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Email: wackyzach7@gmail.com

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The following is not an artwork.

Introduction

Art has been delayed by idealism. The delay is twofold: on one hand, art itself is liable to be misconstrued in the mind of the artist as a metaphysical entity, and following this initial idealistic moment, involvement with art comes to rely on other ideals which proliferate in a climate of lost contact. This reliance is superficial, but the illusion is strong and oftentimes persuasive. It may be true that this situation is mainly perpetuated by historians, critics, and curators, but my sense is that it can slow artists down as well by subsuming their actual concerns under a fabricated mistaken reality. I sometimes feel slowed down to the point of forgetfulness. Although discursive thinking in any regard may cloud art to various extents at different times, I feel that the following seven terms warrant a closer inspection as they shape artistic production and reception. They are:

1. Life
2. Experience
3. Consciousness
4. Human
5. Person
6. Practice
7. Process

I do not argue for the outright abandonment of these terms, although such a total abandonment would be exciting if it were possible. Rather, I argue that these terms should be only held onto with a certain degree of caution and spaciousness, in thought and in speech, lest art become delayed further. The terms under scrutiny are not equal in their frequency of use or potential influence, and for some, only certain usages raise suspicion. This written intervention addresses what I perceive to be the problems with these terms, but it occurs midway through a line of thought. Alternative words and the mentalities they could imply have not yet offered themselves up. Likewise, I cannot fully explore possible alternative contexts that are different from the one in which the seven terms I've outlined circulate and produce subjectivity. In a sense, this text has one foot in the current context of idealism and one in a space of abstraction. On the one hand my aim is polemic, but on the other it is to speculatively identify openings.

Alongside this, an odd feeling of aimlessness pervades. There is a glaring problem that my writing has not resolved: I clearly address what I regard as a secondary issue, which is the proliferation of terms/ideas that have been rigidly linked to art to the detriment of artists. However, I don't delve deeply into what I view as the more primary issue of art being fundamentally misconstrued. Given my line of thinking, it would seem that the terms "art" and "artist" would be next on the chopping block.

But artists need not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Maybe some already have. For them, I imagine that the term "artist" is no longer useful in clarifying their existential position, nor liberating as a social role. And I would imagine that these people do not view their activity or its reception as having the status of art, or find the question of what art is or could be to be particularly interesting. These people may or may not be in association with artists, and artists may or may not attribute the activities of these ex-artists, or to use Duchamp's term, "anartists", any kind of art condition. It is likely that the attribution of both "art" and "artist" occurs as a social gradient, in which case clear demarcations are either authoritarian or comedic.

However, I write under the assumption that both "art" and "artist" are worth holding onto, if only provisionally and somewhat loosely. Without engaging an in-depth analysis, it should suffice to say that "art" and "artist" lack any sort of immutable essence. Though "art" and "artist" constitute a kind of counterpoint to the seven other terms which I disavow in turn, their reification would be a mistake. Before proceeding, a few additional qualifications and disclaimers are needed.

Although writing is a fundamentally a social act, I have developed the line of thinking of this essay in a relative amount of seclusion, without the direct contribution of other artists. Because of this seclusion, I have been liable to a certain amount of shortsightedness and outright blindness. While I have attempted to write in a spirit of utmost honesty, this honesty is relative to a constructed performative apparatus in which I can find honesty to be desirable. A writer is constructed behind the writing, expressing ideas polemically and analytically, and at times ineffectually. The seven sections of the essay shine light on possible mentalities, each rife with skepticism and each approaching a threshold of absurdity; the writing both has and evades function. The confusion of this sentiment will be partially addressed in the "Person" section below. Conversely, the proscriptive thrust of this essay and my apparent tendency to generalize a category of "artists" is a measured stylistic choice; I will leave it at that. I have no wish at present to divert my line of thinking into a legible intellectual position or to fashion it into a well researched thesis complete with a bibliography. My line of thinking has simply been momentarily arrested and transcribed with haste but without authority.

