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Thick Theory: a Social Science Philosophy of the Aesthetic

Realistyczna teoria estetyki sformułowana w oparciu o filozofię społeczną

The following essays a theoretical exposition of aesthetics from a social scientific perspective. It builds on Howard Becker's art worlds (Becker 1982), Pierre Bourdieu's art fields (Bourdieu 1993), and Niklas Luhmann's art systems (Luhmann 1995). The argument assumes a model of a fractal structure of the phenomenological world (Body-Gendrot 2000; Hayles 1991; Mandelbrot 1982). The fractal model envisions phenomena sharing a similar, patterned structure at various levels of magnitude: small social phenomena at the individual and interpersonal level share a pattern with those at the level of whole societies. That is, levels of systems, fields, and worlds are not just connected, but have recursive patterns. The fractal patterns appear across time, space, and levels of systems. For example, micro-evolutionary events transpire within neuro-psychological systems in the same patterns as macro-evolutionary events have transpired in human bio-social evolution.

Art is a uniquely human activity, an essential part of culture, and partially definitive for humanity. Here, culture should be read in the anthropological sense, as the oblique reference to Clifford Geertz' "Thick Description" (1973) attests. Whatever anyone may call art, and the calling of something 'art' has a central place in the present argument, its emergence coincided with the evolutionary move from just another social primate to human. Art is bound up with the kind of societies people make in such a way as to act as both a woven strand of a given society and as a structuring force on people's relations and interactions.

The thick theory developed here is not gratuitous, but comes of a need to explain a particular phenomenon. That phenomenon poses a problem because

extant theories prove inadequate. An urban neighborhood in the United States has defied the usual expectations. Based on a wealth of theories and empirical studies and data, neighborhoods like it have fallen into decline and decay. This one has not and commonly accepted explanations for its anomalousness do not stand up to scrutiny. The explanation offered here relies on the practice of art by its inhabitants. Lacking a theory of art that would explain how and why that is possible has occasioned this foray into thick theorizing.

THE PROBLEM

The neighborhood, Riverwest, is in Milwaukee, Wisconsin USA. Formerly a mixed residential-industrial location, like those surrounding it, deindustrialization hit the neighborhood hard in the 1980s. Now in 2011 it is mainly residential with a modicum of residual industry and commercial establishments. Deindustrialization, capital flight, depopulation, and racial and ethnic demographic shifts have produced ghettoization in its surroundings and in similar neighborhoods throughout the United States (Bauman et al. 2000; Bluestone and Stevenson 2002; Bobo 2002; Farley et al. 2000; Massey and Denton 1993; O'Reilly et al. 1965; Orfield 1985; Pritchett 2002; Sugrue 2005). Instead of following similarly, Riverwest has maintained its vitality, and it has also retained its working class make up – that is, it has not gentrified. The one aspect different from all the other neighborhoods seems to be the multigenerational practice and production of art in the neighborhood by its working class denizens. Moreover, the artistic tradition has continued throughout the post Second World War period despite several turnovers of population and without the entry of grand art establishments and institutions. Those that exist are at a strictly local level.

The problem, then, is to explain how art could produce such an effect. Granted, there are might be other explanations for the social facts of the neighborhood, but on the face of it, the artistic explanation offers the most likely approach. Nonetheless, the artistic explanation has little or no theoretical groundwork. The present essay tries to supply that groundwork. It requires thick theorizing because it does not just have to fill some gaps; it has to provide a complete foundation, as none currently exists.

ART FIELDS, WORLDS, AND SYSTEMS

A social study of art differs from critical artistic studies. Art from a social scientific perspective treats art as a sociocultural phenomenon. Comparable treatments would include socio-lingustics, social studies of the sciences, a sociocultural examination of religious systems, and so on. That is, the social scientific study

treats art as part of a whole, not something singular or sui generis. The models of fields, world, and systems represent attempts at a social study of art. Each of the three models contributes to the present theory, but each is insufficient to explain the problematic phenomenon – the effect of artistic practices and social relations on a single neighborhood.

