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Art and Play as Arenas for Resistance and Change

Strategies and Possible Locations

Eli Bruderman,
Art Institute of Oranim Academic College of Education

Abstract

This paper examines whether Art and play can create an arena for activism and change, and if so, under what conditions this can take place and what strategies must be employed for its resistance to be effective. For the purpose of my inquiry, I link Art and play together and see them as natural, inseparable partners. This line of thought follows Friedrich Schiller and Herbert Marcuse, but ideas of thinkers, such as Johan Huizinga and Charles Fourier, can also be traced at the root of this approach. I argue that in its traditional institutions, especially museums, Art cannot constitute an arena for creating meaningful change in society and unable to generate resistance and change within its own socially accepted frameworks. A real change brought on by Art and play can happen in arenas that are fundamentally alternative to the institutional Art world. Finally, the discussion will turn to the alternative arena, the scene of communal creative activity, where Art and play create a change and have a meaningful effect on social processes.

Keywords: museums; play; art; beauty; Marcuse; hypo-modernism; technocracy

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Eli Bruderman, Art Institute of Oranim Academic College of Education [1]

Part One: Schiller and Marcuse: The Necessity of Art and Play as a Future Prospect for Freedom

The poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller argued in his famous book from 1795, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*, that "play" is a state in which man's humanity is fully attained. Man, in his view, realizes his humanity when he plays, indicating play as a process or action. Schiller made the connection between aesthetics and ethics in order to create a better society. In his view, the aesthetic experience and beauty have a role as mediator between two central, opposing forces in humans: form and life. Form is a force of principle (as a general law), derived from rational thinking, whereas life is a sensory force expressed through the senses. If one force prevails over the other, the result is detrimental for the individual, thus it is important to maintain a balance between the two forces. The aesthetic function, i.e., regarding beauty and the experience it evokes in us, neutralizes the control held by the two forces, life and form, and another force appears in the

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1   Eli Bruderman, PhD, Art Institute of Oranim Academic College of Education: Israel, E-mail: eli_br@oranim.ac.il

human sphere, which is the power of play. This latter is a force that inspires the freedom to choose between forces instead of being controlled by them (Schiller, 1986).

Schiller tells us that the observation of beauty as well as the state of being within the experience of beauty evokes the power of play that enables a person to choose among his powers. These both are a significant complement to human nature and by virtue of beauty and the power of play, the individual becomes a whole, more integrated creature. Individuals are whole in their nature when they play, and play creates a balance between their internal forces (Dickie, 1974, p. 73; Gur-Ze'ev, 1997, pp. 102-104; Schiller, 2004, pp. 68-72). In societal terms, beauty and play also have an ethical perspective. The moment that people, as a gathering of individuals, learn to play and strike a balance between the rational and the sensory, they will be able to establish a beautiful community based on freedom, equality and fraternity.

Marcuse: Society as a Work of Art

Schiller's influence on Marcuse was very extensive (Gur-Ze'ev, 1997, pp. 43, 103-104). Marcuse drew many of his ideas about a utopian aesthetic society that actualizes its freedom in the act of play from Schiller's concept of human realization (Marcuse, 1978, pp. 121-131). However, unlike Schiller, who did not aspire to create a plan of action and then devise a utopian revolution, Marcuse viewed the aesthetic realization of man conceived by the "play impulse" as in fact a tool for creating a *future* utopian society. "The unification of technique and art, work and play...implies an aesthetic reality—society as a work of art" (Marcuse, 1971, p. 185). Marcuse was not necessarily speaking of a genuine revolution. This is because he feared the consequences of revolutions and in this respect, he explained: "Because we know of too many revolutions that became a means for maintaining oppression and its perpetuation" (ibid., p. 179). Marcuse spoke of the unification of certain elements in society and culture that

