
The End of Art or the Origin of New Art?

By Andrew Johnson

Introduction: Graffiti and Post-modernity

Art is at a crossroad. How does one analyze the insanity/violence of Artaud, the labyrinths of Borges, the meaninglessness of Duchamp, the symbolism of Dali, the spatiality of Gehry, the significance of Basquiat? However diverse the above examples are, they all retain responses towards the imminent crisis of modern times and what has been labeled, 'The End of Art.' Postmodern forms of artistic expression are conscious departures from Modernism, especially when characterized by a rejection of ideology and theory in favor of a plurality of values and techniques. This paper will address the graffiti movement in New York City during the 70's and 80's as distinctly Postmodern, and, moreover, as an explicit alternative to traditional aesthetic theory. Using Heidegger's challenge to aesthetic theory, in "*The Origin of the Work of Art*," as the philosophical background in which to emphasize the importance of the graffiti movement in relation to the 'World-Historical Significance' of art/society, I hope to illustrate why the reader must, 'take graffiti seriously.'

The End of Art

"Art no longer counts for us as the highest manner in which truth obtains existence for itself.

One may well hope that art will continue to advance and perfect itself, but its form has ceased to be the highest need of spirit.

In all these relationships art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest vocation, something past."

– GWF Hegel, "*Lectures of Aesthetics*."

During the 19th Century European, intellectuals began to take account of their temporal finitude and expose a crisis of modernity. Friedrich Nietzsche exposed the flaws in Western metaphysics and the challenges the future posed to the present. Nietzsche believed that society as a whole was moving towards nihilism and decadence. Karl Marx demonstrated the alienation of the common man in relation to the

means of productions. Marx believed that a world revolution was imminent, because of class struggle. Georg Hegel announced that the end of history was near. Hegel believed that the society was moving towards Absolute Freedom in which history and art would be subsumed. All of these theories helped to establish a feeling of anxiety in the face of modernity.

Hegel's scholarship also made a fundamental departure from current beliefs in the substance of art and aesthetic judgment. He concluded that art was intertwined with history and that the novelty of artistic expression had burned itself out. Hegel claimed that great art was dead and must remain so. First, he argued that nothing will ever be new again; second, that even if there is something unique and original it cannot compare to the Greek temples or tragedies that Western Humanism is founded upon. Nietzsche claimed that the Greeks '*lived*' art, so that their entire society and daily operations were aesthetically manifest. The Greek temples, the Dionysian festivals and the public plays brought the entire civilization of Greece into the aesthetic experience. History will never repeat a more primitive stage of itself, but is, rather, a record of uninterrupted progress, of the ever increasing perfection of world, like the passing of childhood and innocence, what is past can never be regained. Modernity is burdened with maturity and responsibility.

Martin Heidegger echoes Hegel's claim of the 'End of Art,' but also departs from its dogma. He concludes that art will always correspond to the changes in 'Truth,' and that 'Things' will always be molded by current technologies, and thus always novel. However, he also concludes that art is dead, or, rather, great art is dead.

Before engaging Heidegger's text "*The Origin of the Work of Art*," I believe that it is important to elaborate upon the socio-political challenges to the significance of modern art. Heidegger critiques what he calls the Art Industry. Heidegger believed that the 'End of Art' was a very realistic proposition, because of the inherent nature of how art was institutionalized in modern society. He argued that there is a violence perpetrated upon art by Museums and the institutionalization of artwork. Once art is nailed down, made stagnant, it is not able to truly impact or represent modern society. Art, according to Heidegger, is a temporal

force that must *perform* its significance. You remove its dynamism when you put it behind a glass window or transform it into a tourist attraction. Heidegger cynically asserts, “Works of art are shipped like coal from the Ruhr and logs from the Black Forest. During the First World War Hölderlin’s hymns were packed in the soldier’s knapsacks together with cleaning gear. Beethoven’s quartets lie in the storerooms of the publishing house like potatoes in a cellar. All works have this thingly character.” (Basic Writings, pg. 145).