Each of the models acts as a building block of a foundation for an adequate theory. Each has something to recommend it, and each needs fitting together with the others. Luhmann's systems approach contributes what he first called 'self-thematization' (1975: 324–362) and later autopoiesis (1984, 1995) after the bio-systems of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980, 1987). Self-thematization or autopoiesis refers to the self structuring of systems, which is necessary for their maintenance as distinct systems separate from other systems. Howard Becker's art worlds model lends the social interactional component. Less abstract than the models of Luhmann and Bourdieu, art worlds are the social circles within which artists, their auxiliary art producers, and audiences for their products commingle. Bourdieu's art field supplies the dynamics, the conflicts and jockeying for advantage that taken collectively and understood systemically results in change. Bourdieu and Luhmann explain art as product. They look at changes in the artifacts of art – artistic movements, styles, and conceptualizations. Becker, on the other hand, helps explain how artists get along with each other, with their support personnel, and the audiences. What each and all three minimize, or do not address at all, is the actual activity and how that activity changes the human world.

An excursion into very different times and places is necessary to get at the world changing activity. A look at the origins of art and not coincidentally modern humans, combines with how people act at the neuro-psychological level. Combining the two means combining macro evolution that transpires over thousands of years with micro evolution that transpires in micro seconds. The excursion traverses the Upper Paleolithic cave paintings in Lascaux, Altamira and nearby locales to relatively recent rock art by peoples living in simple societies. It also delves into research in neuro-psychology.

The various systemic models and the evolutionary perspectives share a concept of art that functions semi-autonomously. That is, they treat art as a system unto itself, reflective and reflexive, but at the same time recognizing its interconnections and interdependencies with other cultural elements and social structures. These relationships are those of interacting systems. The next section considers the systems of neuro-psychology, micro-evolution, human biological evolution, and social evolution in terms of art.

EYE AND MIND

> Art is not a mirror to hold up to society, but
> a hammer with which to shape it.
> Bertolt Brecht

> There are painters who transform the
> sun to a yellow spot, but there are others who
> with the help of their art and their intelligence,
> transform a yellow spot into sun.
> Pablo Picasso

In his essay on painting of the same title as this section, "Eye and Mind" Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1961) invoked the cave art of the Upper Paleolithic (40 to 10 thousand years ago) in the Lascaux caves.

The eye is an instrument that moves itself, a means which invents its own ends; it is *that which* has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the traces of the hand […]. In whatever civilization it is born, from Lascaux to our time, painting celebrates no other enigma but that of visibility […]. The painter's world is a visible world […] because it is complete though only partial […]. It gives visible evidence to what profane vision believes to be invisible […]. The painter, any painter, practices a magical theory of vision[1].

This painter's magic helps explain the enigma with which Merleau-Ponty wrestled. Paintings cannot be mere replications of what one sees when gazing upon the quotidian world for two reasons. First, the mountain in a painting is not and cannot be the mountain we see. Instead, the mountain and the painter's gaze interact. The seeing painter reaches out to the mountain in order to see it *as* a mountain, and at the same time, the mountain reaches into the painter's mind. "It is the mountain itself which from out there makes itself seen by the painter; it is the mountain that he interrogates with his gaze."[2] Second, the painter paints an image that is a product of neuro-psychology, not geography or geology, and a neuro-psychology conditioned by the painter's culture.

Merleau-Ponty was looking for a "philosophy of vision – its iconography, perhaps"[3]. That is, he was constructing an aesthetic theory mainly about paintings accessible to mid twentieth century people. A seemingly different project challenged the anthropological archaeologist David Lewis-Williams who examined the cave art of the Western European Upper Paleolithic and the rock

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[1] M. Merleau-Ponty (1961 [1993]) Eye and Mind, translated by Michael B. Smith. In *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. by G.A. Johnson, 121–149. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1961, p. 127.

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 128.

[3] *Ibidem*, p. 129.

art in southern Africa and elsewhere. Lewis-Williams did not seek an aesthetic theory; he tried to explain the occurrence and nature of the cave paintings in the context of human biological and social evolution. Briefly, David Lewis-Williams said that the cave paintings could only have been executed by physically modern humans, and – precisely speaking to the point of this excursion into art to explain a contemporary urban neighborhood – the cave paintings as cultural artifacts and human activity contributed to social evolution and society's structural differentiation. Furthermore, he speculated about the connection between paintings and mystic visions and dreams. This latter speculation receives support from neuro-psychological investigations of Jason W. Brown. That is, the making of art comes from micro-evolutionary processes within human nervous systems and these processes structurally replicate in a fractal manner the history of human biological and social evolution.