are viewed as opposites, such as, technique and art, in order to create something new and different from their earlier essence. He spoke of a complete and final reconciliation between form and content that leads to a perfect redemption of the human being. In his book, *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse saw "the erotic reconciliation (union) of man and nature in the aesthetic attitude, where order is beauty and work is play" (Marcuse, 1966, p. 176). In the same chapter, Marcuse continues with: "The play impulse is the vehicle of this liberation. The impulse does not aim at playing 'with' something; rather it is the play of life itself, beyond want and external compulsion—the manifestation of an existence without fear and anxiety, and thus the manifestation of freedom itself" (ibid., p. 187). Marcuse's words resonate with some of Schiller's ideas. Among both scholars, we see there is no play but, rather, with the awakening of beauty, or the reign of beauty, the beautiful aesthetic society is the unified form and content which facilitate the existence of a future society. "In a genuinely humane civilization, the human existence will be play rather than toil…Then, man is free to 'play' with his faculties and potentialities and with those of nature, and only by 'playing' with them is he free" (ibid., p. 188). These remarks may sound abstract, but in the fourth part of this article, I will present several examples that will demonstrate how Marcuse's arguments correspond with Schiller's conceptual roots in contemporary, realistic frameworks that are realized in a type of utopia.

Museums as step toward a society as a work of art?

In effect, museums could have established themselves at the very crossroads of utopian revolutions. This may have contributed to a change in the face of society while in pursuit of the concept of society as a work of art. Museums have all the elements of a cultural micro-cosmos while carrying the potential for a utopian revolutionism in the spirit of Marcuse's vision, as well as the ability to create a better society as Schiller envisioned. The museum as a world of art and its wide range of activities—a large part of which is play activity conducted in the framework of museum education and

training departments—seems like an ideal platform for creating change and perhaps even exporting utopian revolutions. But this did not happen. With caution, but also with a certain degree of resolve, it can be said that a revolutionary call or action, even one that produces change in the long run, combining aesthetics and play, has yet to be heard or seen by museums in the world and probably will not burgeon in the future. This is despite the fact that museums today are introducing modifications in their education and training methods, and the role of playfulness is increasing and occupying a significant share of the museum's activities. I wrote about this together with my colleagues in an article that indicates how change is taking place in museums as they increasingly turn toward playfulness. (Bruderman et al., 2020). In this article, we focused extensively on the genre of immersive play as adopted by the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (and then followed by other museums throughout Israel and the rest of the world, such as the Dutch Rijks Museum) as an example of the use of play as a way of bringing the diverse populations that visit the museum physically closer to the various objects in the museum. However, this playfulness and the art exhibitions on display at the Israel Museum, the Rijks Museum, and other museums worldwide that adopted playful approaches, did not in fact ignite a spark of change via social and cultural processes. In Israel, the country which I focused on, museums did not help stop anti-democratic processes that escalated during this period, nor did they contribute to a change in consciousness regarding the ongoing conquest in the depths of the Palestinian territories. It often seems that art as a utopian revolutionary tool, or the artist as a torchbearer in the forefront of the camp, as Marcuse depicted it, is neither one nor the other.

In the following chapters I will illustrate the main reasons, i.e., a great dependence on government technocracy and private capital, which prevent museums and other cultural institutions, such as repertoire theaters, from advancing toward the revolutionary crossroad and then subsequently inducing change. I will begin with a

short overview that will shed light on the technocracy concept and then I will examine its relationship with art and museums. A similar analysis will then be conducted in regard to wealthy owners of capital.

Part Two: Are Technocracy, Art and Museums Compatible?

Before I elaborate upon the complex relations between the technocratic elite, art, and museums, I would like to review and characterize the concept of technocracy. Who are the technocrats? Who are the scientists, academia, and politicians that Marcuse has so capably described? I will use his definition, which seems quite comprehensive, and written without antagonism toward this class:

> Let us first look at the so-called new working class, which is supposed to consist of technicians, engineers, specialists, scientists, etc., who are engaged in the production process, albeit in a special position. Owing to their key position, this really seems to represent the nucleus of an objective revolutionary force, but at the same time it is a favorite child of the established system, which also shapes the consciousness of this group (Marcuse, 1970, p. 60).