Theodor Adorno extends the damage done to art in modern times through a Post-Marxist analysis. Museums, exhibitions, collections, monuments, and the entire Art Industry, have transformed art into a commodity, something to be consumed and marketed. According to Adorno, art has become ‘reified,’ and made into a mere ‘thing.’ The ‘thingification,’ or objectification, of art has helped to seal its coffin. Thus, even if modern art were to break its own boundaries and have something original and significant to say it would immediately be offered as a sacrifice to the expenditure of the bourgeois. Adorno is useful in thinking outside of the philosophical ramifications of modern art, but also how it becomes utilized and/or coerced by the capital/ideological functions of modern society.

Interpretation of Heidegger’s ‘Origin of the Work of Art’

“The foregoing reflections are concerned with the riddle of art, the riddle that art itself is. They are far from claiming to solve the riddle. The task is to see the riddle.”

-Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art.”

It will be the basis of this interpretation that Heidegger’s seminal work “*The Origin of the Work of Art*,” is a response to Nietzsche’s and Immanuel Kant’s aesthetic theories. Heidegger is critical of the need for aesthetic theory and goes out of his way to invent a language that does not lapse into the standardized descriptions of art. Thus, while his vernacular seems childish, it is actually a disciplined effort to think about art in such a way as not to repeat the mistakes of his predecessors. Therefore, I will attempt to define the sometimes ambiguous notions that Heidegger uses in his description of a unique and revolutionary outlook on the ‘riddle of art.’

-What is art?

From the beginning of his discourse Heidegger discounts the easy response to say that the origin of an artwork is the artist. This view, attributed to Nietzsche, would hold that importance of an aesthetic evaluation is the genius of the creator. Heidegger contends that the artwork and the artist exist in a dynamic where each appears a provider of the other. "The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other" (Basic Writings, pg. 143). Art, a concept separate from both work and creator, thus exists as the source for them both.

Furthermore, I interpret Heidegger's aesthetic project to be a rejection of the Kantian tendency to place judgment on art, to objectify it. Heidegger claims that art has become the 'beautiful' lapsed into aesthetics, the adoption of a disinterested and judgmental attitude. Heidegger's contentions are that aesthetic theory does not make art and that any attempts at categorization or qualification fail to account for art in its 'World-Historical Significance.'

So the question remains, what is art? Heidegger agrees that art is a 'thing.' However, it is exactly this mentality, introduced by Kant and the thing-in-itself, that has corrupted the meaning of art. Art is not a *mere* thing and it is pointless to prevail in the Kantian tradition of interpretation of "the thingness of things." So, in response to Kant, Heidegger answers that art *is the happening of truth*. However this fails to be an easy or sufficient answer, but, instead, leads the reader into more questions, such as, what is truth, what is this "Being of beings" that Heidegger speaks of? Heidegger elaborates on a rigorous project to transform the conventional doctrines of truth, into truth as a *revealing* of 'world.'

-What is world?

'World' is truth, according to Heidegger's logic, but it is important to note that Heidegger does not take truth as correspondence or adequacy to the facts (the Greek *homoiōsis* or the Latin *adaequatio*), but rather the original Greek synonym for truth, *alētheia*. *Alētheia* is a Platonic term meaning the transition from concealment to un-

concealment, thus truth according to Heidegger is a type of disclosure, a coming-out-of-oblivion. Hence, 'world' is always changing. Heidegger's method of philosophy is distinctly challenging because of his renouncement of traditional definitions of his key terms. However, it is possible to think of art as this movement from nothing to something, the "disclosure of the particular being in its Being, the *happening of its truth*" (Basic Writings, pg. 164).

Therefore, through Heidegger's interpretation, art is necessarily temporal; it changes from one moment to the next. This is where his reliance on history is so pivotal, because he proposes that art will always correspond to changes in the 'world,' to truth, thus art will always be molded by current technologies and equipment. Art takes on 'World-Historic Significance.'

The Heideggerian term, 'world,' can be described as an all-governing, open relational context of a historical culture, a kind of space. More towards Heidegger's point is that 'world' is a passive space and nexus for human engagement. 'World' is important for recognizing the present-at-hand, both Being and Time, and retains an ontological structure. It is important to note that relationship between art and 'world.' It is my interpretation that Heidegger's description of art is that it is a revelation and happening of 'world.' However, this does not prescribe a Promethean view of art as creating 'world.' Through the example of the Greek temple, Heidegger illustrates how art helps to reveal the Greek 'world' around it. The role of art is to make expressively visible, to "thematize a world which is already in existence." Art is an "opening of the world." Art is not like Van Gogh's shoes, a thing, never an object that stands before us, but "ever non-objective."