Mind in the Cave Hypothesis

David Lewis-Williams hypothesized that Upper Paleolithic cave art required a modern human neurophysiology (2002: 189–192). That is, before the appearance of physically modern humans about 40 thousand years ago, hominids, even the closest to modern humans, Neanderthals, had neither full consciousness nor language. Consequently, they could not discuss and imagine in a social, collective and therefore cultural sense, their dreams and other autistic psychological experiences. Neanderthals dreamt, as do all mammals, but they could not talk about their dreams. Therefore, their dreams could not become part of, and shaped by a shared culture. Physically modern humans, on the other hand, not only dreamt, but talked about them with their fellows – a shared autistic psychological experience. Moreover, the talked about dreams acquired culture bound meanings. To take an oversimplified example, twenty-first century people might have dreams about devastating explosions, planes, missiles, and so on, but people 40 thousand years ago would have nightmares about spears. As with dreams so it is with induced altered states of consciousness, whether from various forms of hallucinogens, or hypnotic activities such as ritual dances. Those who experienced such altered states, shamans, had access to a different world, a spirit world. Lewis-Williams then asked the following question.

How, then, did people come to make representational images of animals and so forth out of projected mental imagery? I argue that at a given time, and *for social reasons* [emphasis added] the projected images of altered states were insufficient and people needed to 'fix' their visions. They reached out to their emotionally charged visions and tried to touch them [just as Merleau-Ponty's painter might try to 'touch' the mountain], to hold them in place, perhaps on soft surfaces and with their fingers. They were not inventing images. They were merely touching what was already there[4].

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[4] D. Lewis-Williams (2002) *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art.* London, UK: Thames & Hudson, p. 193.

These prehistoric, Upper Paleolithic shaman-painters inscribed their mystical visions on the walls of caves to 'fix' them. Lewis-Williams then related this leap into modern human neurophysiology with social evolution. He argued that "Higher order consciousness allowed a group of people within a larger community to commandeer the experiences of altered consciousness and to set themselves apart from those who, for whatever reasons, did not have those experiences"[5]. Art and access to a normally invisible spirit world, the world of altered consciousness, became the cultural form of social differentiation as visionaries and image makers: "[…] art (to revert to a broad term) and religion were simultaneously born in a process of social stratification. Art and religion were therefore socially divisive"[6]. Here, divisiveness need not entail hostility. It does however, entail social complexity, and complexity exponentially increases adaptatability to environments.

The location of the cave paintings is not coincidental. A common feature of cosmologies in recorded ethnology is a tiered structure in which the middle tier is the material quotidian, the upper tier, heavens, mountain tops and so on, the realm of gods, and the lower tier that of spirits. The lower tier commonly is associated with caves and other holes in the earth. In his 2011 *Deciphering Ancient Minds*, Lewis-Williams reports that the San of southern Africa have such a three-tiered cosmology[7]. He compares the San to the Mountain Shoshone in North America[8] (181–187). The same holds true for ancient Mayans as their cave art suggests (Stone 1995). Lewis-Williams concluded that

> […] it seems clear that people all over the world and in markedly differing cultures have ideas about altitude. They imagine a vertical axis that runs from a spirit realm in the sky, through the level on which people live, down to a subterranean spirit realm. This is the so-called *axis mundi* […]. In different cultures the *axis mundi* is conceived differently[9].

Cave painting, then, not only inscribed a common human experience – altered states of consciousness, oneiric imaginings, and the like – but the origins of social differentiation beyond episodic divisions of labor such as leaders of the hunt. Given the hard to access placement of the cave art noted in the Upper Paleolithic caves of Western Europe and those of the ancient Maya, one can surmise that gazing upon the fixed images played some role in socially important rituals, perhaps rites of passage, rituals of intensification, and so forth. Thus getting the images became part of the ritual experience shared by a group thereby intensifying its social cohesion. The making of art in caves serves as a sort of primal scene for humanity. It also

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[5] *Ibidem*, p. 196.

[6] *Ibidem*.