These are therefore, as so succinctly described above, the technocrats. In the second half of the 20th century, this group included visionaries, trailblazers, and futurists, who to this day have had a far-reaching influence on United States policy in the government, the economy, urban planning, and national nuclear policy. Examples are Anthony J. Wiener and Herman Kahn who were members and founders of the conservative Hudson Institute. Wiener served for two years as a consultant on urban planning in the Nixon administration. Kahn supported the possibility of a nuclear war, and his character was a source of inspiration for the satirical black comedy, Doctor Strangelove, by Stanley Kubrick.

The technocracy roster varies from period to period, yet it always consists of scientists, futurists, entrepreneurs and capitalists. After World War II, nuclear scientists led the technocracy. Today, the technocratic leadership is composed of the digital information elite. Google, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, Facebook, the transhumanist movement, Raymond Kurzweil and the singularitarians—all, without exception, represent today the connections between scientific research, technological development, capital, and the often intricate and multifaceted ties to the corridors of power. The constitution of the technocracy varies according to the period, but not in the pattern of its operations.

Even today, as earlier noted, the information sector produces (members of) the economic elite that continues to tighten its grip on culture and human society. This is achieved by means of a great variety of technological advances, principally developments in artificial intelligence and robotics that silently but effectively are eliminating numerous professions and adding to unemployment. We hear and read reports about excessive surveillance and of course in the reports we tackle on the ethics of artificial intelligence technology (Zuboff, 2019; Bird, Fox-Skelly et al., 2020). In the future, the numbers of the unemployed will gradually increase, and this silent revolution in life as we know it remains unchallenged, without significant criticism coming from the art world and certainly not the museums themselves.

The world of science, along with its technological developments, has gained significant prestige in recent centuries (Houweling and Wolff, 2020, pp. 1432-1450; Sprat, [1667] 2002, pp. 177-179). The public's impression of technology remains positive, and technological inventions are considered first and foremost a tendency that is favorable and that enhances the way of life. This is true even when it becomes evident that technological advances or inventions often carry a heavy price, such as: environmental pollution from cars, factories, plastics, airplanes; wars on a global scale; the nuclear race among the greatest powers on Earth; and nuclear accidents on an unima-

ginable scale, even in peacetime nuclear facilities. Despite all these, the prestige of science and technology has not been compromised. The relationship between technological advancement, capital, and the bureaucracy that carries out their development with governmental support has not changed. In fact, it appears that the aura surrounding these technological developments has in fact expanded, and attempts by members of the United States Congress to break up Facebook, Google and Microsoft, as major monopolies such as the Standard Oil Company were dismantled in the past, is not bearing fruit at this stage.

Why, then, despite the enormous amount of damage inflicted by technological developments on society (carrying with it a possible undermining of governmental institutions), culture (leading to a cultural homogenization and the erasure of cultural differences and diversity), and on the individual level (turning the individual into an incapacitated person entirely dependent on technology); why, despite the "horrors of industrialization," as Marcuse (1970a, p. 27) termed it, has the towering stature of technology remained so imposing? Why is the economic and political power of its developers growing? And why are most of us willing to go, like the blind, in the footsteps of the technocratic elite? Finally, all these reflections lead to the question most relevant to this article: Despite the obvious failings of technology, why has Schiller's and Marcuse's vision not materialized, and why have art, play and beauty not healed the sufferings of humanity?

Part Three: 1. Art in the Shadow of Technocracy: Beloved Enemies, Play and Art under the Patronage of Law, Work and Planning

Among the classes that formed during the Industrial Revolution, and with the increase in the scientific-technological mentality, especially among the working classes, aesthetic activities and play were considered a sort of out-of-place pleasure, a form of

social disorder, a type of activity that involved a malicious aspect, and sometimes also a source of political unrest. A similar attitude was expressed toward any creative activity that had no goal or purpose, and particularly toward the field of art (Marcuse, 1978, pp. 124, 125; Schiller, 1986).