Heidegger's description of 'world' is meant to be passive. The 'world' is simply there. However, to engage in art, one has to use equipment to transform the 'earth' and performatively reveal 'world,' or being. The conflict between 'world' and 'earth' is what gives substance, essence, and process to art.

-What is earth?

As ‘world’ is to disclosure, ‘earth’ is to concealment. Truth is not just a disclosure, but also a rejection, a denial, a concealment. Earth is ungraspable. We know through truth, in the sense of ‘world,’ there is an indefinitely large totality of other possible truths, alternative horizons of disclosure, views disclosing other sides of our world of beings that are equally revealing of Being. One, after all, cannot forget the dark side of the moon. Heidegger’s ‘earth’ is an active property always changing unbeknownst to human intuition; it is, therefore, self-secluding and suppressed. Heidegger explains, “We call this ground the *earth*. What this word says is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere, or with the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises as such. In the things that arise, earth occurs essentially as the sheltering agent” (Basic Writings, pg. 168).

Art disrupts this concealment of ‘earth.’ ‘Earth,’ through the process of art, rises up out of its self-closing, to reveal ‘earth’ *vis-à-vis* ‘earth.’ Therefore, the Heideggerian view of art, relishes in sublimity, the revelation of the ungraspable, coming to terms with the unintelligible. ‘Earth’ reveals the infinitely awesome and becomes a holy place.

Art, so far, sets up a world, brings it out of inconspicuousness and into salience, places it on display. However, not just that, it consecrates its world, rather, the artwork brings the world to charismatic salience. Great art brings things into un-concealment, makes the ‘earth-world’ *holy*, and hence has a quasi-transcendental truth function; by definition, great art reveals a world, and in so doing assigns men a place amongst things, thereby giving their lives significance. It is through the struggle between ‘world’ and ‘earth’ that art is manifested and a society’s essence becomes exposed.

-Earth-world significance

Art works set up ‘world’, but in order to do so it must employ some work materials and equipment: i.e. stone, wood, color, language, tone- collectively ‘earth.’ Works use materials without using them up; works rest upon and set themselves back onto the ‘earth,’ but in doing so reveal the ‘earth’ as ‘earth,’ that is, ‘earth’ is recognized in works as fundamental for their possibility. The demarcation of ‘earth’ and ‘world’

in Heidegger's vernacular is never straight forth. His tendency to avoid binaries oppositions is clearly relevant in his use 'earth' and 'world.' Heidegger asserts that it is through this fundamentally transparent relationship that one is the compliment of the other. Heidegger writes of art's ability to set up an active struggle between 'earth' and 'world.' Both are necessary components for an artwork to function, each serving unique purposes. The parts that clarify and unify the work embody the 'world' aspects, while the practices that help resist such completion make up its 'earth.' They engage with one another, trying to surmount its counterpart: the earth is unable to be fully revealed or explained and attempts to draw the world into itself; the world, more open and unhidden, tries to overcome the secreted earth. This is *sublime*. The existence of truth is a product of this struggle; the process of art takes place within the artwork revealing what was once veiled being exposed. Heidegger, himself, illustrates his theory of truth revealed through the strife of 'world' and 'earth' in this poignant passage.

“Truth establishes itself in the work. Truth essentially occurs only as the strife between clearing and concealing in the opposition of world and earth. Truth wills to be established in the work as this strife of world and earth. The strife is not to be resolved in a being brought forth for that purpose, not is it to be merely housed there; the strife, on the contrary, is started by it. This being must therefore contain within itself the essential traits of the strife. In the strife the unity of world and earth is won. As a world opens itself, it submits to the decision of a historical humanity the question of victory and defeat, blessing and cure, mastery and slavery. The dawning world brings out what is as yet undecided and measureless, and thus discloses the hidden necessity of measure and decisiveness” (Basic Writings, pg. 188).