[7] *Idem* (2011) *Deciphering Ancient Minds: The Mystery of San Bushman Rock Art*. London, UK: Thames & Hudson, p. 159.

[8] *Ibidem*, p. 181–187.

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 187.

implies that art, the making of images, and the artists who make them are both held apart from other members of the group and also at the same time, intrinsic to connectedness among the group's members. That is, differentiation increases social solidarity along with increased adaptability, hence social evolution – a point made by Emile Durkheim in his seminal sociological writing, *Division of Labor in Society* (1893).

Moving back to more contemporary art, Merleau-Ponty quotes Alberto Giacometti "I believe Cézanne was seeking depth all his life"[10] Merleau-Ponty's point is not just metaphor. His argument concerns visualization and the depiction of images. No painting actually *has* any depth. Depth come from the art of the painter, as in the Picasso quote at the beginning of this section.

> Depth thus understood, is rather, the experience of the reversibility of dimensions, of global "locality" in which everything is in the same place at the same time, a locality from which height, width, and depth are abstracted, a voluminosity we express in a word when we say that a thing is *there*. In pursuing depth, what Cézanne is seeking is this deflagration of Being […] that the external form, the envelope, is secondary and derived[11].

Therefore, the bison inscribed on the cave walls of Lascaux are not attempts to draw the bison seen by Upper Paleolithic people in the external world, but the bison envisioned in their internal, mental worlds. Depicting them had several consequences. It showed a shared human experience by giving it visible, tangible form. It differentiated the imaginer and maker of images. And it bound together members of the group, and presumably bound them through time as the images on the cave walls would have to have been inscribed across generational lines. Whether or not one accepts David Lewis Williams argument about Neanderthals or his speculations about the psychology of prehistoric hominids, the gravamen of the present argument lies with the connections among psychology, culture, and society. The art, as in the Brecht quote at the beginning of this section, did not mirror the world; it shaped it.

Mind and Brain

Based on his clinical and experimental work with people suffering brain damage, Jason W. Brown (1972, 1977, 2005: 32–126) hypothesized a microgenetic model of psychological functioning. Briefly, it depicts brain centered neural processes originating from the most primitive brain functions, the vegetative, and developing outward toward cognition, consciousness, and finally actions such as speech and other motor functions. Accordingly, when we speak or raise an arm, our brains have initiated the action before we 'decide' to issue an utterance or move a limb. Effectively, it means that such 'decisions' are really

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[10] M. Merleau-Ponty, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
[11] *Ibidem*.

rationalizations for what has already begun, neurologically. As the neural impulse moves toward the acting, it acquires increasing complexity – hence the term microgenetics or micro-evolution, an evolution taking place in microseceonds rather than millennia. As impulses progress through the nervous system so can they regress once realized. Induced regression toward the earlier microgenetic states is an autistic process. The model is commensurate with Merleau-Ponty's discussion and his phenomenological psychology. Perceptions are not passive and "perceptual modalities are not recombined but individuate from a multi-modal synaesthetic core"[12]. The painter sees the mountain by creating it as a mountain from a synaesthetic core, to use Merleau-Ponty's example.

On point with the present discussion, Brown later described regressive states induced by artists and mystics. Brown observed that both mystics and artists retreat into the deeply subjective, "before the arousal of language"[13]. Comparing mystical retreat and art, Brown noted two differences. Mystics' regression is deeper than that of artists, and mystics do not aspire to a social end whereas artists do. "The artist's descent is less profound […] the feeling is closer to *desire*, 'located' in the self […]"[14]. 'The artist is driven to share the Idea with others"[15]. Here the Idea refers to a transcendental object, a higher level or plane derived from a dialectic in keeping with Luhmann's conception of systems and subsystems in dialectical dynamic always tending toward transcendence. The act of creating, art, draws on unconscious mentation "[…] the ability to tap preliminary or Ucs [unconscious] phases of pre-logical whole-part relations, such as metaphor, is central in the creative act"[16]. As the creative act succumbs to socialization, it takes the form of metaphor, a basic structure of linguistic concepts. Brown points out that this conversion into metaphor, into thought as language, is fundamental.