As such, this text does not propose a philosophical framework or attempt to describe the way things actually are. To do so would either limit art to the failures of philosophy, or succumb to realism. The aim is to point to a broadened scope of art made available through holes in linguistic and mental constructions that have calcified around the supposed nucleus of art. These holes will be poked in the paragraphs that follow. Rather than scrutinizing or deconstructing the ideals of interest with a sound theoretical mode of analysis, this text subjects faulty idealisms to what essentially amounts to the movements and responses of a sensibility. Any inconsistencies and contradictions in method are therefore indicative of a shifting ground that evades any underlying or overarching metaphysics. In fact, such a condition cannot be called a ground at all. Each of the listed terms/ideas contain within themselves various claims to reality that must be in a sense corrupted from the inside, which is to say that the proposed artistic sensibility must deal with each reality claim through escape by any means available, and this will entail various pathways. The sensibility does not simply disavow a series of concepts in turn from a privileged detached vantage, but must be liberated from inside the grip of each concept. This apparent motion is only superficially dialectical, for artists are in a sense already liberated. The charge could be made that art itself is constituting a metaphysics, but as will be pointed out below, such

a conception of art can only be provisional because art projects beyond whatever metaphysics are inhabitable within any given manifestation of art.

1. Life

"And I suppose they told you too that my roll of life is not natural? But before proceeding to conclusively confute this begging question it would be far fitter for you, if you dare! to hesitate to consult with and consequentially attempt at my disposale of the same dime-cash problem elsewhere naturalistically of course, from the blinkpoint of so eminent a spatialist."

- James Joyce, Finnegans Wake (1939)

The concept "life" is perhaps most striking as an instrument of organization. Built into this organization are principles such as chronology, length, age, value, a relation to work, and a relation to art. As the conception of life is altered, either through restriction or opening, the level of organization is also altered. Without the construct of life as an overarching ideal, art may assume a more primary position that allows for new possibilities for organization and disorganization.

Many artists from many periods have done important work to call into question the relationship between art and life. Pertinent ideas have included the re-enchantment of the everyday, the aesthetic potential of sociality, and liberated working conditions, to name just a few. So, the abandonment of life as a category opposed to art is not really anything new, but it has become clear that utopian projects for the widespread transmutation of life into art or art into life have lost steam.

Underlying the longstanding duality between art and life is the presupposition that life has an ontological status that is either compatible with art or capable of assimilation. Beyond this, even, is the presupposition that life exists in a real and meaningful way. What is oftentimes glossed over in discussions of renegotiating the relationship between art and life is the fact that a conception of life is historically determined, in addition to the fact that usually these discussions limit the meaning of the word "life" to the description of a totality encapsulating the everyday experience of a human being during their natural lifespan.

It is nowadays common to use the phrase "my life". This phrase is seemingly so common that it raises no eyebrows, and is a socially endorsed way of thinking about existence. Alongside this notion of "my life" there is the understanding that all other individuals also have their respective lives, and that the common ground between these isolated lives is a larger notion of life, and this "life" describes what happens between birth and death for everyone. In specialized fields or certain occasional cases life may refer to the experience of animals. It is only in contexts where biology is concerned that life refers to all extant lifeforms. The possibility of extraterrestrial life is rarely considered, and almost never is brought to mind by the usage of the word "life" in art contexts. More often, life is thought of as a somewhat open terrain of human possibility, with trajectories that may be reimagined through creative effort and determination seeking to liberate life from oppressive societal structures. Implicit in this usage is the view that life is valuable in itself, and has or is at least able to have a dignified status. Despite the elucidation of theoretical accounts of life as damaged by historical capitalism, "my life" and "life" often have a somewhat banal connotation tending toward the biographical, the individual, and the affirmational.

