many differences with Plato, Aristotle (1996, S. Everson, Trans.) believed that art can serve a healthy function in society as a unique, and thus valuable, form for the expression of ideas and emotions about everyday realities. This classic debate on the value of art in society has been elaborated by many thinkers, in modernist conceptions of the aesthetic as the beautiful (Schiller, 1974/2004, Novalis, 1798/1997), and then the sublimely transcendent; and in postmodernism's confrontation with this understanding of aesthetics, keeping in mind the constraints and challenges of late capitalism. Historically, art has thus moved from highly mimetic or realist forms to increasingly impressionistic and abstract ones. In general terms, postmodern art

movements have employed ideas of flux and impermanence, language and dialogue, interaction with the spectator, transformation of the found into art, and both the process of art, and the ideas behind the art, presented as the art itself.

The notion that the process of creation, and even the initial idea that spurred the creation, is valuable in itself is important to our overarching argument that public and social art, in its freedom from institutional constraints, can readily experiment with a variety of directly political, and indirectly inspirational conceptual works, using language, emotion, human interaction, sounds, sights, and smells. Public and social art in this country could be more strongly encouraged and made available, so it could serve as a positive force against a lack of community and participation. The expansion of individual, and collective, imagination – the ability to envision change and progress beyond the status quo – and the increased importance in society and political life of artistic knowledge and experience will encourage people to participate, to become more actively involved in their everyday decisions and in the greater questions of humanity. The most direct way to create this expansion is through democratic and frequent access to the benefits of artistic experience. If art and creativity could create and maintain a stronger presence on our streets, and in our public squares, it would enable individual engagement in new and challenging ideas that explore sublimated ideas and collapse accepted norms, and conceptions of difference. This inner reflection will lead to an interest in one's community and eventually to a desire and willingness to participate in the development of that community. Art on the streets is more unrestrained, more challenging, and more experimental than work that is presented within the walls of our

brick and mortar institutions. This public creation can be material, performative, or in the form of an idea expressed through dialogue or a process. It is not necessarily its beauty or its physicality that makes the difference but, rather, its ability to disrupt, to engage, and to invert or subvert everyday perceptions and limitations. Public art, especially noncommissioned works, can and should employ their less regulated boundaries in their ability to be experimental and critical.

### **The difficulty of defining art**

The history of Western art has evolved along a particular narrative that can be roughly divided into three main eras of approaches to art-making (Danto 1984). Danto locates the beginning of this story in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when art was understood as the beautiful and as direct copy, the second major period being the modern period of experimentation. The culmination of this long development is the postmodern era, when craft and popular media joined with the fine arts, and it became difficult to see the difference between art and non-art. Although Danto does note that art (versus non-art) must hold and exemplify meaning, in this brave new world where art becomes primarily about philosophy creative pluralism is the dominant credo. He does not imply that there is not plentiful worthy art being created, just that the art is being formed within less stringent philosophical and social boundaries with each year that passes. Found art, process art, pop art, mail art, and other forms of conceptual art exemplify art as philosophy.

In Danto's Hegelian framework,<sup>50</sup> the history of art is a teleological endeavor that develops and expands until it reaches its ultimate goal and becomes itself- until it is a philosophy. According to Danto's understanding, art and art history "died" or "ended" in the mid-1960s with the advent of conceptual and pop art. According to the conceptual movement's focus on the process and ideas within art, art could be anything and could be created anywhere. Danto argues that the avant-garde in art was always seeking to invent and create the new and unexpected and that, once art had become even the process, and the idea, and the words involved in creation, that once it became clear in the 1960s that avant-garde art had become its philosophical end, in a way it then stopped growing and "ended."

Danto says that art always exists in relation to its interpretation (Houkema, 1998). Further, he writes that "we live at a moment when it is clear that art can be made of anything, and where there is no mark through which works of art can be perceptually different from the most ordinary objects" (Danto, 1998b, p. 139). This observation of the contemporary art world – that of two objects ostensibly the same in every way, one can be art and the other not – led Danto (1987) to the conclusion that the task for the philosopher of art is to identify differences between works of art and "real things" (p. 64). An object is art when the art is intertwined with the art's (or artist's) meaning: "Craftwork is art when it is about what it embodies" (Danto, 1988b, p. 137). In other words, there must be creative self-consciousness in artistic creation. Contemporary art, in its newest endeavors and particularly in the desire to be both social and public, has

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<sup>50</sup> Hegel's 1807/1977) "end of art" thesis.



moved away from a focus on the material end result and toward an appreciation of the idea behind the artwork, the process of creation, and the interaction between artist and observer. As it is more difficult to preserve and care for an object of art when it is out on the street and susceptible to crowds and poor weather, street artists employ a wide variety of conceptual and sensual tools and artistic elements that create atmosphere, sensuous experience, and critical thought. Their avant-garde methods can remain free from societal assimilation longer than artistic methods that are created with institutions and specific authorities or platforms in mind.

### **The Dionysian literary point of view**

Two very different, but equally rebellious and infamous artists in late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century France, are examples of modern men who expressed the raw emotions of the Dionysian realm, both in their lives and in their words, but ultimately needed the balance of reason and reflection to achieve their desire for true freedom and lasting relevance. The libertine Marquis de Sade<sup>51</sup> promoted an antisocietal viewpoint that favored an individually determined and unrestrained morality, where man obeyed the law according to his “ability.” The other, the young French poet Arthur Rimbaud,<sup>52</sup> exhausted himself seeking the truths of the modern age through the expression of unrestrained passion and

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<sup>51</sup> Two excellent biographies of de Sade are Bongie (1998) and Gray (1999).

<sup>52</sup> There are many first-rate studies of both Rimbaud’s literary project, and of his personal life. See Rimbaud (1946, 1953, 1967, 1994), Oxenhandler (2009), Steinmetz (2002), and White (2008).

experience. Both pursued sensation above all; de Sade lived his philosophy that pleasure can be pain (pain as knowledge) and that one can have (and live by) art in place of authority, and Rimbaud fully submitted his being to his self-motivated project of feeling and experiencing all the pain and beauty of the world and savoring from all experiences that which is universal. These two artists staked a place for the role of the *anti-* in modern life. The anti-political tradition of the modern age was anti-community in the traditional sense of community-building – through struggle, man naturally adapts to life in a stable and safe civil society. Writers like de Sade and Rimbaud demonstrated the need to understand people as anti-social individuals. These authors believed that the project of bringing the individual, the body, and empiricist understandings of life back into modern society, with all its ability to frighten and confuse, is necessary if we are to get in touch with our own sublimated passions and thus with our natural universal relations to one another.

As Rimbaud described, to live artistically is to believe in the importance of the knowledge that is attained through instinctual and sensuous experience (1869-1891/1975). His personal revolt is not a surprise when seen in the context of the Romantic Movement, whose proponents attacked the Enlightenment because they felt that the mechanical and objective nature of Enlightenment thought stifled creativity, imagination and spontaneity. At this time then, art and reason were necessarily on opposite sides of the spectrum. To fight against the virtue- and reason-obsessed philosophies (including those of Rousseau and Voltaire), it was necessary to bring the realm of the imagination to prominence. This meant that there was no room for

compromise; instead, the brightest few believed they had to ignore the voice of reason as much as possible, and live through the passions alone. True Dionysian release transcends and creates some change within the individual immediately. Despite this important release, without the reflective “visionary” consciousness, self-destructive behavior may take the place of visionary “research” where the “quintessences” of life’s many experiences are not savored or used to transcend the age. Both Rousseau, a philosopher, and Rimbaud, a notorious libertine, were searching for revolutionary answers to the most essential of concerns of human existence; this quest naturally employs some dialectical combination of imagination and reflection.

### **The public value of de Sade’s private creation**

Louis-Alphonse-Donatien<sup>53</sup> de Sade, better known as the Marquis de Sade, known for his libertine novels and his similarly libertine lifestyle, holds a rightful and pivotal place in the history of post- (or counter-) Enlightenment modernity. Although his detailed descriptions of violent sexual acts and bloody mutilations gave rise to his infamous reputation, de Sade was very much a visionary for his time. His *Philosophy in the Bedroom [La Philosophie dans la Boudoir]* (1795/1990) is a story of the sexual

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<sup>53</sup> According to Lawrence W. Lynch (1984,), he was originally to be christened Louis-Aldonse-Donatien by his parents, but owing to a mixup was he was named Donatien-Alphonse-Francois. Only after 1792 did he adopt the name Louis-Alphonse-Donatien.

education of a bourgeois young girl, as well as one about transgressing the morals of society and the relationship of such transgression to violent revolutionary action. The role of the articulate and aggressive sexual educator, Dolmancé, and Rimbaud's (1869-1891/1975) notion of the poet visionary (poets are born, visionaries are created) show how transgression creates the leaders of the creative and societal avant-garde. Both thinkers understood the need for visionary artists who create art of and for the future, and seek answers to the modern age's great questions through the elements of art (unguarded passions, instinctual and sensuous experience), rather than through the tools of reason and science. Hegel (1807/1977) argued that reason constantly evolves dialectically toward a goal, but art is best not characterized as goal oriented. Instead, we could say that art is experience oriented, sensory, and spiritual.

De Sade was primarily an artist, not a philosopher, and who infamously claimed that some choose suffering because pain is a form of knowledge (de Sade, 1795/1990). De Sade, writing almost a century before Nietzsche, (1886/1989) envisioned a society where morality was understood on an individual basis, where all private and public action was "beyond good and evil." He used frequent images of sodomy, homosexuality, and other taboos to invert societal mores. The young girl's mother in the story of "Genie," whose rape and mutilation ends the story, is representative of societal rules and authority – the obstacle to natural passions and urges that is mainstream culture and the knowledge of reason. Simone De Beauvoir (Dinnage, 1951/1962) noted that de Sade "chooses imagination," which he used as agency for liberation and revolution. "In order to escape the conflicts of existence, we take refuge in a universe of appearances, and existence

itself escapes us” (p. 80). This statement seems to echo Rousseau’s (1750/1993) worry that the arts and sciences, through both university curricula and mainstream art like popular opera productions, had created a universe of mere appearances unaided by the Dionysian experiences of truly living life, of *living art*. For de Sade, the physical – the body – was crucial to inner discovery, and to good art, but was often unknown territory in societal life. Beauvoir reminded us that “to sympathize with de Sade too readily is to betray him. For it is our misery, subjection and death that he desires ... what he demands is that ... one engage himself concretely in the name of his own existence” (p. 79).

De Sade created a philosophy of extreme individual self-interest as the true expression of freedom. He believed that morality and religion (that of both monarchy and the Catholic Church), along with empathy and ideas of human unity, were all societal constructs that worked only to limit our expression of self-interested desires. De Sade believed, too, that society was in need of the knowledge and expression of true freedom. He argued that man should naturally allow the freedom of nature to provoke him, rather than to conform to the rules and values of our false gods. He encouraged the experience of pain and suffering for the very reason that society is constructed to ameliorate our discomforts and injustices. He endeavored to feel and understand the ideas and experiences that society had collectively banned. It is possible, though, that, as was the case with the philosophy of the American Transcendentalists, this extreme individualism is only the first step- in the withdrawal from society. The second step is to relearn our relationship to society. In so doing, we can access and understand a truly free connection to ourselves, to others, and to Nature.

De Sade (1795/1990) examined everything under the “torch of reason” (p. 126). He still employed reason in his discussion and defense of the self-policing of morals and of an evolving and malleable justice system. In other words, he used reason – the very tool of society that he challenged – to formulate an argument that encourages experience with our instinctual and creative selves. Unlike Hobbes (1651/2009), who tried to restrain what he also saw as our inherent and dangerous human passions, de Sade (1795/1990) freed them and worked to justify their existence and importance, even within the constraints of institutionalized justice: “man receives sensations from nature” while, de Sade said, law is always naturally in opposition to nature. He continued, [N]ot having the same motives [nature and the law], it cannot have the same rights” (p. 126) “[I]t would be a palpable absurdity to wish to prescribe universal laws; it would be like the ludicrous procedure of a general who dressed all his soldiers in uniforms of the same size; it is a fearful injustice to expect men of different temperament to bow to the same laws” (p./ 125). Here we can see that de Sade is antipolitical, antisociety, and anti-Rousseau and Rousseau’s (1993) concept of the “general will.”

Pierre Klossowski (1947/1991)<sup>54</sup> argues that there is an interrelationship, though a distinction, between writing about the sensuous and actually experiencing it. Klossowski says that, for de Sade, once we write about an emotion or an action, we are unable merely to be descriptive, as we are already interpreting that emotion or action. In this way, sensuousness can exist only in the initial emotion or act. “For de Sade the fact the sensing, the irreducible element in perversion, does not have to be justified. It is the

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<sup>54</sup> Klossowski was a literary critic who published in George Bataille’s *Acephale* in the 1930s. His texts on de Sade and Nietzsche were widely influential on French postmodern philosophy.

aberrant act issuing from sensuous nature that de Sade wishes to moralize” (p. 17). According to de Sade, we experience the aberrant when we cannot locate reason. He asserted that the aberrant is within all humans, and Klossowski makes the point that de Sade was attempting to understand and defend the aberrant by using the dominant framework of reason. George Bataille (cited in Allison et al., 2006) writes that some critical assessments of de Sade’s ideas believed that the “brilliant and suffocating value he wanted to give human existence is inconceivable outside of fiction; that only poetry, exempt from all practical applications, permits one to have at his disposal, to a certain extent, the brilliance and suffocation that the Marquis de Sade tried so indecently to provoke” (p. 19).

