

Ernest Becker argued in his book *Denial of Death*, written in 1974, that the human condition is characterized uniquely from other species' by our awareness of mortality, awareness of the impermanence of life. Because of this transience nature, filmmaker and futurist Jason Silva claims, "the goal of any artist, whether it be in paint, or song, or cinema, is an attempt to put people in one's head, to invite us to smash our sense of separateness." In an interview, Silva introduces Becker's theory on the human condition, and that the trouble of the innate separation of man from man originates out of our awareness of mortality. This means that the creation of art, in a pure, generalized sense, is man's effort to achieve something that is larger than him, to break the boundaries created by the impermanence of life, and to share that with fellow man. Art is thus a manifestation of this trajectory of human beings, of the impermanence that begins at birth, in which we are individuated, and to death. Therefore, this manifestation originates out of the inherent separation that individuates human beings in conjunction with the impermanence of life; yet it has not been successful in its attempts. To understand this failure, I will focus on the visual arts in an attempt to understand its true nature and importance. The investigation begins at the moment one emphasizes the interpretation of another's creation, creating misconceptions that overwhelm the creation. This emphasis is then critiqued through the concept of alienation, which is the inherent trajectory of art between the viewer of art and the artist himself. Because of this, visual art is reduced purely to aesthetics, and the emphasis then falls on the act of creating the aesthetic specific to the individual.

If all art is a general reflection of the goal to express something from the creator, then the subsequent inquiry requires the understanding of the motive to express said thing, incorporating the key contrast between the audience and the creator. However, that being said, this investigation more so requires the investigators want of understanding the art, of the creation; the audience desires exposure. For example, if one views an exhibit of paintings they find aesthetically pleasing, they will have desire to understand them and be exposed to what the artist went through, by reading the artist statement, and so on. As soon as the emphasis of inquiry begins moving towards this focus, a general set of questions arises: such as, why did the artist choose to express such idea in the way they did? The wholeness of art then becomes purely the embodiment of this inquiry. The audience asks, why did the painter paint this portion of the painting red, are they trying to reflect anger? They come to conclusions and statements such as, the artist is reflecting the anger he felt towards the recent presidential election, and so on.

The first flaw in visual arts is introduced as soon as the investigation becomes manifested through this position of desire the audience has to eliminate the separation that characterizes the inherent trajectory of art. However close an individual comes to answering these questions and making these conclusions about the creation, they are forgetting the innate alienation of man to man that will forever exist, they are forgetting the negation that perpetually arises. In his influential book *Walden*, Thoreau questions, "What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another," (Thoreau, 109). This placed importance in the incentive of exposure is the same as one exposing themselves to the banjo in order to look at music created through this instrument with a more defined, absolute perspective, and although they may now know how to play the banjo, they do not know anymore about the person who inspired them by playing the banjo in the first place. Another example, you go to a museum and see a famous painting by Van Gogh, decide to learn how to paint in the Post-Impressionism style with oil paints, come back to the museum and see the same Van Gogh works in a new light, because you were exposed to the means of producing the paintings. Yet with visual art, the constant

assumption is that through this process, the alienation between man and man that manifests itself through the creation of a “thing”, such as a painting, will be diminished; only serving to water down the truth, only serving to subjugate the absolute existence of what art *is*: purely aesthetics. In this case, this incentive to reduce alienation through exposure only serves to further alienation.

One must then look at the intrinsic alienation that manifests itself in this creative process: the severance from the audience and the creator, and the creator from the audience. What is this distance, this separation, from the audience and the creator? The term alienation simply defines the inseparable difference between the audience and the creator, yet more generally the inseparable difference that Thoreau articulated between man and man. With visual art, this inseparable difference will always remain, that the audience will perpetually be alienated from the creator, and the creator alienated from the audience. Therefore, the existence of any importance in the pursuit to reduce alienation via exposure dies as quickly as it is born. The search for what is absolute in art regarding this concept of alienation in the relationship of the audience and the creator has proven to only result in the preeminent arrival at the endpoint of alienation itself.

The only subsequent direction to exist is the acknowledgment that all that exists in visual arts is the creations reduction to purely an aesthetic. To deny this and search for something more than just an aesthetic is to go through the process of exposure and is therefore equal to denying something that is undeniable. This acknowledgment of the aesthetic then does not passively subjugate the alien essence; it actively accepts and fulfills the role of destroying that is neither absolute nor true: any questions of the similar nature of “what was he trying to express with this red paint?” and so on become themselves subjugated, whilst the creation becomes created for and by the creator. However, what is then the purpose of the creation in visual arts?