In narratives of emancipation, revolution frees life from that which alienates and degrades it. I wonder, though, if such an emancipation would necessitate freedom *from* life. Certainly, life as it has been designed for us is unbearable. However, just as the material

conditions for life have been designed, so too has the very conception of life itself. Art may provide idealistic visions of life assuming new meaning, and in doing so provide resistance or even a hypothetical total liberation. An example of this mentality is the way in which some artists have responded to the incessant marketing of lifestyles over and above discrete products by emphasizing their activity as lifestyle primarily. These models of lifestyle-as-art may in fact constitute a mode of dissent, but the status of life as an entity remains entertained and ultimately endorsed, and any transubstantiation of life by means of art is rendered illegible.

Established conceptual frameworks for understanding "reality" determine to a large extent what occurs. Given this, life convolutes the understanding of art by making it seem as if art occurs inside of life, or as if artists operate from within life, and any understanding of art as it exists socially is subsumed by the category of life. This is different from speaking of artists responding to their immediate contexts, which they do, but life is not synonymous with context. Life can be part of the overall contexts in which artists find themselves and make work, but life is not integral to these contexts. This is evidenced by the long time span during which art was being made without people having any conception of "my life" or even life apart from other entities such as the movement of seasons or the church, and there was simply not the context for thinking of life as a reified entity. This is not the time to hand our lives over to more refined idealisms in an attempt to dig ourselves out of some kind of well, but to move instead into more open and abstract possibilities.

Art shrugs off cultural limitations and their attendant obfuscating properties. Just as the traditional forms of painting and sculpture were revealed by the Conceptual generation as lacking any irrefutable and eternal link to the condition of art, the form of life is being revealed as inessential to art and artists. This revelation does not occur in some ideal realm of art, nor is it indicative of the annihilative modernist impulse toward the monochrome, but is simply a result of artists coming to terms with the incompatibility of their existence with a life that is always overdetermined, dead on arrival, subject to reinvention but never to rebuttal.

What remains after life has been abandoned as a theme? There is inevitably some fear that arises that there may be nothing at all, much less a fertile ground for a deepened engagement with art. But can it really be said that art is living in the same sense as organic tissue is living? If life is damaged, then is art damaged by association? The abandonment of the life theme is not suicidal. Artists are alive and not dead, and notions of vitality and survival remain pressing concerns. The charge of escapism is more challenging to dismiss, but only from the viewpoint of someone who is operating solely from within the predesignated boundaries of life. The escape, if it is to be looked at as one, may not necessarily be into some kind of protected realm of art, but rather into a condition that is *actually* life. This life would be life under a completely new definition, and therefore could not be called life at all. In this sense, the phrase "new life" is vague, and this is why I caution against artists' indiscriminate or unqualified use of "life" as an idea and term.

2. Experience

"Under the blind but powerful drive of instinct, every activity of their small and glassy bodies was directed unconsciously toward the attainment of a goal unknown in their own experience-something stamped so deeply upon the memory of their race that each of them turned without hesitation toward the coast from which their parents had come."

- Rachel Carson, Under the Sea-wind (1941)

The Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. has put on two Yayoi Kusama exhibitions centering around her infinity rooms in the past five years, one of which is still up after having

been extended multiple times. The immersive Van Gogh experience, which included projections of animated painting montages in lieu of paintings, was not just a blip on the radar, for now advertisements for a similar experience of the art of Gustav Klimt are flooding New York City subway stations. As a drive toward the experiential permeates the cultural sphere, it is unclear whether the primacy of direct experience is being redirected into oblivion by image media, or if it persists as just another form of consumption. While the instances listed above are outlandish and easily dismissible as spectacle, it would be a mistake to assume that the evolving nature of experience is irrelevant to the mentalities and work of artists, even those who have withdrawn from contexts of mass culture. Even as some artists aim to provide revelatory and subversive experiences, the notion of experience itself as it relates to art is contestable.