Maurice Blanchot (1949/2004)<sup>55</sup> wrote that de Sade’s philosophy was one of simple self-interest. In other words, de Sade failed to experience empathy and connection with others, and was thus concerned only with his own pleasure and pain. Blanchot said that de Sade criticized both the focus on reason and the focus on equality, that the Enlightenment had introduced, and that this revealed itself in de Sade’s peculiar understanding of natural human equality. It was de Sade’s claim that, because all humans are equal, no one has to help another person to have to help others (p. 10). De Sade’s aggressive form of free will was a philosophy of strong visionary leaders. He believed that the powerful few could rise above society values and fulfill only their own needs and desires (p. 12). Blanchot agreed with Klossowski that de Sade employed an evil form of

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<sup>55</sup> This text consisted of two extended essays, one on each of the writers. Blanchot examines De Sade’s philosophy in “De Sade’s Reason.” This essay appeared in *Les Temps Modernes*, and in part reviewed Klossowski’s (1991) *De Sade, My Neighbor*.

reason that displayed aggressive human instincts. De Sade's reasoning can also be seen here as a response to the sort of argument that Sartre makes, that one must be actively participatory in order to be committed to a political life, by which one who does not speak out to help others is essentially helping to hurt them.

### **Rimbaud as Dionysian rebel**

The sensuous verse of the avant-garde poets of 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, Charles Baudelaire and then Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine, rose from the ashes of the revolution in France, and the Enlightenment triumph of science over the church, to develop a style of poetry that leaps from one sharp sensuously detailed image to the next, often from one line to the next. Although he wrote poetry only for five years and had given it up by age 21, Rimbaud made famous this style of tactile free verse. His details were more vivid, more colorful, more sensual, and more grotesque than those of Baudelaire and even Verlaine. This "chains of images" style also worked as a linguistic device that paralleled the rapidly changing raw experience of his life, physically and emotionally. But Rimbaud really becomes vital to the story of the modern age in those lines and in those poems where he speaks of revolutionary praxis and of the liberating powers of art.

Edmund White (2008)<sup>56</sup> recently published a relatively short and footnote-less biography of Rimbaud. Focusing primarily on Rimbaud's personal life and on Rimbaud's art- and violence-fueled relationship with the poet Paul Verlaine, White concludes that Rimbaud's artistic experiments with antisocial and chaotic behavior, though ultimately

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<sup>56</sup> White is a novelist and prominent writer of gay nonfiction since the mid 1960s.



destructive, inspired Verlaine to new poetic freedom and genius. Quite different in his approach, Neal Oxenhandler (2009) examines Rimbaud's life and philosophy through a detailed examination of his poems. Oxenhandler successfully weaves literary analysis with historical events in Rimbaud's life against the philosophical backdrop of modernism. Though academic and ambitious, his tone is straightforward and allows Rimbaud's poetry to play the leading role.

Similar to Sartre's (1937/1960) concept of the pre-reflective versus the reflective self, Oxenhandler's claim is that Rimbaud viewed reason as necessary but mechanical and not entirely reflective of our experiential life: "[This] ubiquitous reason distances the speaker from the here and now of his engagement" (p. 53). He points out that Rimbaud's (1869-1891/1975) language in his poem "A Une Raison / To A Reason" (one of the *Illuminations*) is more structured and less "informal or free" (p. 53). Further, Oxenhandler postulates that it is no coincidence that Rimbaud began to admire reason some time after his many poetically documented experiments with rebellious freedom had likely already begun to wear thin: "'A Une Raison' seems to mark—in auspiciously—the midpoint in the rise and fall of Rimbaud's career." (p. 53).

Oxenhandler examines Rimbaud's interpretation of the idea of reason.

This poem is the drumbeat of rationalism in the service of the right action, a use of cognition that attracted Rimbaud, despite the deep currents of irrationality that stirred so powerfully in him and inspired his greatest poetry. The rationality of this poem is primarily political, since the proposed use of reason leads to "des nouveaux

hommes / new men” and their “nouvel amour / new love.” Reason is the faculty in us that connects us to an order of things in the universe, which itself can be called rational (pp. 52–53).

That extract shows Rimbaud's awareness, to create political change, he needed to apprehend, and even befriend, reason. It was the combination of rationality and irrationality that created the visionary, and produced a new way of knowing our world.

In a letter dated May 13, 1871, to his former teacher, Georges Izambard, Rimbaud (1869-1891/1975) described his theory of the visionary:

A Poet makes himself a visionary through a long, boundless, and systematized *disorganization of all the senses*. All forms of love, of suffering, of madness; he searches himself, he exhausts within himself all poisons and preserves their quintessences. Unspeakable torment, where he will need the greatest faith, superhuman strength, where he becomes among all men the great invalid, the great criminal, the great accursed – and the Supreme Scientist! For he attains the *unknown!* (p. 102).

Rimbaud seems to have understood that the visionary is a universal figure: “[S]o Baudelaire is the first visionary, the king of poets, *a real God*. ... [but] the inventions of the unknown demand new forms” (p. 104). The visionary transcends the times, and in so doing serves a particular role in revolutionary change. Visionaries always seek to change their conditions to propel history forward, not necessarily towards a teleological endpoint but to discovery and rebirth. Rimbaud wrote of the inception of his own transcendent

journey: “Right now I’m depraving myself as much as I can. Why? I want to be a poet, and I am working to make myself a *visionary*” (p. 100).

In the poem “Tale,” about a prince who has become discontent with his stable and peaceful status quo life, Rimbaud wrote “He desired to see the Truth, the time of essential desire/ and satisfaction ...Is ecstasy possible in destruction?/ Can one grow young in cruelty?” (p. 157). These lines point to Rimbaud's belief in a Truth that liberates man as well as to his Faustian ideas of creation and destruction, which explored pain and cruelty as potentially redemptive knowledge sources, similar to the experimentations of de Sade. These hopeful early lines led to poetry that screams revolutionary ecstasy. Included in this collection is the poem “Democracy,” its entirety a fiery battle cry. Rimbaud describes the greed and exploitation of modern industry and the military, and then proclaims the manifesto for the antipolitical, antireason tradition:

Goodbye to all this, and never mind where.  
Conscripts of good intention,  
We will have policies unnamable and animal.  
Knowing nothing of science, depraved in our pleasures,  
To hell with the world around us rolling ...  
This is the real advance<sup>57</sup>! Forward ... March!

(Rimbaud, 1975, p. 168).

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<sup>57</sup> In other translations, it is the “real progress!”

In *Second Delirium: An Alchemy of Words*, after five difficult but exciting years, Rimbaud bids farewell to his poetry and to his life of art. He explains that his mind has “turned sou.” The poet is by this point in his life weak, –physically spent – and disillusioned from his self-imposed journey of magic and discovery, two words he often used to describe his youth, the time of his quest to become a visionary. He sings the praises of a life of happiness, not pain, and of science, not art. In “A Song from the Highest Tower,” a combination of traditional verse poetry with prose poetry, as if to emulate the chorus-verse-chorus structure of the piece, the poet sings to his new-found (or re-found) home in reason and stability: Finally O reason, O happiness, I cleared from the sky the blue which is darkness” Further along in the several-page prose poem, though, Rimbaud seems to remember what he is now claiming to be leaving behind and calls for attention to the senses and to our passions: “You must set yourself free/ from the striving of Man/ And the applause of the world!/ You must fly as you can. ... The fire within you,/ Is our whole duty-/ But no one remembers” (pp. 207–208).

Rimbaud here seems an old man, tired and worn, a refugee from a sort of thrilling war that has taught him a love of peace. In the late letters, his sarcasm erratically plays with his semi-madness. It is not quite clear what he means when Rimbaud announces suddenly that “[he] will become involved in politics. Saved” (p. 195).

### **Marx, Rousseau, and the problem with mainstream art**

The philosophies of de Sade and Rimbaud call for a rebellion from the social and moral restrictions of society through a connection with the disorder of instinct and

sensuousness rather than the dominant reliance on reason and order.<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to consider the rebellious ideas of these two artists alongside the work of Rousseau and Marx. Although the work that Rousseau and Marx are most famous for in the Western canon does not directly concern rebellion through creativity, all these philosophers were keenly aware of the difference between a visionary, or truly free, creativity and a mainstream, or alienating, artistic experience. Although all art in its very creation is a negation of the given reality, this distinction between visionary and mainstream art is the difference between art that challenges the ruling ideas of society, and art that is in the service of the sublimated passions of the status quo and the Establishment. Rousseau (1762/1993) criticized mainstream artistic endeavors for their acquiescence to the order and morality of popular culture, whereas Marx (1844/1978) differentiated between alienating experiences and healthy self-unifying ones that capture and encourage universal human connection.

Marx (1844/1978) defined 'species being', as the feeling or knowledge of human unity that needs to be accessed to subvert the alienation of modern man. He described how the men who labored in the factories of modern industrial Europe had, in becoming alienated from themselves and from the objects they produced for others' use each day, become estranged from their natural but latent feeling and knowledge of universal unity with all humans. "Man is a species being ... not only because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a *universal* and therefore a free being" p. 75). For Marx, species being was a vision of a world without property and capital,

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<sup>58</sup> "Today's rebels want to see, hear, feel new things in a new way: they link liberation with the dissolution of ordinary and orderly perception" Marcuse (1969, p. 37).

where the unity and wholeness of the community of man could be acknowledged and appreciated. He argued that it is not merely economics that creates alienation, but rather the conformity and complacency that is bred by the conditions of everyday life in contemporary American democracy. It is not merely species being of which we could make a goal, but also Rousseau's (1750/1993) idea of "empathy", and Emerson's theory of "Oneness". All these philosophical ideas point to the same conclusion: that a feeling of universal human community among individuals is not only valid and in need of renewal, but is also a key to solving the lack of participation in American public and political life. The ever-growing individualism among Americans needs to be balanced by more frequent interactions with visionary art, which fosters feelings of community and genuine interest in the public domain and in civic involvement.

Danto (1998b) writes:

Hegel, thinking of philosophy as the domain of thought and art the domain of sensation, was obliged to think that art had come to an end when it became suffused with critical thought about itself. The sharp division between thought and sensation is pure Romanticism ... art has in its own right become part of art's own reflection on itself" (p. 136).

The stark division between experience and reflection is a misleading characterization of human experience – as Danto argues, a misleading description of postmodernity or “after the end of art”. Whereas experience by sensation is vastly different from experience by reason, art, and in particular postmodern art, joins the two

realms. But instead of using reason to progress, one can employ art, or rather *be* art, to transcend. To be art is to accumulate experience without regard for moral convention or societal taboos, not to mention experience often without regard for one's own health and safety. It is to face pain; not always to create pleasure, safety, self-sustainability, the "good." To live art can be scary and difficult and often, when truly accepted, debilitating. Nonetheless, art can enlighten and reveal; it can transcend the ages and be the catalyst for change and progress in society- the very society from which it seeks to separate itself. Art can lead us to vital and latent truths and can inspire a change in consciousness. Artistic experience leads to a reawakening of 'species being'; people become not only self-aware, but gain the potential to be connected to all others in the species and to recognize their interdependence. For Marx, it was through the alienation of labor that species being was lost for the individual, and it is through revolution (and the end of the alienation of labor) that it can be found again.

In the "Discourse on Arts and Sciences," Rousseau (1750/1993) expressed a two-pronged problem with modernity: the effects of capitalism (for Rousseau, property) on society and on our morality, and the effects of a *realpolitik* theory of governance on modern politics. Rousseau lamented that "the politicians of the ancient world were always talking of morals and virtue; ours speak of nothing but commerce and money." (p. 17). In Part Two of this discourse, although disdainful of and sarcastic about both the role and the content of art in mainstream bourgeois life, Rousseau still acknowledged the importance (he said "genius") of true or transcendent art. By that very definition, he was speaking of art that is not "of its age" (it looks forward) and even specifically said that a

true artist of this sort must live in poverty and struggle, and should only be recognized after his death. “It is only those who feel themselves able to walk alone in their footsteps and to outstrip them. It belongs only to these few<sup>59</sup> to raise monuments to the glory of the human understanding” (p. 27). He cited even the great writer and fellow Enlightenment intellectual Voltaire (the two did not get along) as being guilty of censoring his own words to please the masses. This accusation is interesting in the context of his theory, not only because of his allowances for “genius” even in an essay that is a polemic against art, but also because Rousseau importantly targeted and articulated the universal problem of the repressive nature of the mainstream. In Danto’s (1998b) words: “[Art becomes] an object rather than a medium through which a higher reality made itself present” (p. 130).