The terms 'earth' and 'world' are meant as non-metaphysical replacements for what has been traditionally called form and matter, and, also, recall Nietzsche's distinctions between Apollonian and Dionysian, that Heidegger expresses later as the source of this dichotomy. Art is a thing, and a “thing is formed matter.”

In conclusion, it is Heidegger's argument that art is the tension and struggle between 'world' and 'earth,' between concealment and disclosure. This struggle unveils the origin of the work of art and helps to establish cultural identities of the said inhabitants.

Graffiti and the 'Opening Up' of America

Much has been said about Heidegger's critique of Western Philosophy in general, specifically his attacks on aesthetic theory. However, we have failed to really come to terms with what a great artwork would entail. Heidegger never really explains this explicitly either. Instead he attempts to explain the art process, as opposed to methods of aesthetic judgment. The only answer he leaves us is that great art reveals or opens a 'world.' For example, the art of the antiquity comes to express what it meant to be Greek in that day and time and that is why it is great.

In attempting to explain the graffiti art movement in America during the last half of the 20th Century in relation to Heidegger's aforementioned text, it will be important to illustrate not only a brief history of graffiti, but also some of the discrepancies with Heidegger's viewpoint and the realities of graffiti, as well as how I believe the movement as a whole overcomes these shortcomings.

-Graffiti Contextualized

Which of the following political symbols is omnipresent?

A) television

B) the church

C) McDonalds

D) SAMO (Basquiat's tag name, meaning Same Old Shit)

-Jean-Michel Basquiat, (a multiple choice graffiti stencil presented in "Downtown 81.")

Graffiti is hardly something new. This instantly reasserts some of the challenges posed by theories about the 'End of Art,' that cannot be argued against. In the ancient ruins of Pompeii, volcanic magma has preserved a lexicon of political and comedic graffiti. While this challenges graffiti as a novel art form, it does illustrate how graffiti transcends temporality and performatively transforms its meanings from

one civilization to the next, *in par* with Heidegger's arguments on the preservation of the work of art.

Graffiti in Modern America actually didn't start in New York City, but in Philadelphia as early as 1959 (Taking the Train, pg. 41). However, it was in New York City that it exploded into an art and social movement that could not be ignored. It was in the racially diverse boroughs of New York that graffiti festered into a progressive and explosive median for artistic expression of the alienation of modern American life/culture. During this time new forms of artistic expression by the lower class African-American population began to spring forth, specifically in the South Bronx between 1974 and 1977.. This subculture had its own music (at first distortions of record players, DJ'ing, and then rapping, MC'ing), its own form of dance (breaking), and its own art style (graffiti). I see this as a second Harlem Renaissance, an explosive reaction by impoverished African-American youth against their modern situation.

It is important to note that graffiti was not spawned over night, but rather began small. At first it was simply 'putting one's name out,' writing a tag that somehow identified the artist. It was this process of identity politics and hypertext that really gave graffiti its unique medium. Graffiti artist began as anonymous identities and/or slogans. Tags were ordinarily acronyms or partial names and street addresses. It is the use of the sign that really exposes graffiti's ability to play with language and at the same time often *express* something. Soon, graffiti became a competitive process. It was important to get your name out more than other, or to make more noticeable sketches or tags. It was a competitive nature amongst a culture that invented graffiti and at the beginning not 'artists' experimenting with new styles or techniques in a traditional way. Graffiti was a performative experience where the artists made up the rules as they went along. In New York City all of a sudden anyone could be an artist, thus making graffiti a truly democratic art form. Soon graffiti became more than just an expression of identity, but large murals began to appear on subway cars and buildings. Political propaganda, social and cultural critiques, elaborate and surreal masterpieces of neon paints, began to expand the conceptualization of graffiti's horizons. Competition and an ever-increasing public awareness began to move

graffiti out of the streets and into the galleries. Graffiti had burst from its early beginning in neighborhoods, would come to envelop the entire city and eventually the entire world.