Experience is now a central value of managed life. Before death, it is important to gather as many experiences as possible, all the better if the experiences are maximally intense, positive, and novel. The world, through travel and through digital projection, is available as an experience, and it should be experienced. Unitary and sectioned off experiences are privileged over subtle qualities of experience or generalized experience, and thus experiences become arranged and pursued according to hierarchical values, many of which are established by culture. Identifications and selves are solidified and gathered around experience, allowing people to "speak from their experience", and in this way experience enables authority. Even experiences which break through habitual patterns of mind and movement, the dullness induced by continuous inattention, and everyday sobriety are subject to clinging, repetitious stupor, and reification. This is not to say that certain experiences of art aren't enormously transformative, politically charged, or transcendental. Experience, that is intelligible sensate impressions and conscious cognitive events, remain a major component of the interest of art. In the context of art from Europe and the United States, the foregrounding of the viewer experience that took place in the 1960s was a major development that broadened the scope of art. But despite the richness of the experiential, there are many facets of art and artists that are not covered by a phrase like "the art experience".

Simply put, a great deal of art is not experienced. Much of the draw of art is that it oftentimes provides an experience that suggests something beyond experience. This is similar to the way in which an illuminated crescent moon suggests the non-visible sun. This image is only one of many possible ways of conceptualizing the forever open ended relation between the experienced and the non-experienced. Not only can art lead to a heightened awareness of what is not being experienced, in the sense of absence, emptiness, negation, or framing devices, but it can also invoke what is *not able* to be experienced. The objection may be raised that a turn toward the non experiential disempowers the active potentiality of art, neutering its concrete spatial and political effects through naive recourse to magical thinking, detached speculation, or insularity. But even if the non-experiential is purely speculative, which I contend is not the case, it is nevertheless far from a dead zone. Because intimations of it can only be gleaned from the furthest extremities of experience, in subtle and unexplored movements of the imagination, the non-experiential disturbs assumptions about agency and exerts its own mysterious pull. A suspension of the tendency to reify experience therefore also suspends the instrumentality often assigned to it, and allows for what happens *within* experience to open up as the implicit conceptual frameworks underlying, and to an extent determining experience are tampered with.

The foreclosing of this possibility is what makes experience into an idealism that hinders art and artists. When experience is reified in an art context, the mistaken impression that art is concretely beholden to experience may arise, and this conclusion is an unnecessary burden to artists. The possibility that there are artistic developments taking place outside the experience of artists is oftentimes relieving, as it admits art's transgression of limiting models of psychology in addition to other myriad conditions which misconstrue and degrade experience. This is not about

cynical disavowal so much as relieving pressure. I argue not for the disavowal of experience, which would be nonsensical, but rather for the abandonment of the idea that all art addresses the context of experience exclusively. I do not argue that art is necessarily independent from experience; I merely suggest that the primacy of experience should not be taken for granted or regarded as neutral. When the abandonment of an idealized notion of experience takes place, art can weave freely in and out of perceptibility, disregarding arbitrary demarcations of experiences and individuals. Perhaps the most compelling implication is that art is able to address or even give rise to fluid and poetic conceptions of both being and the even more rarefied possibility of non-being. Moreover, and perhaps more pressingly, the ontological grounds for experience are open to dialogue that occurs between artists.

A danger in upsetting the place of experience in the conception of existence is that experience becomes disempowered or even rendered moot in the face of some kind of transcendent object or property. To fear this would be to fall into just another idealism, one which is based upon a rigid conflation of experience and "reality". Again, renegotiations of the status of experience occur socially, and point beyond solipsistic or alienated models of art. Actually, a commitment to addressing the conditions of both mediated and direct experience is more important than ever; I hold that any meaningful mode of address must treat the valuation of experience with a degree of spaciousness and flexibility. The radical color pedagogy of Josef Albers, which places enormous importance on direct experience, provides just one possible model for proceeding in this direction. Undoubtedly, artists deal with the issues raised by the experiential in modes that suit their own varied needs by calling upon whatever means they find necessary, and in doing so not only give rise to radical aesthetic experiences, but indicate unforeseen potentialities for experience itself.

3. Consciousness

"What do you think, Aggivessana? When you say thus: 'Consciousness is my self,' do you exercise any such power over that consciousness as to say: 'Let my consciousness be thus; let my consciousness not be thus'?"