In Rousseau’s time, the foundations of capitalism and advanced industry, and the culture that accompanied them, created a whole realm of normalizing distractions in entertainment, academia, and bureaucratic institutions. Rousseau wrote of the "end of art," or at least of the end of a mainstream appreciation for "virtuous" art. He maintained that the theaters and galleries of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Paris had done little more than sedate the bourgeois population into complacency. For him, art that merely entertains simply appeases the masses, and is in this sense anti-citizenship (which is likewise anti-revolutionary). True citizenship, according to Rousseau, requires the ability to sustain enough of a sense of universality, and to transcend and pull far enough away from the pragmatism and conformity of society, to be able to question our everyday existence and society’s established rules. Status quo art (and music and poetry and even philosophy)

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<sup>59</sup> Of course, Rousseau was talking specifically about the Enlightenment greats, Bacon, Descartes, and Newton, whom he called “teachers of mankind.”



functions in society much as big screen televisions and oversized SUVs do – as material distractions from our species being (Marx, 1844/1978), or our natural compassion or "pity" (Rousseau, 1762/1993), and as accepted normalizing and disciplining (Foucault, 1991) forces that maintain anti-revolutionary order. All these issues go far to keep the masses happy and distracted, not only from society's ills but also from the true community of man. "As the conveniences of life increase, as the arts are brought to perfection and luxury spreads, true courage flags, military virtues disappear; and all this is the effect of the sciences and of those arts which are exercised in the privacy of man's dwellings" (Rousseau, 1762/1993, p. 20).

Rousseau is often cited as the intellectual forefather of the Romantic Movement, and his many references to the lost virtues of honor and courage are a testament to this claim. But that he used such terms to show how appreciation for community and public citizenship had given way to private, insulating, and ultimately "meaningless" luxuries, his call to arms against the conventional arts and sciences is relevant to the present day. With the masses satisfied and entertained, most of society remains staunchly in the mainstream. Mainstream art is one of the elements that the Establishment uses so that society can continue to build the very system that oppresses them (Marx's, 1844/1978, idea of false consciousness). Visionary art is a way to bring the mentality of everyday revolutionary praxis into the lives of many. It is not impossible that its rebellious rearrangements could eventually incite physical and violent social revolution, but, more importantly and more commonly, it can begin the project of changing or "enlightening" individual social and political consciousness.

## **Conclusions**

The Modern age was certainly industrious; it quickly gave birth to radical philosophical departures like liberalism and democracy, but it also fostered significant reactionary ideas that threatened the newly established status quo. Rousseau was one of the first of the Modern era to point out not only that there is a difference between transcendent art and mainstream art, but also that there is special importance in history for the role of the visionary artist. While Rousseau remained convinced that the visionaries of his age were the founders of scientific rationalism, who largely marked the dawn of the Modern era, he acknowledged that there are such “geniuses” for every age. Calling on his readers to revolt against the arts and sciences, he depicted a societal condition from which there was no escape except through revolution. His was a revolt of simplicity, pragmatism, and citizenship against the culture of wealth, decadence and self-absorption that the bourgeois class exemplified. Ordinary readers of his discourse on the evil of the arts would perhaps reflect on their own “alienation” in the culture of mainstream life. In much the same way, a citizen of 19<sup>th</sup> century France who came across the novels of the Marquis de Sade or the poems of Arthur Rimbaud might be incited to attack the monarchy or members of the bourgeoisie or the many symbols of moral convention – the whole society.

Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what is most striking about the relationship between art and politics is the speed with which the current Establishment is able to embrace visionary art and dilute it for the masses, until it is more easily digestible through known mainstream concepts. This sucks from it its potentially revolutionary and raw emotional power until it is a hollow shell of its transcendent former incarnation. This path of

popular assimilation, now moving at increasing speeds to match the increasing levels of mechanization and globalization, can create almost immediate turnover of new and rebellious ideas. The struggle to be an artist “beyond one’s own age” (to be a visionary) has become, paradoxically, both easier and more fruitless – easier, because an “age” is now far shorter than it was during the time of the Enlightenment in Europe (time seems to pass more quickly and, with it, art too). Yet looking forward has become more difficult and at times even futile. Visionary artists struggle against the anti species being component of the Establishment, rather than directly against material conditions. Even if the Establishment were to become entirely in the service of society, art would still address other, more primal needs. There remains an infinitely expanding role for art.

The connection that art has to the ability to change individual consciousness, and to the development of a rebellious consciousness, is vital to a stronger recognition of species being in social life. Species being is, of course, unreachable in perfect form, for the dialectic must continue, but it can be pursued so that society can change and develop. Change fosters a better understanding of the dialectic of art and reason, and the continuation of that dialectic is what keeps art alive without limit. The journey toward species being may seem teleological in that it can be seen to function as a meta-narrative. But if we accept that the “goal” is unreachable (and that even a journey without a goal can be fruitful), and that the quest itself can yield a deeper knowledge of the endless tension that creates movement or change, and the necessary movements that sustain the tension, then the journey can enrich us. Art exemplifies a universal understanding among people that can be found in the place where emotion and reflection (the Dionysian and

the Apollonian realms, respectively) meet in an ever-blossoming and ever-colliding partnership. The particulars of art will vary, and sometimes confound the viewer, but all powerful art provides a valuable journey using the senses, that established contact with that which is common among all humans.

Rimbaud called for living through the senses and through art. This aim requires that one live anti-politically, in other words, to live primarily privately and not through or for society, but rather, without it. Rimbaud believed that we could reinvent society's concepts of the everyday, so that they are true to us individually – so that we can learn them through our own experience rather than just accept them as they are collectively described. Just as Rousseau argued against the mainstream ideas of Hobbes and Locke by refusing to accept that humans could not be naturally good and just, Rimbaud also warned of the ways in which society – property, industry, and its culture –corrupts man's natural state. He was echoing Rousseau that, using the tools of culture, and often art itself, society casts a veil over its members by mass-manufacturing the Dionysian elements of life. Once bureaucratic structure and order, and the whitewashing that comes with frequent repetition, are placed upon Dionysian moments, these moments lose their ability as a transcendent force, and become a part of their time, rather than ahead of their time. Rimbaud preferred a sort of self-corruption wherein he adopted the individual morality system that de Sade espoused. It is likely that neither de Sade nor Rimbaud, in his artistic expressions and assertions, ever intended that his experiments and anti-societal ideas would become the foundation of an ordered society. Their private transgressions were not intended to be a public performance. Still, they both understood that by writing

about their experiences – by placing their private lives in the public domain and thus into the cultural collective – they were transforming their private experiences into public knowledge. Their visionary combinations of art and thought attest to the importance of the knowledge attained through emotional and spiritual, rather than merely rational, experience.

My conclusions are again twofold. It remains an important task to increase mass access to an alternative, “visionary” way of life – to allow everyone to live by the dialectic of art – both as a response to the mechanization of contemporary life, and as a tool by which to transcend our temporal conditions and enjoy the universal feelings that propel individual interest and participation. Without a doubt, an acceptance of art as a source of knowledge can lead to transcendence of the limits of society that fosters a significant increase in community and civic involvement. When we can feel ourselves as part of something greater, as part of a whole, we have begun to transcend those limitations.

Capitalism, from its inception in the French Revolution to its contemporary sophisticated and global claims, creates and sustains the individual as a single unit, encouraged to feel compassion only for those it is allowed to love – oneself, one's family, one's spouse. Capitalism dictates even our aesthetic tastes, as it produces the arts and sciences of convention that Rousseau, writing over 200 years ago, warned of. More recently, Foucault explained the ability of a person to reproduce himself as a subject of the state willingly as discipline and normalization. Camus (1951/1991) and Marcuse (1969) formulated theories of rebellion, and revolution, through art. It is not primarily a

change in material conditions (i.e., the toppling of capitalism to make way for communism) that will bring recognition of empathy and interconnectivity. Rather, it is an acceptance and development of the eternal dialectic of instinct and reason, as exemplified by visionary art. Through the universal and transhistorical experience of art, and the empathy it engenders, people can engage a revolutionary consciousness within themselves and within society.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### RECENT EXPERIMENTS WITH PUBLIC AND SOCIAL ART:

#### NEW YORK CITY AND BEYOND

*I believe that the artist and his art are only a part of the total human experience; the viewer in the world at large is the essential other part.*

– Ansel Adams

*[T]he alchemical essence known as the sublime, the primal buzz of it all, is no longer in God or nature or abstraction...the sublime has moved into us ... we are the sublime; life, not art, has become so real that it's almost unreal. Art is being reanimated by a sense of necessity, free of ideology, or the compulsion to illustrate theory. Art is breaking free.*

– Jerry Saltz

There is a shallowness to the current state of Americans' participation in democracy. To combat this complacency, we need to seek new ways to revitalize social and political life in America. The solution lies in the connection between visionary artistic experience, defined here as the union of free and individual Dionysian moments with the reflective power of Apollonian reason, and the desire to participate, which is encouraged primarily by the feelings of unity and connectedness that come from such knowledge. This desire to participate- to be interested, to feel empowered is the true key to active citizenship. Dionysian glimpses contain the necessary energy and imagination – by expanding the boundaries of perception – to create an *opening* in the individualist

status quo mindset. Just as flesh-and-blood revolutions need an opening (first a weakening) in the structural elements of the ruling regime in order to move forward with a higher probability of success, revolutions (re-understandings) of the mind also need that opportunity for at least momentary disorder from which to reassess and grow.

Revolutions, coups, and strikes against a system of government or any institution of power are essential to dynamic and lasting change in the minds of individuals in society. This is true despite mainstream history's attempt to relegate most short-lived revolts to "failed" status. A revolutionary attempt can never be a failure, and it should never be regarded as such. Throughout history, regardless of whether a revolt lasted minutes or years, each has contributed to a revolution of the mind. All revolutionary movements engender some form of change within their respective communities and within the collective imagination, in that they pose questions and alternatives previously not considered.

Once we can expand the limits of what we perceive is possible for our lives, there is the possibility of the destruction of previous values and the creation of new needs. Arousal awakens. With physical attack on the government or authority structure, our senses and perceptions are also aroused. It is not the momentary (historical, material, immediate) result of bloody revolt that connotes its success, but, instead, the paradigm shift that it introduces. In the metaphorical sense, the violent moment begins change that only the mind can continue complete. The chaotic feelings that encourage, or make clear the need for change, is the Dionysian moment; the reflection on these new needs is the Apollonian integration of the moment into everyday life.



As Nietzsche (1872/1967) said, the metaphorical bloodshed of creation is necessary, but it cannot, and should not, stand alone. A joining of the Dionysian and the Apollonian realms of life is exemplified in visionary art, and this relationship of interaction and balance is the key to a revolution of the mind. It is with this partnership that one overcomes everyday struggles. A “successful” revolt by an organized militia overtakes one government and replaces it with another, presumably one that proffers more freedom to the people. While this kind of revolution alters the structural façade of political life, the closing of the opening [of the mind that results from the Dionysian moment] comes too quickly for the change to enter and remain in individual consciousness.

The prevailing myth of individualism in the United States convinces us that we are able to prosper alone, “prosperous” being defined through commercial pursuits and through the possession of property. Dionysian moments collapse previous individual conceptualizations of reality and allow for our often latent visions of universal connectedness to become possible and natural. This new sense of our own connection to others enables us to view our own needs in a new light. These new needs instill empathy for all people into our feeling of being individuals, and demonstrate to us our vulnerability and interdependence. Without society, identity, happiness (or neurosis), even the very ability or need to use our democratic rights and liberties, would cease to exist. To aid the recognition of this universal connected vulnerability, Dionysius underscored the primacy of the community, rather than the individual.

### **Defining visionary artistic experience**

There are many different ways to approach theories of subjectivity and objectivity, and their overlap, in art. It could be argued that all artistic endeavors are subjective and should not be subject to objective classifications of taste. There are many different types of art, infinite types in fact. From traditional art forms like painting, dance, and musical composition, to interactive performance, mail art, gift art, dialogical art, street and communal festivities. The more broad that our definition of art has become, the more difficult it is to argue for the value of a transferrable matrix by which to evaluate artworks against one another. Even if we decide to use a series of matrices- one for say precision (of stroke, or arrangement of notes), one for use of color, one for emotional significance- it is easy to immediately see the many difficulties such categories yield. These comparisons become near impossible when often the best artworks and artistic styles first enter society as enigmas, as less than 'correct' or appealing, as revolutionary attempts to invert or subvert the reigning approaches to art and creativity. It is still more difficult to immediately ascertain the value of an artwork when often a less than traditionally beautiful or technically magnificent artwork can illicit powerful responses in individuals and in the populace at large. Often, it is time that illustrates the most affecting artworks. Art moves with time as do other aspects of our common culture. Significant changes in art mirror major changes in society, and vice versa. No one could have predicted the force on modern art history and culture, created by say Picasso's rearrangement of body parts, or Duchamp's unaltered use of everyday objects as art in and of themselves, or Pollock's transformation of paint splatter into fine art.

While these questions are better addressed with greater nuance in a different work, it is enough to say that subjective determinations of ‘beauty’ in art are linked to our individual emotive conditions and histories, and not necessarily to the merit of the artwork itself. Therefore, to say simply that any artwork that inspires emotion or a declaration of beauty by an individual, is then a ‘great’ work of art, is entirely too loosely subjective. Still, it is clear that there are ‘better’ works of art, as compared to lesser others, and that there are artworks and artistic styles that endure over large spans of time, and many that are naturally deemed masterpieces. There are broad guidelines for a combination of forces that create a better artwork, but none of these can be absolute or definitive. Innovation in style and approach, range and variation in technique, powerful use of imagery and color (in music, dance, and art), and an evocation of relatable universal ideas and emotions within the work, are perhaps the most important variables for evaluating a work of art. Sometimes we are moved by an artwork because it captures a moment or person particularly well, and thus transports us to that place or to them through the work. Other times, an artwork may call attention to an issue or problem in a new or strikingly powerful way. Other times, we may look at, or listen to, an artwork, and perhaps not yearn to put it into our homes and our daily lives, but yet we may still value its relevance to change, progress, and justice.