> If metaphor is ubiquitous in language, it is because whole-part relations are fundamental in mind and nature. The natural tendency of thought is to analysis, or the derivation of parts from antecedent wholes. The creative step reverses this trend by a move inward to the wholes [a sense of globalization] […]. This opens the way to a novelty generated by the multiple relations of unrealized parts. Put differently, the incomplete analysis permits the arousal of unexpected parts that are tacitly subsumed within wholes that have not yet individuated[17].

Artistic regression taps into more primitive stages of mental activity, what Freud (1920) tried to express by calling it an oceanic feeling associated with Eros. Delving into the depths where sensory input is synthesized, brings forth the ability

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[12] J. Brown (2010) N*europsychogical Foundations of Conscious Experience*. Lovain-la-Neuve, Belgium: Chromatika, p. 323.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 321.

[14] *Ibidem*, p. 323.

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 324.

[16] *Ibidem*, p. 345.

[17] *Ibidem*.

to put into a mountain into a painting, to return to Merleau-Ponty again, more than the paint on canvas actually shows. What is visible to the artist as see-er becomes visible to viewers of the painting as a common human experience – a regression in the service of the ego, again to refer to Freud.

ART, MIND, AND SOCIETY

Art is instinct socialized. That is how autistic meditation turns into strengthened and diversified social ties. It is how a centrifugal force, the artists delving inside themselves, produces a centripetal force, that of culture and social solidarity. Unregulated instinct is dangerous to social animals. Non-human primates solve the problem, as do many other social animals, by a ranking system with a pyramidal structure: a male with female lieutenants dominates a group. Such groups may display a complicated pecking order. In any case, the control emerges from the social order. Within humanity it emerges from culture – symbolic norms. Whether the elemental rule was the incest taboo (a likely candidate) or some other device, its importance lies in its mechanism; that of deferral, deferral of aggression, sex, hunger, or something else.

Eric Gans proposed an originary hypothesis in which symbolic representation defers intra-group violence (1981, 1985). He argued that when the proto-human social order could no longer contain intra-group violence, a new method emerged. That method is "*representation*, and the first representation is that of the sacred"[18], where sacred means the non-quotidian, non-pragmatic, or the remote, such as difficult to access caverns in caves. Gans went on to argue that "To represent is to defer mimetic violence until it can be focused on the shared destruction and consumption of the material center […] from which meaning and with it, the human, emerge"[19]. Interpersonal violence gets subsumed into what became institutionalized social forms to defend the group. The desired object and competition over it is deferred so that it becomes a possession of the group as a whole. Eventually, it assumes transcendence. It becomes a sacred figure. This sequence – interdiction by symbolic rule, deferral and renunciation, transcendence – takes two forms: ritual (Rappaport 1999) and depiction (Lewis-Williams 2002). Gans' theory depends on a scenic origin in which sacred rituals, symbolization, social institutions, and other characteristically human forms come from a singular event.

The present argument need not, although it could, accommodate the scenic, but Gans' hypothesized consequences fit, most particularly, the deferral of violence and symbolic representation. Consider ritual and painting-drawing – both of them

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[18] E. Gans (2008) *The Scenic Imagination: Originary Thinking from Hobbes to the Present Day*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. 177.

[19] *Ibidem*.

art forms. Gans tied them to an originary scene, a recurring social situation. He speculated, "If language, ritual, desire, and all other fundamental categories of the human emerged in the *same* scene […] [they can be] opposed to the behavior of all other animals, human institutions are scenic; they constitute themselves as totalities rather than sets of piecemeal relations"[20]. Ritual has two relevant aspects: repetition and rhythm. Rituals endless repeat scenarios, and they do so in predictable rhythmic patterns. Consequently, rituals lend themselves to music, an art form. Moreover, rituals enhance transcendental mental states – trances and the like. Such experiences tend to be associated with mystical experiences, which Lewis-Williams posits as the origin of the visions imposed on cave walls, or cave art. Both rituals and cave art have culture bound meanings for the people who produce them. That is, they are symbolic.

With or without a scenic origin, rituals, the sacred, and symbolic art have strong associations, whether in human origins or contemporary social groups. Their social effects promote group cohesion and defer appetitive, instinctual centrifugal forces. A small story from Riverwest illustrates how they coalesce in an urban neighborhood in the United States of the twenty-first century.