- Gotama Buddha, Middle Length Discourses (c. 6th or 5th century BCE)

Consciousness is a word that is comparatively rare in art contexts, but when it is occasionally applied to art and artists a degree of confusion inevitably ensues. The main source of this confusion is the vagueness of the word resulting from the different traditions of thought which use the word in their own specific way; it seems that everyone has their own definition of consciousness which has been amalgamated from its various meanings. There is the Marxian usage, found in phrases such as "false consciousness", which refers to a certain way of considering the societal status quo that enables class oppression, and fits within Marx's historical materialist philosophy. Perhaps a variant of this usage is the notion of a "consciousness industry", which fits within a similar philosophical framework and addresses the role of mass culture in "producing" consciousness. Scientific reductionist models of consciousness posit that consciousness is an epiphenomenon of the physical brain, whereas more challenging conceptions have emerged from recent research by quantum physicists who say that human perception collapses wave functions. There are new age promises of expanded consciousness, a "hard problem of consciousness", complex phenomenological accounts of consciousness from philosophers and theologians, and a Ph.D. program indicating a "history of consciousness". Prevalent usages of the word in art contexts have to do with the notion of an artwork somehow bringing about a change in consciousness or introducing a new kind of object into consciousness, and the word at its most basic level often denotes a nonphysical ground for all experience. It is

worth noting that usages tend to privilege the waking state over dreaming or deep sleep.

These are just some ideas and definitions which shape the notion of consciousness. While some artists may direct their attention to the complex questions around consciousness and others may not, the mysteriousness of consciousness is undoubtedly fascinating. However, unspecified and careless applications of the word in discussions around art and artists may unwittingly hinder its possibilities, in that lack of clarity leaves the door open for inherited models of consciousness such as those listed above to overdetermine these discussions. For example, it would be a mistake to force art into a materialist conception of consciousness to the exclusion of other conceptions, or to solidify around the understanding that an artwork is an object of consciousness in relation to a perceiving subject. So often, adherence to models of consciousness produces limited and limiting experiences of subjects, objects, and time.

Additionally, discussions of changes to consciousness often include faulty narratives of progress, doctrines of salvation, and ideologies based upon lack. Rather than making discrete artworks which are then fit into various preexisting models of consciousness, thereby confirming and bolstering their viability, artists may give rise to entirely new models, or even question the need for any kind of static model whatsoever. This does not imply that art constitutes its own separate form of consciousness any more than it implies an outright dismissal of consciousness as completely unrelated to art and artists. While both of these extremes are contestable and certainly available to artists, either of these positions are liable to be misunderstood. The claim that everything is consciousness is still a realist claim. Whether or not we can speak of an art without consciousness, art resists hardened views of what reality is. A satisfactory account of consciousness and its artistic implications lies beyond the scope of this essay. I only suggest that the idea of consciousness should be dealt with more caution and precision than has hitherto been done.

4. Human

"Use a Rembrandt as an ironing board!"

-Marcel Duchamp, The Creative Act (1957)

Luckily, less heavy lifting is required in this section because many writers, thinkers, and artists have been speaking and writing critically on the subject of the human for some time. I do not claim to write authoritatively on the intellectual trajectories that have culminated in the present vigorous questioning of the category of the human, nor do I feel that I am able to contribute anything especially new to the discussion in written form. However, my interest in the subject fits in with the trajectory of the line of thinking represented by this essay, so some of the artistic implications of "human" are worth briefly covering.