-Public Space: The Technology of Graffiti

“I was free, but the city wasn’t. The subway fare had gone up. But that was okay. I knew my way downtown, and walking was deluxe. It meant time was on my side. The streets looked really good to me. They looked like art. Marble and tar. Oil and steel. Chrome and glass, money like fly paper. Solid gold tiles. Neon Literature. Nature pushing through the concrete. I wanted to paint the town red. Paint the town black. ‘And the earth was formless void. Darkness upon the face of the deep. And the spirit moved across the water and there was light.’ New York is my kind of town. The city looked big. And I felt big, because I was apart of the landscape. I am an artist. When you tell people that, they normally ask, ‘What is your medium?’ And I normally say, ‘Extra Large!’”

-Jean-Michel Basquiat, “Downtown 81.”

What gives graffiti its defining and unique essence is its appropriation of the public space to graph its message. This is precisely what makes graffiti a unique and revolutionary art movement that needs to be taken very seriously. Graffiti cannot be nailed down and institutionalized to a mass degree. Graffiti remains outside of the sphere of the Art Industry. It cannot be turned into a *mere* thing, to be displayed for patrons to see, to be abstracted out of its environment and corrupted as an artifact of a capitalist apparatus. Graffiti exists as a form of art characterized by the stereotypical starving artist and rejects the commercialization/exploitation of artistic modes of creation. The clever use of equipment involved in everyday life, like buildings, subways, TV’s, refrigerators, had utility for the aspiring lower class artists, but also helped to emphasize these docile and often ignored objects of American society.

Furthermore, the unique attributes of the graffiti art movement, the equipment it uses and specific rise in history, illicit noticeable similarities and points of comparison with Heidegger’s conception of art as a necessary synthesis of ‘world’ and ‘earth.’ Graffiti uses ‘earth’ in dramatic and violent ways, helping it to transcend its sterile character.

The graffiti artist uses the ‘world’ around them to find objects, i.e. ‘earth,’ they see in everyday life and give them extraordinary properties/caricatures. The artist takes from the ‘world’ puts it onto the ‘earth’ and reveals a ‘new world.’ The utility of buildings and subways is in complete contrast to the leisurely pastime of art. Graffiti humanizes the instruments of daily reality: the sleek aluminum, utilized for the efficient speed of trains, and the bleak brick, the strength and foundation of gothic skyscrapers. Graffiti is a ‘thematization’ of these utilities already present in the city.

Graffiti is also a powerful mode of expression, with propaganda and socio-political commentary as the most noticeable. However, this was not all that graffiti communicated. Graffiti connected the identities of a vast array of artists throughout the entire city. The graffiti artist Tracy explains, “You thought your tag would just disappear because there were so many trains. But it would come back the next day, and you’d see somebody else’s tag right next to yours. That was part of the communication thing. The train would shoot over to Brooklyn and somebody over there would see your style” (Adventures in the Counterculture, pg. 45). Graffiti was able to allow communication, from otherwise complete strangers, to spread into an entire revelation about New York culture. Graffiti’s ability to utilize the space to bring the public together is its revolutionary value.

Graffiti was an illegal art form and the political ramifications of its activity are certainly exemplified. Graffiti was commonly used to assert political messages about drugs, civil rights, poverty, or Vietnam. It was common to see household items like TV’s used to depict mushroom clouds, exposing the sense of alienation over the cold war and the fear of nuclear holocaust. Graffiti stood as an alternative to the billboards and to the posters pasted on trains, as public advertisements. Advertising is the premier example of aesthetics made into utility to efficiently reaffirm the mechanisms of capitalist society. Graffiti was the answer to that, in which trains were distorted and art took a form of sabotage. Graffiti has become a symbol for resistance to the ‘system.’ It cannot be institutionalized and that in spite of extensive efforts to erase and prevent its proliferation, it is noticeable in almost every city in the United States. It opens up a ‘world’ in which this type of artistic

freedom is possible to everybody: to resist society actively, while adopting a critical tone of its governance and behavior. It is precisely the resistance to traditional methods and techniques of normalized art, and the capitalist control of the means of production, that makes a compelling argument that art is not dead, but something retaining hope, that has future possibilities of unlimited socio-political potential and change.