A SNAIL'S CROSSING

A Snail's Crossing is the name of a small park in the neighborhood. The park is only a quarter of a square block in size. It gets its name from ceramic tiles embedded in the ground as part of the art objects in the park since its renovation in 2004–2005. Surrounded by residential buildings, mainly duplexes, it was one of many corner parks established by the City of Milwaukee, before the County took over the park system. Locals call them 'baby parks.' They originally contained some minimal play equipment – a small swing set, merry-go-round, slide, and so on. Most fell into disuse once the county park system came into being. The one in Riverwest was no exception. Patchy grass, straggly weeds, bare patches, and rusting playground equipment did not make for an inviting environment for young children. They also had little lighting. Perhaps not surprisingly they could become sites for clandestine activities such as street level drug dealing. Before it became Snail's Crossing, this Riverwest neighborhood baby park provided a venue for a shooting.

Shootings and other street crime were not unknown in the neighborhood, and its residents had concern about them. The neighborhood has an association, block clubs, liaison with the local police station, and various other mechanism devoted to, inter alia, curtailing street crime. A shooting in the baby park in question might have occasioned a defensive response – erection of bright spotlights, increased police patrols, maybe withdrawal of neighbors. The last would have followed

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[20] *Ibidem*, p. 179.

a pattern outlined by some criminologists who theorized that signs of disorder cause withdrawal, which in turn leads to more crime, creating a vicious cycle (Kelling and Coles 1996; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Skogan 1990; Wilson and Kelling 1982). The cycle can be generalized to what René Girard (Girard 1987) called 'mimetic violence'. Mimetic violence is socially learned. It serves as one of the main centrifugal social forces – that is, it drives people apart. What Wesley Skogan and other students of crime argued was that socially learned and occasioned violence not only produces antagonists, it also drives away others who might otherwise reassert social norms. In more practical quotidian terms as proposed by the criminologists, shootings make people avoid each other out of fear. Regardless of the validity of the criminologists' argument, it has shaped public policies for neighborhoods, public safety, and policing in the United States probably more than any other criminological theories (Skoll 2009). So, after the shooting one would have expected a securitization of the park. Instead, a snail's crossing emerged.

Instead of securitization, the small park became a neighborhood art project. Moreover, the art project featured children's art from the neighborhood and its elementary schools. The project garnered donations from neighborhood residents, businesses, the city's arts council and the city government. In the years since, the park has continued as a neighborhood project with volunteers helping to keep it clean, cultivate its flora, and regularly using it for recreation, especially for young children (Zipperer 2004). In sum, A Snail's Crossing contradicts the criminologists' argument. Instead of driving people apart, an incident of interpersonal violence brought neighbors together to validate what other criminologists have called social or collective 'efficacy' (Chung et al. 2009; Gibson 2010; Sampson 2006; Wells 2006). Art and especially its social production are not coincidental to the efficacy effect. For why this should be so, the discussion returns to art fields, systems, and worlds.

ART AS A SOCIAL FORCE

The force of art acts symbolically, but the force of artists acts socially and symbolically. In the case of the Snail's Crossing Park, a lead artist, Merina Lee (Zipperer 2004), organized other members of a neighborhood art world to make the park, at the time a site of urban decay and violence, into a useful, usable venue for art and social recreation. Had there not been an art world, the park could not have become a scene of art. Nonetheless and what still needs explaining is why its recreation by art prevented further decline and violence, In part, the explanation lies in collective efficacy. That is, neighbors interest and collective action arrested decay. But this explanation leaves out meaning, which comes from the symbolic force of art and artists operating within an art field. Pierre Bourdieu's model of art

field incorporates Howard Becker's art world and Niklas Luhmann's art systems so the following relies on the field model.

Art fields are dynamic; they are driven by conflict and struggle. Nonetheless, as Georg Simmel pointed out, art takes the role of a third force between antagonists as it does in the social form of a triad (Simmel 1908). Moreover, art fields maintain a degree of autonomy from other social fields and their forces, among which the most basic are class conflicts. Class conflicts are played out in urban neighborhoods on a daily basis. Interpersonal crime is one of their manifestations. The art field offers a semi-autonomous third, a triadic structure, in these fundamental conflicts.