Nowadays, what is provided as human is simply unacceptable to many artists, who may choose to eschew the term altogether. For them, the range and position of the human category as it is currently proffered is so shrunken, degraded, and unlivable that its outright refusal has become both a strategy and a necessity. Though it may be just a problem of semantics, it should not be taken as a given that artists are human beings. Despite the diverse and rich ideas explored in discourses of post-humanism and animism, as well as the findings of ecology, a refusal of the "human" is still widely misunderstood, or not seen as an option. There is seemingly an assumption at play here that art pertains exclusively to the human species. Under this assumption, art is created by human beings and received by human beings. This view may be reinforced with the additional assumption that aesthetic experience as a whole pertains

exclusively to the human. To hold these assumptions without question would be to limit the scope of art. First of all, archeological findings suggesting Neanderthals may have made artworks, or the elaborate courtship rituals of some bird species are examples of the potential disruption of an anthropocentric conception of the aesthetic. Furthermore, as has been argued by Donna Haraway and others, the reliance of the human species upon many other lifeforms for survival precludes the outlining of what belongs to the human species and what does not, for any such boundary would be arbitrary.

Although the incorporation of ecological themes into contexts of art and artists does much to dispel myths of humanism, the point is not to arrive at a sort of ecological art. The issue of the human goes beyond biology, for art itself has been anthropomorphized. Whatever sort of way art is made available to the imagination and whatever the form of its realization, whether it be a conversation, a drawing, an absence, or a spiritual encounter, art even in its most rarefied and esoteric instances is in danger of being identified as solely human. This identification reduces the manifold abstract potentialities of art to a mirror-like function which falls back upon a definition of the human that is inherently conservative. Regardless of this false recognition, art may extend its motion against the idealism of the human, causing a reorientation toward the nonhuman in an instance of transgression. This experience, which is aesthetic in nature even if it falls outside of the beautiful or the sublime, may expose the arbitrariness of the neatly delineated human, a radical vastness beyond the human, or the nonhuman elements that have been hiding inside the human. However, the inattentive human may hardly register any of this at all due to the persistence of the illusion. The mental habits conflating art and humanness are hard to break; luckily, these habits are often broken involuntarily and unexpectedly.

Just as scientists do not yet understand exactly how the electrical impulse of the heartbeat begins in fetuses, artists do not yet understand exactly how art exists. Much of artwork is driven by this mystery and its social dimensions. Under the current dominant metaphysical regimes of positivism and materialism, the role of the artist is reduced to cultural worker. Artists perpetually exceed and also fail this role, and in doing so, find themselves outside of the human; that is, they find themselves as nonhuman. This in no way implies a rejection of "humanity" or the importance of art to humanity. In a way, it could be said that art *is* human. However, to admit this requires an expansion of categories, allowing for an extension of humanity beyond arbitrary delineations; the notion of the human would have to be revised.

Note: Since the original publication of Latte Akimbo 2nd Edition I have written more extensively on the topic of the human (see Addendum).

5. Person

"He did not look like an artist, he looked like the quarry worker, like a wrecker demolishing walls, and like a monk. Then she did not want him to stop or glance at her, because she wanted to watch the ascetic purity of his person, the absence of all sensuality; to watch that- and to think of what she remembered."

- Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead (1943)

The conception of the artist as a person has profound implications for their understanding of themselves as well as for the sociality experienced between artists. As the self conception of artists is tied deeply to their relationship to art, I do not want to advance a view of "person" as it relates to art that is dogmatic or in any way disempowering to artists. That being said, my frustrations with overdetermined conceptions of the artist as a person are very much tied to the desires of this whole essay. If you are an artist, you may take it or leave it. My question is: Must

we think of the artist as a person? In the conventional sense, artists are people. But if the idea of the person is felt as a constraint or delay to art, sometimes or always, then it is able to be suspended, taken up by artists only when it is advantageous to do so and dropped like a hot coal when it is not.