The graffiti movement is a struggle between the artist and the city. This resistance cannot be underemphasized. While the struggle might be against the giant skyscrapers symbolizing American prosperity and strength, the bleak decay of the aging building, the dislocation induced by the subways system, or against the Transit Authority constantly attempting to erase one's work, what is most important is the struggle between the two. Art as counter-culture is a reaction, a negation, an anti-thesis to culture, but it also is a new outlook on life, a new ideal of what culture could be and should be. Graffiti artists hope to transform their environment or leave an imprint of themselves, thus giving themselves to their 'world,' making the graffiti activity infinitely awesome and renovating the dynamic environment of the city into a personal, sanctified, and holy place.

-New York City and the Disclosure of American Culture

"SAMO as an end to midwash religion, nowhere politics, and bogus philosophy.

SAMO as an escape clause.

SAMO saves idiots."

-Jean-Michel Basquiat, (pg.174 in Adventures in the Counterculture.)

According to Heidegger art is the 'opening up of a world.' For graffiti to be an adequate expression of artistic expression it must reveal something about its creators, its preservers, and its neighbors. It is my argument that the graffiti reveals something unique about the New York City experience and American culture in general.

Heidegger argues that great art is communal. People become authentically bound together through their world-earth community. Their shared artistic experience is a reflection of their shared

environment. Heidegger explains the essence of art in terms of the concepts of being and truth. He argues that art is not only a way of expressing the element of truth in a culture, but the means of creating it, providing a springboard from which ‘that which is’ can be revealed. Works of art are not merely representations of the way things are, but actually produce a community's shared understanding. Each time a new artwork is added to culture, the meaning of what it is to exist is inherently changed. Heidegger, in other texts, refers to this culturally manifestation as “being-with-one-another,” that we have a community project, a shared commitments within our society. Great art represents a ‘World-Historical Significance’ in which a people become defined. The happening of truth, artwork, creates a people and a culture. Heidegger elaborates, “Whenever art happens- that is, whenever there is a beginning- a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again. History here means not a sequence in time of events, of whatever sort, however important. History is the transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into the people’s endowment” (Basic Writings, pg. 202). I take this to be the single most important element of Heidegger’s essay *‘The Origin of the Work of Art.’* In Heidegger’s concluding remarks he exposes art as temporally significant. The movement of truth from concealed ‘earth’ to a revealed ‘world’ is a temporal movement of *this* ‘earth’ and *this* ‘world’ in *this day in age*. Art, as truth, is the exposure of *zeitgeist*.

In the context of the latter half of the 20th Century, America had established itself as the preeminent world super power, and American culture was under a significant strain to establish itself. Instantly, after the war, America was endowed with an importance that it had no precedent of having in its past. New York City, as the crux of this new super power, represented the heart of the new American culture. The blossoming businesses, the towering skyscrapers, the cultural integration and diversity of millions of immigrants and natives, the Lost Generation of post-war era, the explosion of the Beat movement that sought to escape from that modern alienation, the two Harlem Renaissances, and, finally, the Punk movement, all helped to establish New York City as the ‘New Athens,’ the ‘New Rome,’ the ‘New Paris,’ the Big Apple, the ‘city that never sleeps,’ Gotham City, and the Capitol of the Twentieth

Century. New York City and its population have been and are representations of American culture. The artistic movements during these times helped to establish a unique identity and ‘opened up’ the American world and culture.

Being young and poor in the big city has its own mythology, its own literature, its heroes and heroines. Athens had its Socrates, Paris had its *La Bohème*, the penniless painters of Montmartre in the nineteenth century and the vagrants/gypsies of the eighteenth, and now New York City has its hipsters, its gangsters, its punks, and its own twisted youth in the twentieth century. Graffiti itself was a communal project by the lower class African-American population to resist their situations and alienation in the South Bronx. However, it soon found expression in the East Village. CBGB, Max Kansas City, and the various clubs like Club 57 at St. Mark’s Place or the Mudd Club, became the new sources of graffiti’s increasing complexity. This new art form took the city by force and it was only a matter of time before SoHo and the Upper West-side swooped in to exploit the movement for all it was worth. Underground ideas became marketable commodities. Young painters began to be treated like emerging rock stars. Graffiti, which began as a sub-conscious pulse amongst rival teenagers in localized neighborhoods, exploded into a movement that dominated all five boroughs of New York City and has penetrated every city in the world.