What in this work I term ‘visionary’ art, also referred to alternately as transcendent or rebellious or avant-garde art, is described here in opposition to mainstream or conformist or ‘plastic’ art. There exist two primary forms of artistic creation. The first challenges the status quo and the dictates of mainstream everyday life,

by seeking alternatives and provoking deeper individual engagement with the world around us. This is the artwork I term visionary or rebellious. Art, that is, on the other hand, supportive, of both the content and form that defies the boundaries of our daily existence, and enables us, as does the power of popular opinion, to delay or even entirely avoid, a truly independent and critical examination of how and why mechanisms of our world function as they do. This sort of art has historically been employed both to uphold the materialistic drives of society, as well as to create support for unjust decisions and regimes. There have been examples, particularly in the bloody experiences of the twentieth century, of aesthetics being employed in service of totalitarian ideas and goals, such as the vast array of propaganda art that was created in both Nazi Germany and in the Stalinist Soviet Union. It is because art is always indirectly related to politics, and to issues of ethics, that it can be employed so effectively in the name of negative ideas and ideals.

The notion of creativity is linked intimately with art. The twentieth century writer Arthur Koestler, in his *Act of Creation* (1964, 1990), argues that creativity- let us define it here loosely as the creation of new ideas- can, and often is in modern society, repressed by the dominance and strength of rational thought, action, and moral codes. It is when we can release ourselves from the bonds of rationality that we can access the highest levels of creativity.

Surrealist philosophy provides an interesting corollary in discussions of the importance to society of irrational explorations within the self. Surrealism as a philosophical and artistic movement, and intellectual and emotional disposition,

developed in Europe, primarily in Paris, in the beginning of the 1920's. It was borne at least partially out of the equally anti-rationalistic, though explicitly 'anti-art', Dada movement in art and culture of the previous decade, that likewise argued that society functioned through, and relied upon, too strong a focus on rationalism, and not enough on the knowledge of irrational instincts.

Surrealist artists strove to create visual artworks that encouraged a fantastical or dreamlike irrational state within both the artist and the viewer through disorienting and unusually composed images. The Surrealists, headed intellectually by the ideas of the writer Andre Breton among others, and guided by both a Freudian and a Marxian ethos, believed that looking at art that temporarily disoriented, and aimed to reorient in a new way, the viewer with unfamiliarly juxtaposed and strung-together ideas and concepts from the everyday, could encourage a search within the unconscious, similar to the style of inner discovery developed by Freudian psychoanalysis. Besides publishing a journal on Surrealist ideas, Breton also wrote three manifestos for the Surrealist movement in 1924, 1930, and 1934, that expressed the movement's philosophical goals of creating a revolution in society through creating images that served to unleash the workings of the unconscious into everyday reality.

George Kateb's argument about the potentially malignant character of aesthetic experience (2008), through his concept of aesthetic cravings, is a seeming foil to the main idea presented here about the positive value of art for society. His belief is that it is in fact the natural human instinct for the very same order and accord, which Camus and Nietzsche too discuss, that propels us to create out of a messy world, a false and

detrimental cohesion. This false unity and logic, he argues, was a leading cause of many of the worst political experiments, especially of this last century. With this notion I agree. It seems to me that although Kateb's analysis is rich, it is simplistic to reduce aesthetics, or even 'vulgar' notions of aesthetics, to a desire for unity and homogeneity. In his theory, he equates aesthetics with the sort of beauty yielded by harmony and order. This is what in this work is referred to as conformist or status-quo-affirming art. I equate 'aesthetics' here with the 'plastic' arts, as they attempt to create order out of a hopelessly, though in my opinion pleasurable, disorderly and vastly pluralistic world. The positive value of art that is expressed here pertains not to the harmony and order of aesthetics, but rather to the self-awareness, innovation, and empowerment that exists within creativity, and within experience with visionary art. When this work asserts that notions of empathy and oneness can be found in creative visionary experience, the argument is not for a perfect or forced or homogenous oneness, but rather for a source for interconnected empathy that is the foundation for true justice.

It is also necessary to flesh out the nature of what I call here 'experience'. Experience, as it is used here, implies a ritual, or a process, captured within even just a momentary pause from our daily lives. An 'experience' with art contains more than one idea. The initial Dionysian moment begins the experience with temporary spiritual pause, and reflection creates empowerment and desire for change from it. Artistic experience includes the participating and looking, the listening, the being captivated, the being moved emotionally and spiritually; these feelings during the viewing experience mirror the experience of creating the art itself. Episodic experience, as differentiated from

habitual experience, is a relevant distinction, but only to demonstrate that episodic experience with art can become habitual once the inner awareness of our own creative individual will is confronted. This is achieved more broadly and inclusively with art that is situated in outdoor public spaces.

From Joseph Beuys to the contemporary theorists of the social and participatory art movement, their main arguments about artistic experience mirror this as they believe that art becomes art not when the initial artist produces its foundations, but rather when the viewers participate—either directly (physically) or indirectly (through feeling)- in the artwork. Those intangible moments where we feel the spirit within art is a form of artistic creation itself. The art then flows within us. This is the experience of art.

### **Marcuse's revolution through art**

Marcuse's (1969/1974) work on the political possibilities of creativity and art combined Freudian psychology with a post-Marxian critique. He believed, following Freud, that some individual repression is vital in society, but that other repressive qualities of society (not the Establishment, or the powers that determine the very desires of society) were unhealthy and hindered individual liberty.<sup>60</sup> He argued that art could

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<sup>60</sup> "Only if ... the scientific and artistic imagination direct the construction of a sensuous environment, only if the work world loses its alienating features and becomes a world of human relationships, only if productivity becomes creativity, are the roots of domination dried up in the individuals. No return to precapitalist, pre-industrial artisanship, but on the contrary, perfection of the new mutilated and distorted science and technology in the formation of the object world in accordance with 'the laws of beauty.' And 'beauty' here defines an ontological condition – not of an *oeuvre d'art* isolated from

allow for endless possibilities, and thus enable not escapism from society and politics but, rather, opportunity for individual resistance, revolt, and liberation, through creativity and imagination.<sup>61</sup> Kellner (Marcuse, 2007) quotes Marcuse as saying that art can take us back in time, as much as it can envision the future, and propel us into the still unknown: “Marcuse sees social change prefigured in artistic subcultures and in the productions of artists and intellectuals.” (p. 13). In an interview between himself and Richard Kearney, Marcuse said, “Art, therefore, does not just mirror the present, it leads beyond it. It preserves, and thus allows us to remember, values which are no longer to be found in our world; and it points to another possible society in which these values may be realized.” (p. 228). Here he distinguished between art as a positive force that conforms to the constraints of mainstream culture, and art as a protest and negation of the accepted reality.<sup>62</sup>

Marcuse, like Camus before him, struggled with the injustices and political horrors that were taking place around him and yearned to find a philosophical way to an alternative society. Marcuse (1969) believed that the unifying and healing power of Eros needed to overcome the dark force of Thanatos in society. Specifically, Marcuse argued

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real existence ... but that harmony between man and his world which would shape the form of society." (Marcuse 2001, pp. 138–139).

<sup>61</sup> In Douglas Kellner’s Introduction to *Marcuse: Art and Liberation* (2007) he elucidates the most common criticism of Marcuse’s philosophy, that it enables escape from, not interaction with, society. Referring to Timothy J. Lukes’ work, he writes: “[H]is book *The Flight into Inwardness* (1985), also affirms ‘the central role of aesthetics in Marcuse’s work,’” agreeing with Katz concerning the primacy of aesthetics in Marcuse. Lukes claims that Marcuse’s work leads into a withdrawal and escape from politics and society in aesthetic “flight into inwardness”. (Marcuse, 2007, p. 2).

<sup>62</sup> “As part of the *established* culture, Art is *affirmative*, sustaining this culture; as *alienation* from the established reality, Art is a *negative* force. The *history of Art* can be understood as the *harmonization of this antagonism*”. (p. 143).



for a “radical transvaluation of values [that] involves a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things so that the organism may become receptive to the potential forms” (p. 6) and thus the desire to participate in change. Marcuse believed that, as a system, capitalism is a self-affirming prison. He argued that capitalism yields immediate material satisfactions that serve only to create new needs and desires for more material satisfactions.<sup>63</sup> This is not unlike Tocqueville’s (1835/2002) thesis on the self-limiting nature of American democracy. Marcuse’s critique of advanced capitalism is linked to a critique of modern democracy. In a sense, Marcuse’s arguments are specific to the politically tumultuous 1960s and to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but there is both a contemporaneity, and a timelessness, to his assertion that true individual liberation, which seeks unity with all others, can be attained through interactions with, and expressions of, the aesthetic or creative realm. It is in this aesthetic realm that people can expand their imaginations. Marcuse believed that art’s realization is political struggle, or praxis. I believe this statement to be true, although the relationship is not quite so direct or simple as it may imply.

Marcuse, not unlike Camus, and in a different context Nietzsche too, believed that in order to create the foundations for true justice in society (and in this sense, re-create the social order), it was necessary to step back from, rearrange, reinvent, and revolt against established reality, and the ruling ideas of the Establishment. Once this liberation is achieved, and once a more natural understanding of justice, understood as universal

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<sup>63</sup> “Capitalist progress thus not only reduces ... the 'open space' of the human existence but also the 'longing,' the need for such an environment. [Capitalist progress] militates against qualitative changes even if the institutional barriers against radical education and action are surmounted” (Marcuse, (1969, p. 18).

empathy, has emerged within the individual, the development of the 'new society' could begin. He was insistent that this still unknown future world could not be determined, in all its details, upon the initial move toward significant change; the 'new society' would develop from the bottom-up, rather than be placed upon a people. The primary nature of this new humanist society, besides its reliance on empathy among individuals, is that it evolves through the involvement of interested and willful citizens who are guided by the teachings of artistic experience. Marcuse believed that art was a positive force in society through its very negation of the Established reality, and in this way, of the established structures of power and morality.

Marcuse's project was heavily focused on resurrecting the life-building power of Eros (in contrast to the death drive of Thanatos) in everyday life, and in the mechanisms of societal justice and governance. He believed that Eros, accessed in the creative and life-affirming abilities of art, could redefine the terms of societal relations and justice. It makes sense that in the context of the mid-Twentieth century, Marcuse believed that the forces of Thanatos had overpowered the knowledge of Eros in society, and a variety of violent horrors had ensued around the world, and now life itself had to be revived.

As Nietzsche and Camus both argued, Marcuse (1970a) believed that art and imagination are dependent on the union of the Dionysian and Apollonian drives. "In the work of art, form becomes content and vice versa (p. 40). Form captures the Dionysian moment of instinct and emotion, and content is akin to the Apollonian reflection. Their eternal dialectical dance keeps visionary art alive, as well as critical. In Marcuse's (1970a) terms, content works within the established reality, whereas form creates a new

reality, even though their perpetual interaction is inherent. In his philosophy Marcuse feared destructive and angry forces and believed that they should be replaced by the life energy of Eros. Yet we must not eradicate our natural desires for death and destruction but, rather, to encourage repressed people, “satisfied” by the desires and material goods of popular opinion to experience both the chaos and the freedom of creativity. In this way, they may temporarily disorder their reality and, with this respite, become able to imagine change and gain a genuine interest in pursuing change.

Following Camus, Marcuse (2007) believed that creative rebellion is a confrontation with, and an expression of, a unifying understanding that is revealed through the vital knowledge of human co-dependency that exists within individuals, and in the spaces between all people. Marcuse asserted, “The aesthetic is more than merely 'aesthetic'. It is the reason of sensibility,<sup>64</sup> the form of the senses as pervaded by reason and as such the possible form of human existence. Beautiful form as the form of life is possible only as the totality of a potential free society and not merely in private, in one particular part or in the museum.” (p. 129). He elaborated, “No matter how much Art may be determined, shaped, directed by prevailing values, standards of taste and behaviour, limits of experience, it is always more and other than beautification and sublimation, recreation and validation of that which is” (p. 143). Marcuse was pointing here to the distance that art naturally keeps from reality. Although art is a human creation and is thus embedded in the desires and behaviors of its time, its form is one of reflection, commentary, distortion, enhancement. Art is displayed in the particular, but it is an

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<sup>64</sup> Art and sensuality as a new form of reason.

expression of that which is universal – the Other force in life that challenges our immediate concerns with the tugs of universal and communal experience.

Marcuse wrote extensively on how one can attain liberation from the constructs of everyday reality through spiritual and sensual connections and access to the latent knowledge of universal community. A great believer in the power of Eros to awaken revolutionary spirit, Marcuse (1970a) claimed that art – the realm of the Dionysian (in opposition to the Apollonian) spirit – can be a liberator of repressed and taboo “dimensions of reality” (p. 19) because “[t]he *nomos* which art obeys is not that of the established reality principle but of its negation” (p. 73). By "established reality principle," Marcuse was referring to the prevailing societal obstacles, which visionary artists constantly seek to overcome. Visionaries create the aesthetic dimension, which “may require them to stand against the people” (p. 35) or oppose mass opinion and the status quo. Douglas Kellner writes: Although Marcuse enthusiastically projects an ideal of the merging of art and life and overcoming alienation through integration into a harmonious community, he is aware that the development of bourgeois society created new forms of alienation which were reflected in the artist novel. In his dissertation, he often discusses artistic revolts as conscious rejections of bourgeois society and capitalism that were destroying previous forms of life and were generating new obstacles to overcoming artistic alienation (Marcuse, 2007, p. 13).