The concept of the person is inextricably linked with the concepts of the self and the individual. It does not have an immutable essence because it is contingent on changing cultural norms and values. Despite its fluidity through time, the concept of the person cannot account for all aspects of the existence of artists. If artists are thought of rigidly as individual persons, they are both removed from relationality with regards to art, including their own work, and with regards to other artists. Though it could be argued that a relationality exists between discrete artists and artworks, it may be the case that artists and art are inextricably woven in a complex cosmology of utter dependence. The illusion of discrete and separable entities in the form of art and artists would then be an impairment of clear vision and result in unnecessary problems. It can be hard to tell where one artist ends and another begins. Likewise, it can be hard to tell where the artist ends and the art begins. Sometimes, it may seem as if an artist is fully immersed in art, as a lotus blossom in a pond is totally immersed in the cool water which pervades and fills it. This is not to say that all that is contained within art is of the same substance forming a totality. Connections are broken, and certain manifestations become eclipsed or go dormant. Artists may defend territories, deny lineages, and steal. They also may emphasize their person if that is their choice, just as they may choose to emphasize anonymity or the collective. If the conception of the person is culturally determined, now filled up with ideologies of individualism and unprecedented forms of alienation and a host of psychologies, then the artist may disavow this person. This disavowal does not occur in isolation; ideas of who the artist is and is able to be are always negotiated socially and across time, and artists are mutually formed as they simultaneously form others.

The claim that artists are not people is not meant to suggest that artists form some kind of elite that possesses power in the form of hidden knowledge, distinguished from those who are not artists. Nor does it suggest that artists are detached from material conditions and political urgencies, but it does suggest that artists are able to model forms of social existence which escape from the confines of reified selfhood and individualism, thereby upsetting normative power relations. This is a possibility of art which has direct bearing on the wellbeing of the artist, whose status as artist is designed to be a source of constant alienation, even as this status is objectified and mystified. The abandonment of the idealism of personhood, if only at certain times and in certain settings, must therefore remain available to thought.

6. Practice

"Someone who says privately or overtly 'I have decided' but who never acts, however favorable the circumstances (the existentialist-behaviorist argument continues), has not decided. Private decisions which precede public actions may be thought of as the 'shadow' of the act, gaining their title from being part of a complex properly called 'decision': though even here the term 'decision' if applied to the inner part only would be a courtesy title since there is no check upon the nature or existence of the inner part and its connection with the outer."

- Iris Murdoch, The Sovereignty of Good (1970)

The word "practice" is not completely irrelevant to art and artists, but it covers only half of the entire equation at most. An emphasis on the "practical half" of art and artists takes the connotations of "art practice" and applies them universally without discernment, precluding understandings of art and artists which don't fall under the rubric of practice. Practice as an idea

is offered to artists as a readymade way of thinking about and relating to art, and it may be to the benefit for some artists to question the wholesale adoption of this term.

Practice assumes that art is an activity to be carried out like any other. Practice assumes that artists refine their skills through habitual activities, and apply these skills to various contexts. Practice assumes repetition. Practice assumes competence and discipline. Practice assumes an opposition to theory; practice and theory are the only two options of artistic work. Practice assumes that while artists may do different things related to art, these things are all part of their practice. Practice assumes that activities external to an artist's practice can become part of their practice. Practice assumes that all artists have practices, and that their practices belong to them individually. Practice assumes that artists are not practice but rather that artists conduct a practice as part of their lives. The artist and their art constitute the center of their practice. Practices are modified according to the needs of the artist. That some artists choose practices which do not produce marketable goods does not disprove that practice assumes a degree of professionalism. Practice assumes that one practice can be talked about on the same plane as another practice, because all practices share the quality of being practices. Affinities are drawn between different practices. Practice assumes that the components of practice are legible, and instances of illegibility are still legible as such; in this way practice assumes that artistic activity is behavioral. Practices are fungible. Practice assumes the artist's statement. Practice assumes that an artist's practice fits within a larger art discourse added to by many practices. Curatorial practices coexist alongside artistic practices. Practice assumes continuity; someone who has stopped practicing has stopped being an artist. Paradoxically, practice assumes that there are some things that are practice and some that are not. An artist may have an art practice in addition to being a homeowner and having a day job. A practice is clearly demarcated and it is understood by others which activities and behaviors are part of the practice and which are not, and any confusion about the boundary between the two classes of activities and behaviors are part of the practice itself. Practice assumes that practice can thus be isolated and talked about from a bird's eye view; artists may speak of "my practice". Practice assumes self consciousness. Artists are expected to be able to describe their practices. Practice assumes that activity is the basis of art. Practice assumes that continued engagement with art will produce value. Practice assumes that artists are only able to act from within their own practice. Certain practices are more effective than others, and a practice may become obsolete. Practice assumes that an art exhibition is a culmination and result of practice. Practice assumes that if someone does not have a practice, then they are not an artist. Practice assumes that artists know what art is and that is why they can practice it. Practice assumes coherent methodology. Practice assumes a self-determined individual who exercises the freedom to choose a liberal mode of practice; practice assumes agency. Practice tends to assume that the practice is oriented toward the production of art. Practice tends to assume notions of change, learning, and growth. Practice tends to assume a degree of respectability, legality, and ethical conduct. Practice tends to assume an arts education at a college level. Practice is taken to the next level with a graduate degree and legitimated by institutional endorsement in the form of exhibitions and teaching positions: your practice is in fact a practice. Practice tends to assume a fluency in contemporary art discourse and a place within the art world. Practice tends to assume voluntary action. Practice does not include reception. Changes in art reflect changes in artistic practice. Art is practiced.