> This field is neither a vague social background nor even a *milieu artistique* like a universe of personal relations between artists and writers (perspectives adopted by those who study 'influences'). It is a veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted. […] [T]his autonomous social universe functions somewhat like a prism which *refracts* every external determination: demographic, economic or political events are always retranslated according to the specific logic of the field […][21].

A Snail's Crossing became a venue for art much like the remote caverns in the caves of Altimira, Lascaux, and Naj Tunich. By the practice of art in the park, as in the caves, it acquired a degree of sacred space through its symbolic force. Such a force operates largely unconsciously. For example, a potential mugger would not say, even if asked, why she/he avoided the park as a site for a mugging, but nevertheless, the force repels that kind of activity. In the case of the park, the symbolism has to be far more subtle, because unlike remote caverns, the park is and is meant to be easily accessible. Its only boundary is that between the concrete pavement of the sidewalk and the grass and pathways of the park.

As it happened, the park marked a profusion of public art in the neighborhood. Among the most unexpected and therefore revealing is the area surrounding a metal fabricating factory. Its front yard contains metal sculptures. It would be as if one of the old steel mills, say of Republic Steel in south Chicago or Youngstown, Ohio held sculptures instead of just steel making supplies and detritus. The effect of art and its making on the neighborhood as a whole should be understood as the effect of a relatively autonomous subsystem on an encompassing system – the neighborhood. Although Bourdieu here wrote of artists *within* the field, the force should be understood as including external agency as well.

> In the field of restricted production, each change at any one point in the space of positions objectively defined by their difference […] induces a generalized change – which means one should not look for a specific *site* of change. […] The fact remains that every new position, in asserting itself as such, determines a displacement of the whole structure and that, by the logic of action

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[21] P. Bourdieu (1993) *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. and introduced by R. Johnson. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, p. 163–164.

and reaction, it leads to all sorts of changes in the position takings of the occupants of the other positions[22].

To return to Girard's mimetic violence and Simmel's triadic social forms helps explain the pacifying effect of art in a neighborhood and more generally the social force of art. First, Simmel said that the triad is the basic social form. It consists of three sets of dyads. Whatever occurs between two is intimate and therefore not social. The introduction of a third term in a relationship makes it social. When a dyad is in conflict, the third member settles the matter by one of three ways. The third sides with the first against the second. The third sides with the second against the first. The first and second band together against the third – the scapegoat (Girard 1982). A variation on the last is that the third withholds from both. Art takes this last variation, holding out against both opponents while at the same time making itself available to both.

According to Girard's (1978) hypothesis, mimetic conflict comes from acquisitive imitation. One individual reaches for an object, and a second follows suit *in imitation*. Conflict ensues. The two fight, and the winner takes the object. This implies continual violence, a strong centrifugal force that militates against sociality. Continual conflict is only averted by prohibition. One or the other withdraws. The one who withdraws harbors resentment. It assumes a simmering source of conflict, always threatening to break out. Again, sociality is tenuous. Gans (1981) building on Girard, offers an alternative. The potential antagonists point instead of reaching for the object. Thus, Gans argued, language is born of deferred appropriation. The ostensive acts as the foundation for symbolic expression – language. The symbolic act defers, averting violence, and in turn creates desire – a yearning for the object that cannot be taken. But what of the now symbolically desired object?

For an answer, Girard turns to Freud's description of the *fort-da* game as described in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in which Freud elevated an aggressive instinct as the coequal pair of libido, of desire. In the game, the child makes an object (a toy or some other desirable) disappear, only to retrieve it, thereby asserting mastery over loss. In the example, Freud saw an instinct to master by aggression – ridding oneself of what one desires. The child gains satisfaction by its mastery of the situation as the aggressive instinct combines with the libidinous instinct when the child retrieves the toy. Childish games, however, do not suffice in adult societies. In the latter, mastery and reconciliation come from eternal sacrifice. The desirable is sacrificed only to be reborn continually as rituals reenact this primal scene of social formation.