Graffiti began as a sub-culture and grew to embody the entire culture of America in the post-war/baby bumper era. Graffiti was connected with every part of New York City, from the stacked apartment complexes of the Bronx to the dying gothic buildings of Manhattan to the Downtown exhibits by Andy Warhol, from hip-hop to the rise of Goths and punks, from break dancing to New Wave Vaudeville, from the train to the skyscraper. The New York City sub-culture was an intrinsic response to modernity. In the same way that Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg had expressed the estrangement of postwar America, graffiti desperately screamed of the vital and creative capacities being suppressed in the disenfranchised youth lost in television. The bourgeois art markets, the business barons, the politicians and the police force, and the subway were all perpetrators of a crime, a distinctly modern crime that was unique and personal to its

victims. The post-modern style embedded in graffiti's proliferation was a direct response to the oppression of rules and standards for artistic expression. In doing so, they not only expressed their own condition, but transmitted a message in which many were able to emphasize and take up the call to arms. Graffiti artists were guerilla outlaws fighting a culture and propaganda war, a war with art as the alternative and the solution. They stringently personified a social angst and helped to malign the city that they all inhabited.

It is through graffiti's 'opening up' of American culture, the communal intertwinement with New York City's social and cultural conditions, that I believe that the graffiti art movement does require a degree of seriousness in its engagement. It is beautiful in its use of imagery, detail, and style. It is sublime in its battle between spray paint can and skyscraper, between artist and society. It is poetic in its use of language. It is historically captivating how the different individuals associated with graffiti's proliferation were also key figures in other culturally artistic activities and were acquaintances or sincere friends with other key players in the underground network of artists and art markets at the time. Most importantly, however, it retains a 'World-Historical Significance' in its relationship with the specific temporal space it inhabits, with the 'earth,' the substructures and superstructures of the city's vast demographics, but also its cultural permutations, its additions to the identity of the American people.

Conclusion: Graffiti and Post-Modernity

"*The Origin of the Work of Art*," attempts to express how previous aesthetic notions of the 'Origin of Art' are misleading, that art is phenomenologically horizonless, without origins or conclusions. Thus art is a riddle. However, Heidegger concludes the essay with a riddling question that challenges the concept of the 'End of Art:' are we now in *our existence* historically at the origin of art? This is juxtaposed to Heidegger's original declaration of the 'End of Art'" it supposes that maybe there is a new focus in which art and society is moving towards that in uniquely novel and innovative, that *our existence* has the possibility of bring the aesthetical into the day-to-day. Post-modernism is a response to the angst of modernity, but also a conscious breaking

with the rules of standardized forms of discourse and expression. Heidegger agrees that art's fate will always be undecided because it changes concurrently with truth and modern advances in technology, but it remains to be seen how *mere* advances in technology are capable of transforming the human condition into something alien or even evolved from its nature. It could be asserted that Heidegger accounts for a new revival in art and in response to the existential forlorn of modernity. It begs the question: how is a world represented when meaning is lost? Graffiti is a caricature of reality, specifically a rejection of the realities surrounding the artist and the artist's environment. The modern technologies make this separation essential. Neon paints, glow-in-the-dark paints, and other extravagant forms of graffiti help to illustrate a post-modern world, a reality focused on being surreal, symbolic, and/or hyper-real. Graffiti is the color in otherwise drab world. The language is a critique, a private language at times and other times it is silent, a homage to all that is beautiful and *holy* and that retains hope. In a world where the public space is no longer public, but dominated by the private interests of advertising, Graffiti deconstructs the modern world. It is a childish scribble on an important business form: an exposure of art's utilization by industry to dehumanize, while the impromptu symbol of a spray paint can reveal something intrinsically human in spite of the oppressive and lackluster environment. There is something genuine and sincere in graffiti's relation to art history and criticism. It is a resistance to the oppression of artistic standards, to the capitalist fetish on commodities and the reification of all that is holy, and to the experience of New York in the post-war era. Graffiti, and the other art forms that exploded alongside on the American landscape, help show how living in New York City was to *'live'* art. The entire city was canvas and every day was a performance. Graffiti isn't merely just paintings, but a changing set of environments that literally pull the audience, the entire city, into the aesthetic, providing a new way of life to those involved.

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