7. Process

"Precarious labour in machine-learning industries, and the repetitive processes of conditioning and training it requires, raises the question: who or what is being trained? Clearly, it is not only the machines, or more precisely the neural networks. People are being trained, too- as microworkers, but also as general users."

-Hito Steyerl, Mean Images (2023)

Addressing the issues of the term process as it relates to art is less urgent because it is apparent that many artists working today are no longer beholden to it, and haven't been for some time. The heyday of "process art", which to my mind occurred in coincidence with Richard Serra's 1967 verb list, seems to have long passed, with artists guiding their vision to other places such as relationality or the "rhizome", among many others. Despite the shift, an over-reliance on the idea of process still influences the present understanding of art, reinforcing conservative views around the role of the artist, art history, and the nature of art. When the primacy of art experience is shifted from the object to the artistic process through which the object was made, this is seen as an expansion of the boundaries of art giving rise to a liberation enjoyed by the artist, and in many ways it is (or was). Under this process oriented conception, finished artworks function as a physical archive of a larger project, an artifact of an ephemeral gesture, or as a record of decisions previously made by the artist. So often though, these narratives of process only serve as justifications for more object-worship, as the process itself is compounded in the artwork and gives rise to its own objectification. Even still, physical and material processes are mistaken as inherently artistic. Of course, these problems have been dealt with in many ways by artists, such as by taking measures to avoid the conflation of a photograph of a performance with the artwork itself, or by refusing traditional gallery exhibitions. Furthermore, artists appropriate and mime the processes of social reproduction and emerging technology, thereby implicating their work within ambiguous structures of labor and power; rather than reifying process, these approaches call it into question.

The claim that art itself is a process, as well as claims that the nature of the self or reality is a process that art is able to represent, are open to question, if not totally untenable. With the term process immediately comes a view which privileges linearity and causality, and with it, the trappings of the mechanistic. Art that claims to emphasize process usually defers the artistic encounter to either a consideration of an already determined past or to mere surface qualities; only rarely does the viewer become part of the process. Discrete works of "process-art" demonstrate the end of a process rather than the beginning, subordinating both artists and viewers to narratives of creation. In this way, the term process tends to disempower reception by idolizing the figure of the artist as an initiator of events only discernible through the material qualities of a somewhat mystified art object; such objects may be bolstered by allusions to obscure methods and technologies.

Art is not reducible to a series of decisions made on the part of the artist, nor is the artist a lone figure central to the production of art. Artists do not experience art history as a linear or progressive development; this has been understood for some time. The usage of the term "process" provides a one sided account of the ways in which artists relate to art, an account of action as opposed to non-action, and production rather than reception. Artists are not beholden to restricted notions of their own process, for their process is only one part of a larger context which cannot adequately be described by the term "process". The potential imaginings of this context and its implications for artists remains a pressing concern of art.