Girard jettisons Freud's death instinct and along with it the Oedipus complex in favor of what might be called the mimetic complex. Unfortunately, his mimetic

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[22] *Ibidem*, p. 58.

theory serves less well as a foundational structure. Girard explained that mimetic rivalry arises when an individual cannot decide on an object of desire, and so imitates someone else's appropriation. Granted, learning what to appropriate – for example food versus not-food – is learned, and initially through imitation, but one need not travel Girard's complete path. Instead, his insights can be incorporated into instinctual and social structural theories. Therefore, the following preserves Freud's dual instinct theory of aggression and sex, and it keeps the Oedipus triangle along with Simmel's triad as basic theoretical building blocks.

It is at this point that art enters as a third. Art makes the desirable always available at the same time it is unattainable for all. Every day, thousands gaze upon the *Mona Lisa*. A fortiori, millions can gaze upon reproductions of the painting. The age of mechanical reproduction, of which Walter Benjamin (1936) was suspicious and Theodore Adorno (1970) derogated. Art provides a symbolic nexus in which instincts are fused into symbolic representations that take the form of art. David Lewis-Williams hypothesized that cave art represented visions associated with rituals. Combine that with Girard's concept of the scapegoat (a target to resolve intra-group violence). Then, art can be said to offer symbolic representation of rituals that serve to defuse intra-group violence. As the third in a triad, art stands for something that no one person can appropriate, but that all can share. As Freud put it, artistic activity is a form of sublimation, a defense mechanism but one that enhances both individual psychological functions and sociality.

Therefore art is instinct socialized by representing a fusion of life and death (sex and aggression). It defends against mimetic violence and encourages social solidarity. Its symbolic force comes from these origins. Its social force comes from its symbolic force coupled with the social relations of those who produce it. Art preserves neighborhood vitality through its symbolic and social force.

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RESUMEN

El artículo se esfuerza en explicar como el arte se transforma en un factor que lucha contra la decadencia y las anomalías sociales en la ciudad Midwest en los Estados Unidos, ciudad que pertenece a la zona industrial llamada Rust Belt. Parece ser que algunos rasgos característicos de la zona se deben a las tardiciones culturales arraigadas en la clase trabajadora y a su intesiva actividad artística. Puesto que no existe ninguna teoría que explique cómo el arte puede provocar tales consecuencias, intentaremos expilcar el fenómeno de modo realista. Por este motive en la teoría explicativa mostramos el desarollo de fenómenos sociológicos y biológicos en *macro escala* y fenómenos neurológicos en *micro escala*. Por lo tanto, se perfila una teoría del arte como fuerza social.

Palabras claves: arte, Bourdie, Gans, Merleau-Ponty, chivo expiatorio, evolución social, simbolización, teoría, decadencia urbana, violencia, clase trabajadora

SUMMARY

Faced with trying to explain how a former industrial neighborhood in a rustbelt, Midwest city in the United States, this essay turns to art as a force that militates against urban decay and anomie. What seems to make this neighborhood unique is a cultural tradition of working class art and artists. Nonetheless, there is no theory of how art could produce such an effect. Therefore, thick theorizing is invoked. Along the way and as part of the theory, macro biological and social evolution is juxtaposed to neurological micro evolution. Accordingly a theory of art as a social force is outlined.

Keywords: art, Bourdieu, Gans, Merleau-Ponty, scapegoats, social evolution, symbolization, theory, urban decay, violence, working class

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule autor usiłuje wyjaśnić, w jaki sposób sztuka przekształca się w czynnik zwalczający upadek i nasilające się anomalie w mieście Midwest w Stanach Zjednoczonych, położonym w przemysłowym obszarze określanym jako Rust Belt. To, co wydaje się dla obszaru specyficzne, to zakorzenione w tutejszej klasie robotniczej kulturowe tradycje oraz ożywiona działalność artystyczna. Ponieważ nie istnieje żadna teoria wyjaśniająca, w jaki sposób sztuka może spowodować takie skutki, autor odwołuje się do realistycznego wyjaśniania zjawisk. Dlatego też jako część tworzonej teorii wyjaśniającej przedstawia rozwój pewnych zjawisk socjologicznych i biologicznych w skali makro oraz zjawisk neurologicznych w skali mikro. W ten sposób powstał zarys pewnej teorii sztuki jako siły społecznej.

Słowa kluczowe: sztuka, Bourdieu, Gans, Merleau-Ponty, kozioł ofiarny, ewolucja społeczna, symbolizacja, teoria, upadek miast, przemoc, klasa robotnicza