Marcuse also argued (at least in his later work) that not even socialism and its institutions could ever dissolve the tension in the dialectic between the universal and the particular, or the Dionysian and Apollonian (pp. 71–72). This is the dialectic that can

never be resolved, as both of its poles are perpetually created and re-created in life's experiences and emotions. Its fluctuating tension maintains art's central role in our internal life because in art not only can the impossible be created, but our universal experiences of human existence can be explored and elucidated through powerful moments of creative expressions. Truly independently-conceived individual, and social change, could begin with the acceptance of art's role as being fundamental to progress and to ultimate societal order, as well as to the more immediate goals of increased participation and feelings of genuine interest and inclusion in both civil society, and eventually in the mechanisms of procedural democracy. This would lead to increased support of public and social artistic endeavors, so that this vital knowledge of visionary art can be tapped into more frequently and more broadly, and by more people, in the democratic forum of the streets, rather than in the often intimidating arenas of the art museum and other cultural institutions.

### **The power of public and social art to empower individuals, aid community, and transform society**

Several important recent arguments favor the value of art in society and for political life and create a foundation for all assertions of art's central role in the positive transformation of individuals and groups. Frances Borzello (1987), from a historical view on industrial Britain, says that art can create community, education, empowerment, and even refinement. For Jacques Ranciere (2009), art is political in its ability to challenge and transform everyday reality and thus can serve as a vehicle for individual revolt in society. Others like Knight (2008) and Kester (2004) have focused on the ways in which

the newest movements in contemporary art that stress interaction and communication enhance these positive effects of art. Borzello<sup>65</sup> argues that, in addition to art's obvious aesthetic value, it has also often been used to aid society and politics.<sup>66</sup> She holds that art has been used in Britain since the 1870s to educate, encourage, and refine the criminal and the neglected in society. In late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, "All shared a basic belief that bad environments led to bad people and that bad people led to bad environments. Art had the power to break this circle. Reformed by art, the people would improve their way of life, and once reformed there would be no chance of their ever again being gripped by vicious habits or dragged down by hopeless surroundings" (p. 32). Further, she points to the power of public art that is shared by a whole community. Similar to the use of public art in Ancient Rome, a celebration of creativity and a shared culture that all could take pride in, and learn from, was in Britain an important key to empower and uplift those who had been disillusioned by society's ills and to foster feelings of community by creating genuine connections among citizens across class divides: "Culture was to be the means of achieving this dream of a united society in which rich and poor stood side by side instead of eyeing each other with hostility. As Barnett said, 'There can be no real unity so long as people in different parts of a city are prevented from admiring the same things, from taking the same pride in their fathers' great deeds, and from sharing the glory of possessing the same great literature'" (p. 32).

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<sup>65</sup> British writer on art and society.

<sup>66</sup> Blake (2007) examines how historically the arts, public life, and the state have interacted in America. Gerald Raunig's (2007) text on the relationship between art, activism, and revolution examines revolution through a historical lens.

Jacques Ranciere, known for his early work on Marx as a student of Louis Althusser, has in recent years become one of the most salient and popular figures in aesthetic theory (Davis, 2006). The focus of his many studies on the politics of aesthetics is a reconsideration of the relationship between art and politics and an insistence on the importance of aesthetic experience in contemporary society (Ranciere, 2004), and on a defense of modern aesthetic theory for a new and alternative conception of politics: “Politics, indeed, is not the exercise of, or struggle for, power. It is the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and as pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them” (Ranciere, 2009, p. 24).

Ranciere’s project, in the tradition of Camus and Marcuse, seeks to revitalize and reformulate our understanding of aesthetics. He argues that aesthetics is inherently political because it is by nature in a realm separate from both politics and reality: “the politicized of art is tied to its very autonomy” (p. 26). This statement is not unlike Tocqueville’s observation that religion played such a pivotal role in American political life for the very reason that it was consciously separated from politics. Following Lyotard (1984), Ranciere (2004) believes in an aesthetics that serves the political function of creating opportunity for revolt in society. He links this modernist notion of the sublime aesthetic as a way to transcend the constraints of society with the contemporary art practice of relational aesthetics<sup>67</sup>:

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<sup>67</sup> Simply put, this is art that involves interaction between the art, the artist(s), and the audience.

Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society's structures, or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space (p. 23).

Art's situation today might actually constitute one specific form of a much more general relationship that exists between the autonomy of the spaces reserved for art and its apparent contrary: "art's involvement in constituting forms of common life." (p. 26). "[C]ritical art is a type of art that sets out to build awareness of the mechanisms of domination to turn the spectator into a conscious agent of world transformation." (p. 45).

Knight (2009) draws on the contemporary art practice of relational, and dialogical (Kester, 2004) aesthetics, to assert the necessity of participation and populism in public art. She, too, argues that the observer of an artistic act is vital to the creation of the art itself. She broadly discusses a definition of public art that focuses on its function in society, a history of public art projects in the United States, and, most interestingly, offers an analysis into the current populism<sup>68</sup>, or lack thereof, of our cultural institutions, from

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<sup>68</sup> "Populism is not communal, although it calls for deeper awareness of our social relations. It is also not anti-individualist; in fact at its fullest, populism encourages independent exploration, development of personal viewpoints, and critical interrogations of our public and private selves. Ultimately, populism advocates for the free will and informed decision-making of individuals" (Knight, (2008), p. 110).



the traditional museums to commercial public spaces like Disney World. She is less concerned in this book with evaluating and comparing the artistic value of different public art projects, and rather focuses on the depth of public involvement in the artworks. “A museum becomes most fully public when it prompts us to examine our aesthetic tastes, cultural beliefs, and social practices, and when a variety of visitors feel comfortable and properly equipped to actively partake in such investigations.” (Knight, 2008, p. 62). As Kester (2004) similarly argues, “Conceiving 'art as communication,' new genre public art seeks to move beyond metaphorical investigations of social issues with the hopes of empowering often marginalized peoples.”

Kester's (2004) text on the value of dialogical art aims equally to defend dialogical art as a distinct form of art practice, and attempts to develop a theory in support of his own idea of a dialogical aesthetic.<sup>69</sup> He identifies the “new” genre of the public art of the 1990s, which had its basis in community life, and aimed to connect people across various social divides. He locates that movement in art in the social, conceptual, performance-based, and feminist avant-garde artworks and happenings of the 1960s and 1970s, which widely expanded definitions of art. He argues that this dialogical art practice uses the “interactions with collaborators and audience members” as the medium of the artwork. This means that the communicative interactions involved in this

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<sup>69</sup> There has been an ongoing dialogue between Kester and art theorist Claire Bishop. They disagree about the value of collaborative art. The crux of their disagreement lies in Kester's belief Bishop is too exclusionary about constitutes art, and Bishop is critical of Kester's seeming refusal to appreciate “shocking” art and stepping back from comparing the value of various artworks. Kester believes there is great social value to interactive art projects, which can connect people and engender participation in social and political life through art.

type of artwork are both the tool by which to create the art and actual holders of the artwork.

Kester (2004) begins his argument by explaining why it is necessary to defend such communication and interaction-based art practice. He argues that it is a mistake to cast aside artwork that is not shocking or opaque, as is the tendency with modernist notions of the artistic avant-garde (Lyotard's, 1994, notion of the sublime).<sup>70</sup> He says that there has been a, "gradual consolidation in modern and postmodern art theory of a general consensus that the work of art must question and undermine shared discursive conventions" (p. 88). He explains how avant-garde art developed as a challenge to and a relief from industry, science, and the market, and that it was intended to shock the audience out of their everyday urban lives. Challenging Lyotard's basic premise regarding the creation and experience of art,<sup>71</sup> Kester argues that, whereas Lyotard differentiates between shocking and easy art, he does not question the definition of art as something which is created by the artist, and fails to see that the interaction between artist and viewer could be the art itself (Kester, 2004, p. 87).

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<sup>70</sup> "In short, there is the idea that links political subjectivity to a certain form: the party, an advanced detachment that derives its ability to lead from its ability to read and interpret the signs of history. On the other hand, there is another idea of the avant-garde that, in accordance with Schiller's model, is rooted in the aesthetic anticipation of the future. If the concept of the avant-garde has any meaning in the aesthetic regime of the arts, it is on this side of things, not on the side of the [45] advanced detachments of artistic innovation but on the side of the invention of sensible forms and material structures for a life to come. This is what the 'aesthetic' avant-garde brought to the 'political' avant-garde, or what it wanted to bring to it – and what it believed to have brought to it – by transforming politics into a total life programme" (Ranciere, (2004), pp. 29–0.

<sup>71</sup> "Modernist faith had latched on to the idea of the 'aesthetic education of man' that Schiller had extracted from the Kantian analytic of the beautiful. The postmodern reversal had as its theoretical foundation Lyotard's (1994) analysis of the Kantian sublime, which was reinterpreted as the scene of founding distance separating the idea from any sensible presentation"(Ranciere, 2004, p. 29.).

Along similar lines, art critic Ted Purves (2005) has studied contemporary artists' creations of "gift-based" projects, such as the creation of free commuter bus lines, medicinal plant gardens, commuter newspapers, democratic low-wattage radio stations, and various other free services as creative offerings. He cites, for example, Ben Kinmont's self-defined "street actions," which offered strangers free housework. This creation of a generous relationship, particularly among strangers, is the aesthetic as well as the social value of the artwork, inasmuch as these realms have merged within the concept of "new genre" art. The relationship formed in the interactive artistic act or process, he argues, compels a change within the audience from passive viewer to dynamic participant.

### **The relationship between public art and feelings of community in our social and political lives**

Let us consider two of the most famous, or perhaps infamous, visionary public art installations of the last several decades. Isamu Noguchi's "Shinto" (installed, 1975-1980) was created for a bank building in Tokyo and reminded the Japanese public of an enormous guillotine. Similarly, the New York City public claimed that Richard Serra's "Tilted Arc" (installed, 1981-1989), created to block the entrance of an office building on Wall Street, made people feel alienated, and inconvenienced by the obstruction. In response to a dissatisfied public, both works were eventually taken down.

Some propose that public artworks and projects should be approved, maybe even chosen, by the public. Should there be such democratic consensus on art in the public

realm, simply because it is in the public realm? The general public would most likely never choose any work that would impede, shock, distress, or otherwise challenge them. Aesthetic "lightness" and appropriateness would determine the choice, and although beautiful sculpture might still be valuable and might renew a public space, that the public is given a choice precludes the possibility that the art will challenge, and ultimately lead people to *question*, to *rebel* against established reality.

The purely aesthetic experience of art is valuable because it aids the reinvention of our public and private environments. Through its ability to make beautiful, even mainstream or "plastic" art can transform and humanize public spaces without character or atmosphere, which creates stronger feelings of community and a higher respect for public life. This connection between art and community life, is not entirely unlike the ideas behind the creation of religious art in places of worship -- to create a beautiful and inviting space so that there is more of a desire to believe and to spend time in these spiritual homes.

Beyond the basic relationship between the beautification of public space and a heightened willingness by the public to respect, experience, and participate more in that public space, the *visionary* art experience propels the creator, and likewise the viewer, out of complacency and comfort and into rebellious thought and action. My goals here have been to examine the process of art-making and art-viewing through a philosophical lens, to study the political role of the artistic process, and to establish the importance of this political role in an invigorated democracy here in America – all with the aim of demonstrating public street art is the best vehicle through which to reach the most people

in the most meaningful way. The current movement in art is ever-more oriented toward public artworks and socially interactive performance created and produced on and for the street, not the traditional institution-based style of art exhibition.

To provide new and challenging examples of social and public art projects to support the arguments made here, my focus has been on art in New York City, primarily because it is a major cultural center in the United States. Pick up any cultural publication and evidence of the expanding horizon of art can be immediately seen. Within just the past two years, as can be seen through regular searches in the cultural media for a social and political turn in artistic creation, there has been an increase in the amount of art produced that is either directly or indirectly political in nature, and this is only what is covered by the media. Whether this collaborative turn in art (Bishop, 2006) is a result of the political participation that developed in reaction to the landmark election of 2008, or a sign of a deeper resistance to the ever-individualizing and ever-commodifying political undercurrent in contemporary America, the civic desires and behaviors that bloomed during the 2008 campaign, while still commendable and exciting, were not sustainable indicators of American civic health.

Rather, the increase in participation was centered on a refreshing and charming newcomer candidate who effectively used the social media networks now prevalent in American society, particularly among the younger set, to engage a largely disengaged, comfortable, complacent citizenry. This seeming steep increase in citizen participation in political life could not be sustained after the conclusion of the campaign race because it hid the deeper problems of free-ridership and its friend, a far-reaching focus on individual

material desire. It was an important, but ultimately hollow, demonstration of citizenship in a country where often even the most capable simply choose not to get involved. Not since the politically turbulent 1960s have large numbers of Americans left the ease and comfort of their individual experiences to work towards change on a larger scale. It is clearly time for a resurgence of participation on all levels and in all aspects of our social and political lives.