In its purest and only logical sense after being reduced to only an aesthetic, the creation is only a reflection of context. To understand this concept of the creation, one must look into the concept of creativity. Futurist Jacque Fresco argues that creativity is no innate ability specific to gifted people, more so that creativity, and thinking in general, is simply taking known elements and rearranging them in different ways. Therefore, a creation is but just a synthesis of extracted information, extracted aspects from everything that exists around us, which may seem innately separated in abstraction, in individuality. And yet, it is the beauty of life that brings them together in all of the processes of man and his existence, evidently in the manifestation of art and visual art, and thus the investigation moves towards this existence ontologically, this relationship with man and the context he is involved in.

Karl Marx brings to life a shockingly relevant argument on the individual. Marx believed in the concept of self-determination, that for man to be free he must be determined by his inner essence, his true nature. The autonomous, inherently separated being that Thoreau explicates is but a starting point, for the true nature of man is in its “species-being,” as the essence of man is a universal force that does not separate man into individuals and particulars. Peter Joseph, of the Zeitgeist Movement, argues two key points of life that we have forgotten in today’s society: the emergent and symbiotic aspects of natural law. The emergent aspect states that life is constantly changing: ideas can never be absolute as they are continuously being molded by the vast synthesis of already known elements, similar to Fresco’s take on creativity. In the Zeitgeist Documentary: Addendum, George Carlin describes the symbiotic aspect, “if it is true that we are all from the center of a star, every atom in us... then we are all the same thing. The trouble is that we have been separated by being born and given a name.” Being individuated in this way, Marx arrives at his fundamental critique in order to grasp the truth: the duality between the

particular, individualized element versus the universal essence of the “species-being.” It is because this contrast that alienation exists, for example, in Karl Marx’s First Manuscript of Alienated Labor, he argues “the worker... feels himself only outside of his work, and feels beside himself in his work. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home,” (Kamenka, 136). Marx argues that the separation and distinction between these two functions only serve to alienate humans from the functions themselves: “taken in abstraction... what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal,” (Kamenka, 137). Seeing these as a single process in unity, when one distinguishes the act of working from the act of living, one is estranging himself from nature. However, what remains with more emphasis in Marx’s argument, is the relationship between man and the state as the fundamental force of estranging man from his true essence. Marx argues in *On the Jewish Question*, 1844, that the rights of man that we have established do not succeed in going beyond the civil society that has created them, that they achieve nothing in relation to the concept of self-determination and the species-being. He states, “civil society does not rise above egoism... the only bond that keeps men together is natural necessity, need and private interest, the preservation of their property and of their egoistic person,” (Kamenka, 109). Instead of formulating laws and rights based on the linking of man with man, they are formulated on the separation of man from man, perpetuating the individuated mindset that subjugates the natural law of symbiosis.

Thus the context of the creation of art, the synthesis of all known elements into the artistic expression, exists merely as a manifestation of the individuated societal context that we have been born into. Fulfilling this role, artistic expression is reduced to a finalized aesthetic in visual arts that can only be viewed as an aesthetic. However people still claim, as Jason Silva claimed, that the motive of the creator is to produce something that will exist as an antithesis to the alienation of man from man. I am arguing that artistic expression is a direct product of that alienation, of the context we are submerged in throughout life, is less an answer to the alienation predicament and more so a reflection of it. Therefore, expression through visual arts only serves to do exactly the opposite of what Silva was asserting. The visual arts only serve to perpetuate this contrast; only serve to passively place a fake importance on the mastering of aesthetics through exposure. If what Silva is claiming is the true motive of any human, any artist, then expressing that motive through visual arts is futile.

## Bibliography

Jason Silva. We are the Gods Now – Jason Silva at Sydney Opera House. *Youtube*, November 1, 2012. Web, December 3, 2013.

Kamenka, Eugene. *The Portable Karl Marx*. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1983. Print.

London Real. Jacque Fresco – The Venus Project | London Real. *Youtube*, September 2, 2012. Web. November 18, 2013.

Thoreau, Henry D. *Walden and Civil Disobedience*. New York, NY: Penguin, n.d. Print.

*Zeitgeist: Addendum*. Dir. Peter Joseph. GMP LLC, 2008. Film.