Art that engages us in the public sphere puts us into spaces, emotions, and ideas outside our accepted beliefs and beyond the immediate concerns of pragmatism. A potent experience with art is akin to the change that occurs inside us when we leave our daily existence and travel to an unknown land, where our most basic expectations are ignored and our concerns transformed. It is disconcerting and powerfully rejuvenating when this type of self-critique is enabled. Similarly, visionary artistic experience disorders, and this chaos produces a metaphorical clean slate within our inner selves that enables an expansion of the imagination and a space for new possibilities. Many art forms – both mainstream and transcendent – can infuse the prosaic with beauty or entertainment value or at least the novelty of experimentation. But only truly transcendent visionary art opens the way to freedom of thought, real conceptual change, and an expanded worldview that extends and transfigures individual concerns into concern for the greater human community.

### **Public and social art projects in New York: 2007-2009**

In late September 2008, *Creative Time*, which, along with the *Public Art Fund*, are the two largest New York City arts organizations devoted entirely to promoting and

funding public artworks, unveiled its timely, city-wide exhibition, titled, “Democracy Now! Democracy in America: The National Campaign.” Its aim was both a conscious examination of the intersection between art and politics, and a way to educate the public about history and democracy through art. The project included a several-movement performance art work by Mark Tribe, the *Port Huron Project*. The historical public lectures are Tribe’s response to the current political climate through a resurrection of the radical past through reenactments. Tribe has staged the performances of six historical speeches by Stokely Carmichael, César Chávez, and Angela Davis, among others. He is attempting to make connections between the past and the present through echoing the revolutionary words of his parents’ generation and tying them to today’s less politically outspoken generation. Recycling features of the radicalism of the past, Tribe says, “Access to our shared history is crucial for the functioning of democracy.” . He advocates that the speeches of the past be made available to anyone to appropriate, to present, or even to reconfigure. He believes “in politics that question not only the means but the very assumptions upon which our society governs” (cited in Orden, 2009, p. 70). Various other contemporary artists – including Jeremy Deller, Omar Fast, and Allison Smith – are currently producing art that involves this idea of reenactment (Blumenkranz, 2008).

The *Post Huron Project* was part of one of the largest undertakings in *Creative Time*’s 34-year history, and was, in its emphasis on a directly critical politics, reflective of both the 2008 presidential campaign and the legendary 40 years-past demonstrations against the Democratic National Committee in Chicago. The project is an enormous

endeavor by artists to simulate a grassroots political movement by recycling features of the radicalism of the past. "Democracy in America" has sponsored five "town-hall meetings" and protest-performance art pieces across the country. The project culminated at the end of September 2008 with a seven-day exhibition at the Park Avenue Armory, including work by more than 40 artists, and an ongoing lecture series. With similar attention to social concerns, but on a smaller scale, a 2009 blurb from *New York Magazine* described a street-art project that created a portable living space resembling a small tin garage. The work was originally part of the "House of Cards" show at the Invisible-Exports gallery, and the makeshift home will now remain in the Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York City for a year. Made from scraps of garbage and placed on the street for public consumption, it highlighted the enduring problems of homelessness and the societal and governmental efforts, or lack thereof, to provide enough shelter for the homeless.

The American public has long embraced the idea that a creative spin and glossy packaging can elevate even decidedly unappealing products and ideas, as the rise of the advertising industry in the 1950s and 60s attests. Since those early years, the glossy packaging has become elusively ubiquitous in all areas of life, and disseminated across the board of daily experience. As a recent example of this phenomenon, in the spring of 2009, the New York State Senate hired Christopher Sealey, the celebrity disk jockey and marketing impresario, as their first creative director. His job is to consult with the politicians in Albany on the design of multimedia created in the Senate. One of his first initiatives was to work with the Senate on a new website that includes links constituents



to Facebook and Twitter. Another effort is the launch of his new campaign, “Your New York Senate,” which aims to make the role of the New York Senate more relatable and thus more efficient for the citizenry. “Art” is often used in this way to make ideas and processes that are initially boring or intimidating or controversial more palatable or enticing.

While those are excellent examples of how art can be used directly to educate and to politicize, there are countless, equally important examples of street and public art projects that achieve their political ends by virtue of their very existence. These are projects that aim to heighten emotional and bodily awareness, not necessarily of any particular political issue but, rather, awareness of people's accepted beliefs and even their sense of what is a public space, and how they relate to that space. For example, since January 2008, the 25-year-old known as Poster Boy, has creatively manipulated more than two hundred underground subway posters in New York City, and has likewise turned MTA stations into his own public galleries. His pieces are conceived on the spot, his “improvised mash-ups recall ... the cut-and-paste aesthetic.” Although many of his changes to the posters are subversively political, his true art is in the process of speedy and public creation. He makes his spontaneous pieces while people are waiting for their trains, and his work is often ripped down by authorities, sometimes before he has even completed it. His mission is the formulation and encouragement of a decentralized art movement, with no copyright or authorship attached to works, thereby giving the artworks entirely over to public and social life (Raftery, 2008).

Street art takes many different forms. On the Lower East Side of Manhattan, situated between the Bowery Mission homeless shelter and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, was for a short time in November 2008, an exhibit by Filip Noterdaeme (Koppel, 2008). Consisting of a small wooden stand (like a puppet theater) adorned with a sign that read, “Homeless Museum of Art (HOMU),” underneath which was the phrase, “The Director is IN.” He placed a small chair adjacent to the structure. The artist, costumed as the “Director,” spoke to passers-by in one-on-one “encounters”, in which the performance, in Noterdaeme’s words, “open(s) up minds and eyes to these complete separate realities.” Many persons spoke to the artist, most often of their experiences inside the nearby museum as well as about its proximity to the Bowery Mission, which has been providing shelter to the city’s homeless population since 1879. The artist successfully explored the controversial issues behind a rapidly changing urban landscape by showing how the Bowery, a traditionally destitute area that had recently been heavily gentrified as a result of the installation of the New Museum, maintains a symbolic juxtaposition as the homeless shelter’s presence against almost unnerving backdrop of the shiny new looming building.

Beyond awareness of our physical environments, among the density and diversity that is New York City, there are constantly evolving experiments with the social and performative aspects of our daily routines. In the summer of 2009 alone, countless smaller projects that focused on bringing the emotions and concerns of the private sphere into the public realm, as well as several key city-funded public art initiatives, significantly changed the visual and experiential landscape of the city in mere weeks.

Among these was the “High Line,” built as a public promenade on top of a long-abandoned railroad track above the Chelsea neighborhood in the city. Since the train stopped running in the 1980s, the space had gone unused but the city’s transformation of this public space immediately created an instant community of those eager to fill the new public playground with activity as well as one public art project inspired by the renovation of the space itself. One woman who lives in an apartment that now overlooks the new High Line has created a fire escape cabaret of sorts, where she regularly invites her friends to perform opera alongside her artistically displayed “laundry installations,” for the benefit of passerby. The other major public space to receive a much-needed makeover in New York City in the summer of 2009 was the long-neglected Governors Island. The small island in the East River began as a military base but has recently been transformed into an oversized and constantly-in-action experiment in social art. The public art organization *Creative Time* organized a variety of outdoor artworks and experiences, indoor installations, and film works. The experience of being among the high density of public artworks on the small island is further enhanced by the picturesque beaches, and the miniature golf course that is itself an artwork as each hole was designed by a different artist.

In the spring of 2009, the artist Roxy Paine transformed the naturally performative space that is the magnificently open rooftop of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art into a dense, movement-filled steel forest. His installation, titled *Maelstorm*, opened in April 2009 at the Cantor Roof Garden. It appropriated the heavy materials that hold up the city and literally twisted them into the organic tangles of a

natural landscape that echoes some wild vegetation-filled place far beyond Manhattan. The effect is both transformative and mystical, like being in an urban secret garden.

Marilyn Minter's 5-minute video called *Green Pink Caviar* was shown during the week of April 24, 2009, as part of *Creative Time's* video screenings (Siegel, 2009, p. 65) in Times Square – the center of New York City tourism and a major midtown meeting point. Her video was shown alongside other short films by artists Patty Chang and Kate Gilmore.<sup>72</sup> An enormous HD screen, borrowed from MTV, lit up the bustling intersection with these artists' striking images yet seemed to fade in contrast to the massive installations of flashing lights with brand names and streaming advertising videos that fill what seems like every inch of possible air space in Times Square. *Creative Time's* project is not only a display of new otherwise gallery-bound artworks in a very public space, but also a protest against the display of these pieces in a particularly throbbing center of commerce. The art here is sensually captivating – it instantly distracts the mind from the desire to acquire material things and pulls the spectator into a realm of momentary disorder and emotion. Perhaps after the experience has passed and daily work has again begun, it also provokes thoughtful critique that may begin with the very contrast between the everyday and the creative.

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<sup>72</sup> In her striking and chaotic works, the feminist (as she is sometimes labeled) video performance artist Kate Gilmore aims to highlight both human existential struggles and the distinctly feminine struggles of our time. In her most recent work, part of a group video project in Times Square sponsored by *Creative Time* this past spring, she fights to break her head through a too-small hole in a sheet of plywood. In other works, she struggles to place heavy objects onto shelves dripping with paint, and in another drops herself to the bottom of a deep ditch and attempts to crawl out. She regards her work as a protest to some of the unfair struggles of women in society, but also as an homage to determination (LaRocca, 2009).

The artist Patty Chang similarly creates, and stars in, films and performance works that explore feminine roles and their particular challenges, as well as the cultural differences within this, in provocative, and sometimes controversial ways.

Jenny Holzer has been making public and socially based artworks for decades. She tends to highlight words and phrases, often filled with existential warning or political or social commentary or controversial and thought-provoking ideas. In 2009, the Whitney Museum of American Art ran a major exhibit of her work dating from the thirty years previous (Purvis, 2009, p. 234). Her artistic philosophy centers on confronting people with a vision of penetrating words and phrases in their daily lives. In 2007 in Rome, she used light to project the words: “I want peace right now. While I’m still alive. I don’t want to wait. Like that pious man.” To protest and bring awareness to the wartime atrocities against women during the genocide in the former Yugoslavia in 1993 and 1994, as part of her project *Lustmord*, she wrote on human skin phrases like, “I am awake in the place where women die” and “My nose broke in the grass my eyes are sore from moving against your palm.” She calls all these phrases her “truisms” (p. 234), such as the more general, “You can’t get away from yourself” and “Abuse of power comes as no surprise.” Many critics believe that, beginning with her work in the 1980s, which ran her “truisms” on ticker tape billboards, she has created her own genre of public art – that of direct public communication with the intent to inspire awareness and critique. She is said to have “invent[ed] a new form of public address that advertised the necessity for thought itself” (p. 234).

Despite the creation of avant-garde work, the tentacles of society are always grasping for more material to twist into its likeness. Even about the challenging and controversial Holzer, it has been said that, although she began her career by co-opting society’s arenas for communication with her “truisms,” she and her techniques have now

been co-opted, as the general public has democratized and made public their own truisms by way of Twitter and other online forums (p. 234). Her most recent work, which was shown at the Whitney Museum in 2009, continued her desire to communicate and raise awareness through the dissemination of penetrating phrases, but without the aid of technology. In these new pieces, inspired by the secrecy surrounding America's involvement in the war in Iraq, she relied instead on a more traditional art form to create pristine oil paintings of declassified government documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. Holzer reflected on these works in a 2009 interview, "I thought paintings, which tend to be studied and conserved, could keep information before people. And when I had it right, the hand-rendered oil backgrounds were appropriately grave and emotional" (p. 234).

Some works, usually noncommissioned ones, take on a more spontaneous form. In 2009, at the New Museum downtown and at the MOMA, there were several experiments with performance art that involved artists laying down and sleeping in the middle of the gallery space. Museum-goers ended up experiencing both the art they paid to see when entering the institution and the guerilla confrontation of the obstructive public art performance. The same performance – to configure the human body as a physical obstacle with mysterious intent – has played out in several public venues and streets by a few anonymous social art experimenters. Despite where it was performed, the seemingly passive performance resulted in inspiring new communication and community among those watching (and stepping over the artists).

### **Uncommissioned and sometimes unwanted: Graffiti work**

Since its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, graffiti and street art has inspired lovers and detractors. The debate usually involves choosing between the “defacement” of public spaces and property and the beauty and awareness that is created from street art. Graffiti has a long history, particularly in New York City, and has become more accepted by the mainstream establishment in recent years, as many street artists gained international acclaim. NYC artist (he rather calls himself a curator) Michael Anderson has for decades collected graffiti stickers – the small stickers, stuck on walls and other surfaces, bearing tags and phrases that are ubiquitous around downtown New York. His collection numbers around 40,000 stickers. In a recent testament to the submission of even graffiti – a self-declared guerilla art form – to the tentacles of mainstream society and commerce, the new Ace Hotel in Manhattan has commissioned 4,000 stickers from his collection to be installed in their lobby (Kurutz, 2009). Although Anderson claims to be preserving art that would wither away left on the street, some of the artists disagree. One, Steve Powers, says that, “stickers are meant to be ephemeral, not to be poached and hoarded” (Kurutz, 2009). It is interesting that once street art reached the point where it became more often praised than criticized, it was literally lifted from the street and placed either into institutions of art or, perhaps even more dauntingly, into places of business.

### **Performative and conceptual ideas in action**

Through its freedom to enrich everyday life and break down the boundaries of reality, art invokes fantasies, possibilities, and alternatives. But some artworks attempt to reawaken and reconfigure people's minds in a more self-conscious way. Big Art Group, created by Caden Manson and Jemma Nelson, based in New York and appearing off-off-Broadway, is a live-art ensemble that combines performance with video projections to create an experience where viewers simultaneously watch a live show and a movie of the same show as it is happening. The group often performs loud, tangled, chaotic works that engage the audience (such as *SOS*, in March of 2009) to put spectators under a “spell” during which they hope viewers will re-imagine and re-vitalize their thoughts and their lives. “Big Art aims for something more alchemical than mere entertainment.” Manson spoke of ways to make “a combination of actions that literally changes the future... like infecting the audience with a certain set of contexts for their conversations.” (Shaw, 2009). He [Manson] explained that he wanted the performers and the audience “to think about celebration, specifically the kind of pagan ritual that creates the ‘new’ through sacrifice.”

In another example of a recent conceptual work that uses spectator involvement and atmospheric immersion to encourage contemplation of universal human questions Japanese artist On Kawara displayed his own inner reflections in an interactive gallery show in New York. Kawara has had a self-professed obsession with time since his earliest works from the 1960s. It was then that he began his ongoing series, “The Today Paintings,” where he paints only the date on which that painting was made. If he is not able to finish one of these paintings on the day it was begun, he destroys it and begins



anew the next day. *One Million Years*, his most recent work, from February 2009, employs two volunteers per hour (one man and one woman) to sit in an enclosed glass and plaster box inside the David Zwirner gallery and recite a progression of years, running either a million years forward or backward in time (Saltz, 2009a). This exercise, both listening and actually reciting, forces even inactive participants to consider and reconsider time and their relationship to the passage of time. The performance of reading the dates pushes the volunteers to form the years from their own voices, using physicality to heighten the experience.<sup>73</sup>

### **Interaction in art**

Observing the newest trends in contemporary art, critic Jerry Saltz has explored the fruitful relationship between art and the environment in which it is presented. He would likely agree with the contention that galleries and museums are places of ritual and reawakening. From the creators of the Big Art fringe performance group to academic voices like that of Carole Duncan, many have attempted to show that viewing art is a creative process in and of itself, and to elevate the experience of viewing art to that of a spectacle, a transformation of mental space. Saltz (2009b) describes a newly established gallery space inside a former boiler factory in Brooklyn as “using the extraordinary human and architectural infrastructure already here” to give the art extra life. He explains that “too much purity, architectural or aesthetic, is bad for art right now ... art needs to

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<sup>73</sup> Jerry Saltz (2009a) wrote about his experience as a volunteer for this on-going performance work, and kept a running diary of how he felt and thought during the exercise. It is clear from these notes that he was very invigorated by the performance, engaged with the reading, and consumed with thought about time and how the performance presented time.

feel more connected to the world.” Presenting artworks in re-conceptualized spaces rather than in bare, white-walled, cube-shaped rooms provides a personal or historical or societal context for the works. The Tenement Museum on the Lower East Side of Manhattan is one of the larger institutions to experiment successfully with this added element. Its small, cramped exhibition spaces emulate the conditions of life that the museum attempts to re-create. The Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC also tries to draw visitors into the horrific suffering and unspeakable sadness of the historical era that it brings to life.

Of interest, too, are the exhibition spaces that do not so readily and directly correlate to the objects on display but rather serve as a contrast to the art on display or complement it with an unexpected connection. In this sense, when the space creates a feeling or draws on a realm that is distinct from the primary focus of the exhibit, then the final presentation of the art becomes cross-disciplinary and more stimulating for viewers. In a social and economic environment that desperately needs to protect and invigorate ties of community, it is ever-more vital to create an experience with art that reminds viewers of the life around them. Either the room displaying the art should disappear as one is left alone to experience the art, or the space should enliven the works with added dimension, so that one's inner gaze into the self and into one's needs and vulnerabilities that reflect, and connect, us to all others.

Beginning with the “happenings” of the 60s and the conceptual turn of the 70s, through to the theoretically based “relational aesthetics” and community revitalization projects of the late-90s, and to today’s mix of directly political and conceptually

interactive works, the concepts of community, communication, and interaction have been employed as the art itself. The interactive performance art movement that began with artists such as Yoko Ono, who once wore an enormous tangle of cloth layers and invited the audience to cut everything off her in a slow ritual until she was nude, continued with Gordon Matta-Clark creating his Food restaurant inside a SoHo gallery and Rirkrit Tiravanija, who prepared Thai curry for gallery goers. The movement has evolved into the most recent projects in this realm, which include Kate Levant, a Yale student artist who created a running blood drive inside a gallery, Eduardo Sarabia, an L.A. artist who set up a working tequila bar, and Bert Rodriguez, an artist who offered free therapy and poured its murmured sounds throughout the gallery space.

Another example of an artist employing the audience as a key element of the artwork is the work of experimental British artist and filmmaker Mike Figgis. In his mid-2009 gallery show he created a direct reflection of the audience, adding an element of immediacy in the reflection. He picked a high-traffic, designer store in the SoHo neighborhood of New York City and took photographs of both famous and no-so-famous locals shopping over the course of two weeks. He printed all the photos in the store right after they were shot. At the end of the two weeks, he installed the resulting collection of candid portraits in the Milk Gallery exhibit space. Figgis wanted to show that most galleries and museums frame and display works that are “a little dead” as they capture moments long gone. While there is much to learn and feel from historical and universal moments exemplified in an artwork, and life can be found even in that which is “dead,” Figgis works are fresh and immediate, like just-past reflections in a mirror or the memory

of a celebration while still in revelry – an embrace of instant nostalgia (Nelson, 2009). This perspective enables visitors to the gallery to see themselves from the outside, to look with distance at the party they are experiencing, all in the context of an institutional display of art. It encourages viewers to remember that all is art, that they themselves are art in action – in other words, that they have a creative will to become acquainted with, and to nurture. This realization leads to the type of questioning and self-assessment that results in deeper self-awareness, which is essential to one's own creativity. A creative will is also a political will, for creativity displays the power of the individual to create change, and thus inspires interest in public life and its reform.

### **Institutional examples of the social turn in art: experiments with interaction and inclusivity**

Several major examples around the world of art institutions take interactive and performative, if not exactly public, directions with their collections and exhibitions. This social focus in the creation and exhibition of art acknowledges art's ability to express universal concerns, and encourages an experience with art where the artwork is actively in dialogue with its surroundings, its time, and its audience. Many of the newest curators in the upper echelons of the art world have embraced the idea that where and how you experience art is transformative in itself. This idea can be seen in the increasing numbers of smaller and alternative spaces showing interactive pieces and in the acceptance of performance and interaction-based artworks in traditional art institutions. These trends are striving to improve the problems of access and elitism that traditional museums face, as well as to draw attention to the power of truly public, as well as clearly social and

interactive, artworks. Francois Pinault's new contemporary art museum located in Venice's historic former customs house Dogana da Mar, the new Russian center of contemporary art in Moscow, located in a monolith of an abandoned Communist-era warehouse, are museums that are showing contemporary art, in keeping with social and interactive tendencies in the newest art ideas. These institutions are using smaller and more atmosphere-creating spaces that, rather than displaying the art, give the artwork a place to live and continue to create.

This new trend away from the conventional museum style of presenting art and reconceptualizing previously used, often historical spaces, into homes for the newest ideas in art, is well exemplified by Lismore Castle Arts, the project of William Cavendish, Earl of Burlington. He and his wife, Laura, dedicated a long-unkempt section of their family castle, located in remote corner of Southern Ireland, as a summer exhibition space for performative, conceptual, and interactive projects. "I wanted to do something that was a bit more ephemeral, not so acquisitive," William explained. An interesting example of work like this is that of Brooklyn artist Corey McCorkle, whose project involved his all-day brewing of wild dandelion wine made from the plants on the castle grounds, in order to perform the transformation of an undesired plant into "something ceremonial" – a reconfiguration of an ordinarily unnoticed object into a useful and beautiful one, and a focus on interaction among the individual spectators. Touching on the issue of supporting and displaying spontaneous and interactive works of art, London gallerist Iwan Wirth has said of Lismore Castle Arts, "It displays a deep, intimate commitment to art that museums no longer are able to have" (Reginato, 2009, p.

98). William agrees: “We are not bound in the way that institutions and commercial galleries are ... we can offer the artists a chance to do something out of their normal cycle” (p. 98).

In November 2008, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art hosted an event titled, “A Machine Project’s Field Guide to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art,” which, as its name implies, encouraged its audience to explore freely the “natural habitat” of the museum (Finkel, 2009). In the words of its creator, Mark Allen, “Los Angeles has so few public spaces where people can gather, we wanted to treat the museum as a sort of park, creating these pockets of social activity. ... Visiting a museum can be like visiting a very rich person’s house, where you feel pressure to admire the furniture. We wanted this to feel more like hanging out with friends” (Finkel, 2009) As Margaret Wettheim, co-founder of the *Institute for Figuring*, observed, “It’s also about breaking down the wall between artist and audience. We don’t want to pontificate from on high.” (Finkel, 2009). Machine Project shares this democratic ideal, “which in programming corners would be called open-source, and in art circles sounds a lot like Dada.” (Finkel, 2009). Also in Los Angeles, Jeffrey Deitch’s appointment to head the Museum of Contemporary Art there, sets a precedent in the institutional art world that links the academic or educational art world of the museum with both the commercial side of art exhibition (Mr. Deitch has famously run a pair of cutting-edge galleries in downtown Manhattan for years) and the social and public turn in art (he has heavily supported social and public projects, even to the detriment of sales, as many of these types of work are not easily sold).

In recognition of the need for greater creative inclusion and institutional representation, and the quandary of exhibiting ephemeral works of art, in 2009 New York City's Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) began its commitment to more actively support and exhibit both performance art and female art and artists (Orden, 2009). In late January 2009 MoMA launched a two-year long series of live performance pieces that will conclude in 2010 with a retrospective devoted to Marina Abramovic, the self-described "grandmother of performance art." Pipilotti Rist's multimedia installation show, which opened in January 2009, exemplifies both important realms of art-making (Saltz, 2009c, p. 69)). Jerry Saltz commented that, "MoMA is – even with this [the Pipilotti Rist show] and the current Marlene Dumas survey – a place where very little work by women is on view. Rist's installation comments on and reacts to this misogyny. ... MoMA seems to swell and stir to new life" (p. 69). The environment that Rist create for MoMA in her work combines raw, feminine video images of red and pink, with an open, inviting visual and tactile womb (in the form of an oversized circular couch that dominates from the center of the room and is accompanied by dramatic, blood-colored walls and draperies) in which to experience the bleeding world on the screens. Given the societal restraints placed upon institutionalized artworks, Saltz reported, "A widely circulated rumor has it that MoMa asked Rist to edit out the red between the legs. ... In classical terms, the Dionysian is still more fraught than the Apollonian. Thinking about this installation without the blood is like thinking about life without blood" (p. 69). This would-be censorship is an indication both of the regulation that institutions commonly place on artworks in their possession and the still-existing, but slowly changing, differences

between showing art in a museum and creating art in the streets. There have been signs that institutions are attempting to bridge this gap by increasing the diversity of artwork they display and to take part creatively (and carve a place for themselves) in the greater movement in social, interactive, and publicly based art.

In June 2008 the MOMA bought its first piece of pure performance art, European artist Tino Sehgal's *Kiss*<sup>74</sup> and thus heralded in a new age in the art world that signals an acceptance of a wider definition of art by the art establishment (Orden, 2009, p. 70). Sehgal believes that we need to leave behind unsustainable and overused object-based art and rather focus on the living art of human relations (Lubow, 2010). The museum is tasked with preserving ephemeral art, which in the case of the *Kiss* is undocumented (in the piece, couples dance, touch, and make-out for two hours, moving freely through the large space), and proceeds without a script or manual. Instead, the guidelines are passed on orally. Accordingly, MoMA obtained the piece through an oral contract. "The artist will explain its workings to a curator; he or she will pass it on, down the road; and MoMA will have the rights to reproduce the performance forever. (Sehgal's *Kiss* is an edition of four; two other museums have bought it so far. And it can be lent, like a painting)." (Orden, 2009, p. 70).

The MoMA wants to ensure the preservation of the revolutionary work of the first generation of performance artists, now 40 years in the past. The heart of their debates has focused on the question, framed by the curator of the Rist show, Klaus Biensenbach:

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<sup>74</sup> Sehgal's *Kiss*, along with other works, constitutes the entirety of the unique architectural structure of the Guggenheim Museum January 29– March 10, 2010. It is Sehgal's first work in an American museum.



How do you create, conserve, preserve a moment?" In some cases there is nothing material to purchase, only the idea of a particular experience. The Tate Modern in London and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, are also facing this same daunting task in 2009 and 2010<sup>75</sup>.

### **Invigorating effects of the recession of 2008-2009 on public and social art**

In still another indication that the creation of art, particularly self-consciously social and public art, is intimately linked with its environment and thus political life, the deprivations of the recent recession have encouraged both our public culture and the art world to give primary attention to public spaces, and to community. Following Hobbesian theory (1651/2009), the materially acquisitive desires in life should be kept private, while political concerns are to shape the public realm. Because Americans tend to favor individual acquisition of material goods, it took the power of this recession to dig even a small hole in Americans' tightly knit relationship with money. Their disillusionment made for greater consideration of both spiritual and sensuous needs. During the March 2009 record stock market lows, "A Day Trading" installation popped up at the Museum 52 gallery and, for its four-day run, encouraged visitors to barter and swap personal goods, services, and talents. Peter Simensky, the artist who created the interactive and communication-based installation, also made his own "neutral" currency bills with which he "bought" the artworks and objects he most liked and at the end of

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<sup>75</sup> In March 2008, the MoMA started scheduling private workshops to establish some guidelines for preserving and displaying temporary art. These meetings addressed everything from "the discrepancies between a performance and its remnants to legal quirks to the appropriateness of an institution's owning work created to subvert institutions."

each day at “A Day Trading” displayed them in the gallery space downstairs. (Artbeat.com, 2010). The living, dialogical sculpture of sorts worked both as satirical commentary on the financial crisis, and as an opportunity to experience first-hand an alternative, social and need-based, version of market interactions.

Similarly, the difficult economic realities that the recession created, and the cultural turn it spurred towards a life less geared to private possession (the collective reminder that money can be here one day, gone the next, drew public attention to the enduring value of community and the satisfactions found in that which cannot be possessed or assessed monetarily. In line with this revitalized cultural appreciation for all that is traded and shared according to use value rather than market value, as well as for pointed experimentations with ideas of currency, the “Free Store” was installed on a nondescript corner of downtown New York City near the financial hub of Wall Street. From February 19 to March 22,<sup>d</sup> 2009, artists Athena Robles and Anna Stein pursued a socially cooperative economy where goods were traded for goods and others “bought” with the global currency termed “World Bills,” which was both offered and accepted by the project. The stated goal of the project was that the “Free Store aims to reinforce and build connections based on trust and mutual exchange among the people of and visitors to Lower Manhattan. The project is designed to be a model of community and financial support that could also be used in other cities around the world” (Artlog.com, 2009).

Along the same lines, the artists behind “freepublicrentals.com”, a website that arranges the trade of community and personal services among people, created their site to be an expression of the interaction and sharing in art itself. The project designers also

believed in the need to foster public exchange and communication, and they recognized that much of our social lives revolve around the purchase of goods and the daily grind of our lives. They also produced a project based on the social aspect of the free barter of experiential goods and services, but by way of the Internet. These services for barter range from a walking partner, to “plant petting”, to the reading of bedtime stories.

In these humbling times, there has been ample discussion of how the high-priced, insular art world fares during a recession. Besides the guerilla and grassroots art projects and performances that have tended more and more to appear as social, interactive and otherwise public art, the lack of cash flow in the economy has forced some adjustments among those who hawk art. Some critics have said that the art boom was a great loss to the quality of art being produced and appreciated. They argue that art had begun to pander to the masses, and though many were finally buying art, this trend detracted from the quality and authenticity of the art itself. In an art world that revolves around the major commercial art fairs, like the Armory Show, Art Basel, Pulse, and Scope, a lack of wealthy buyers has resulted in fairs' and galleries' selling more traditional and less challenging artworks, and in their taking emerging artists' works (which tend to be more difficult to sell) off the gallery walls (Peers, 2009). Yet artists always make work, and great art, as we say of the truth, will always prevail and make itself known. The lack of financial support that has created a narrower and more challenging niche for art has also deprived many artists, especially younger ones and those who produce challenging or controversial art, of their livelihoods and career opportunities. Many art galleries, unable to sell their product, closed in 2009, as well as in 2010. “Something that may be crucial

for art right now may be an artist's ability not to want to know or dictate what's coming next ... [as] an open embrace of the confusion. ... while the market is dying, art is in the process of being reborn." (Saltz, 2009d).

### **Conclusions: Reclaiming through art the American heritage of community**

Buckminster Fuller devoted both his scholarly and his personal life to the public and democratic accessibility of ideas, to interdisciplinary pursuits of knowledge, and to the need for human connections across ideological and geographic divides. He believed in and lived a life that revolved around striving for clarity when explaining challenging ideas. "He argued that if complex science wasn't easily comprehensible to a child, it was in danger of faulty logic" (Carlin, 2008, p. 53). He was an advocate of the individual and recognized that only when we nurture the individual can we truly connect with diverse individuals. He famously designed living units that were not only self-sustaining but were to be simply constructed by the average citizen.

In the summer of 2008, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City hosted a retrospective on Fuller's life and work and showed, among many other examples of his philosophy, a video called *Buckminster Fuller Meets the Hippies in Golden Gate Park*. In this short film, Fuller engages long-haired men and women seated on grass in a conversation about how they relate to, and feel about, the "spiritual constraints of his geometric designs" (p. 53). His genuine interest and concern in this situation demonstrates his belief that our visual world – the art and architecture around us – has a direct relation to how we think and how we feel. Further, that he expressed worry in his

work that strong lines and hard angles could limit the spiritual or emotional life of people shows a unique attention to everyday experience and the role of public spaces within that experience.<sup>76</sup> Specifically, he brought attention to the power that a nurturing public environment has in the promotion of both the individual capacity to imagine change and the encouragement of human connectivity.

The argument that the most effective way to “convince” people to participate in the public sphere more actively – whether in their communities, in the political process, or in their own lives – lies in the conditions imposed by an overarching authority, such as the government's offering financial incentives for conforming to their strictures, is like saying that the best way to deter smokers from continuing their dangerous habit is to place a tax on cigarettes. Likewise, there have been recent discussions among the American public that the cure to our national obesity problem (the most recent statistics being that more than 26% of Americans are officially obese) is a so-called fat tax, whereby fast food and soda – what many claim is at the root of the problem – would carry an extra tax that would deter consumers from choosing to buy fast food rather than a more healthy alternative (Bittman, 2010).

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<sup>76</sup> Yayoi Kusama is a Japanese artist who came of age in the 1960s era of happenings and early conceptual experiments. In August 1969, she gained somewhat notoriety for her "Grand Orgy to Awaken the Dead" performance, where she and her likewise naked assistants danced into New York's Museum of Modern Art's sculpture garden and proceeded to paint each other in large, brightly colored polka dots. Kusama is famous for working only in polka dots and in their inverse of negative space dots. This creative assertion yields some questions: What is the effect of shapes in everyday life on the individual spirit? For example, do circles imply continuity and unity, with the possibility of eventual existential crisis in the lack of perceptible limits or boundaries? Similarly, while sharp corners can clearly stake out the corners of a landscape, allowing for more immediate comprehension, they may resist the flux that is human life through the force of its lines. Can shapes, and more generally, the way we physically structure our public spaces, help to encourage the need and capacity for participation (desire to improve public life), and pride (belief that public life is a valuable good), in public life among citizens?

That has been a common approach in dealing with the much-acknowledged free-rider problem in political life in this country. Many argue that, if we could only provide a valued (and tangible) incentive to those who participate, we would be more likely to get a faster and more significant response than if we work more slowly to genuinely inspire people with political possibilities. This is misleading reasoning and only supports the status quo. We need a new approach to confront the problem of low participation in this country, and supporting public and social artworks brings much-needed attention to the true freedom of our creative and sensuous lives. The knowledge gained from such access to the spirit can open the inner doors within individuals, to develop new ideas of empathy for the plight of others, and ultimately, of political life as foundationally empathetic. In other words, you can catch a fish for a man, but if you teach him to fish, he will catch many fish and teach others to do the same.

The conceptual trend in today's art world reflects the primacy of philosophy in art. The primary characteristic of art is that it is self-reflective – creating art, even if only in the imagination, involves both sensuousness and thought. In other words, visionary art is conscious of its transcendent qualities; it is a manifestation of our passions and our reason as they dance endlessly in tension. Art can also be a way of viewing and living life. In this sense, to be artistic is to embrace a sensuous dialectical world view. Dionysian release enables us to begin to experience *true* art in its instinctual and sensuous revelations, but it is the visionary conception that the Dionysian must engage the Apollonian in a transcendent dialogue that allows us to define art and the participation, and rebellion it ultimately encourages.

The American Abstract Expressionists were among the first to emphasize the physical activity of painting over the accuracy of the strokes and the resulting image. Like the American Transcendentalists before them, they strove to express the feelings involved in the process of creation rather than the details of its material manifestation. This is the emphasis in a Dionysian, and visionary, philosophy – to focus on how we feel, and not on how we think. An increased presence of public and social art projects on our streets, and in our daily lives, can foster within us a brief but necessary retreat from reason and everyday concerns and thus encourage an exploration of the sensuous and spiritual realm of life. Social and public artworks, both consciously political projects and indirectly political, conceptually arousing events, are needed to imbue our quotidian lives with Dionysian breaks that disorder imagined boundaries and lead to inner revitalization, visionary reflection, and the accompanying feelings of empowerment and positivity. This change can provoke true freedom and individuality and, as a result, can uncover within each of us (without direct material incentives) the true empathy and community that are the first step to an active citizenry in a democracy.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Barbara L. Fredrickson (2007) concludes that positive emotions are the active ingredients that allow people to be optimistic and resilient. Feelings persuade us to speak or act; encouraging the emotions of empowerment in our public spaces is vital to the goal of participation. She argues that the answer to both the lack of positivity and the lack of participation among Americans lies in, “[p]ut[ting] emphasis on the power of relationships and small-scale pragmatic action, rather than on making policy or protests. In some ways we’ve become a culture of what psychologists called ‘learned helplessness,’ and as we wait for others to solve our problems, the problems get harder to solve. But resilient people don’t wait; they think their actions make a difference in the world. Any changes that would happen from the ‘prosperous way down,’ could...allow people to have more frequent positive emotions, greater connection to the people in their lives, the natural world ... as opposed to ‘work, achieve, work, achieve.’ The satisfaction and pride that you get out of creating something, growing something, is hug.” (p. ). Chase, 2009,

### **Some ideas for further research: idea art and the creativity of the homeless**

Ideas are a powerful force in society, politics, and especially art, as for they lie that unique realm where the impossible can become possible, imagined, envisioned. If many successful artists today have become mere directors of the construction of their artwork, then it is clear they are being paid, and valued, for their ability to produce for society and for the history of art, a novel or visionary idea. If artwork can be contained within an idea, why should there be *any* limits on its vision? If one can describe something in words and otherwise, what can be imagined, then we can re-create the image of the proposed artwork, or creative interactive concept, in the minds of the viewers or readers. In this sense, the words are art themselves, but that which they describe is visionary, for it transcends the realm of the materially possible. So, why not propose even fantastical art projects that reconceptualize our public spaces, and our world, in fundamentally new and surprising ways? Idea art could create public and social art that is impossible to create but valuable to consider. Imagine if we were able to throw enormous nets over vast land areas. The nets could be cast broadly or narrowly, and deliberately aimed. It could connect city with city, or country with country; or could drape over oceans and continental divides, drawing together vastly different climates, political beliefs, religious paradigms, and cultural behaviors and norms. Envision dense netting strewn over New York City and stretched west until it encompasses the land all the way to St. Louis! Suddenly New Yorkers and the people of St. Louis would be forced to engage with one another, whether with enthusiasm, curiosity or aggression.



Or one could connect Paris with Algiers, the capital of its former colony, Algeria, and the site of many struggles for independence from its European master. Not only would their shared past have to be re-examined, but two opposing cultural forces would be forced in a particular, literal way to recognize their common ground. A net, or any physical obstacle imposed literally from above, creates the material environment for community. Despite the many inevitable differences between the newly linked cultures, differences that would, at first, likely intensify and highlight what is disparate between the two halves of the new entity, people would have to recognize the many needs and desires that they all share and be reminded of their ultimate reliance on others, for life and love but also for the very definitions of their private and public identities. Without our relationships to each other, we would not have the use of many of our tools of self-identity and self-understanding. This type of idea-based public art that could encompass different ends of the earth, and its theoretical support, is valuable in a contemporary world that is increasingly interdependent in economy and trade, yet not in cultural and political beliefs.

On a quite different trajectory, I am intrigued by "outsider" individuals and populations, and what they can teach society about how to address and encourage our natural needs and desires in political life. I believe that the homeless create a political life that resembles our everyday political life (Morris, 2010), but in a more "natural" way (without the bounds of traditional society, or at least with less of an ability (or is it desire?) to follow rules or to "sublimate" their inner passions into the order and relative sterility of society. I would like to explore the philosophical and perhaps social value in

the political and moral boundaries of the homeless. Like the mentally ill and others living in asylums, homeless people develop a sense of self that exists outside of mainstream society and often "reality" (Glass, 1993). Rather than merely viewing them as less able, or less normal, it is helpful to try to understand the worlds they have constructed.

Those who are mentally ill, or otherwise emotionally detached, exist on the outskirts of society in their own perceptions of reality. Similarly, homeless people live according to their own self-made adaptations to reality. There is diversity among the homeless. Some who refuse the mores of traditional society and seek to live without its rules and boundaries; others have not been able to succeed in traditional society, now wish to recapture the trappings of everyday life that will allow them to now succeed in their own way. To live on the fringes of society is often difficult work, for each person is forced to create his or her own alternative world individually.

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