This perspective, rooted in the technocratic worldview, views life as one long and perseverant struggle to be powerful, to assume control, to gain knowledge, abilities and greater resources than others. Life is also a struggle between the individual and him or herself because of the conflicts it creates. Moreover, due to the incessant desire for power, society is continuously under the threat of destruction and disorder. However, to a certain degree chaos can be contained by *culture* if it is anticipated and domesticated. The need to domesticate chaos became a burning issue in the 19th century when Western society underwent a wave of shocks, i.e., the industrial, social, and cultural changes in Europe (Crary, 1999, pp. 13-14).

Art, through museums and play, and later principally by means of television and sports, became the main tools in domestication, sedation, containment. These tools were used as a legitimate counterforce, a force endorsed by the social mainstream. Art and play are therefore perceived as a force that does not threaten the technocratic project and does not foresee a future, a force that organizes society on the basis of an aesthetic order. For the individual, the aesthetic experience has become a type of legitimate expression, a way of estranging and expelling anti-social drives and tendencies, libidinal excesses, aggressiveness, and all those other forms society does not consider useful.

Through art and other aesthetic expressions, such as sports and play, the individual is allowed to purge him or herself of feelings of anger, rage, incompetence, incompatibility—all those emotions and feelings that if permitted active political expression, would threaten the normal course of society and cause disruption (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1993, pp. 168-169; Marcuse, 1978, pp. 118-124). Art and play are

offered as fantasy worlds where disappointments from the outside world can be resolved; they can be approached from another angle, redefined, replayed, until finally they are overcome. Thus, without the unnecessary risk of revolution and without the need for the corresponding suppression, and while even deriving a certain pleasure from it, humans thus accommodate the oppression built into their technology-saturated lifestyles.

Examples of assuaging frustrations by means of art or play are also not lacking today: movies, amusement parks, shows, concerts, museums, Disney World, reality programs whose artistic and play value is very low but highly effective in draining excess frustration. These means also provide viewers with escape from daily drudgery on one hand and grant new validity to the individual's self-abilities on the other (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1993, pp. 174-180; Haug, 1986, Chapter One). Art, in its many forms, is therefore an artificial Garden of Eden for the oppressed and a safety valve for the oppressor. On one hand, it soothes the sorrow and suffering of the powerless, weaker members of society, who are mostly us. On the other hand, it provides an illusion of power to those same weakened people, who, once again, are us. The art displayed in museums, acted out on the theater boards, played in the sports leagues—the playfulness inherent to all these, the purposeless enjoyment they all offer, the pleasure derived from fantasy—all these sedate the subject, while the real power remains in the hands of those institutions and their sponsors who control these cultural resources without threat from any social sector.[2]

In the eyes of the elite groups of knowledge, industry and capital, aesthetic creativity (that produces aesthetic order) and the enjoyment of this production has therefore a highly significant benefit: They drain energy excesses and channel the de-

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2   On the dialectics between accelerated development and the need for control that is built in to modernism, see Jonathan Crary, 1999, pp. 13-14. In regard to art and culture of the masses, see: Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 1993, pp. 178-192; Tamar Liebes, 2004, pp. 169-173.

structive potential latent to the masses into harmless amusement. The harmony that is a built-in element in the forms of art and play keeps society in line, and order preserves the stability of the general public and enables the sustained and uninterrupted planning of the future.

Art and the aesthetic experience are therefore a type of beloved enemy—the same rebellious "other" who poses a perpetual challenge yet returns and is conquered and absorbed in the calm fabric of law and order. The capability of art to play this role stems from the canonical aesthetic ideal of "unity in diversity" that can be found in the (artistic) work (Hein, 1976, p. 145; McKee, 1977, pp. 14-21). The absorption of conflict and its containment within the ruling political system thus extends the ability to control the existing order.[3] The social body, according to this perspective, is a complex yet complete configuration, consisting of a rich diversity of variances that can be effectively contained, a synthesis that creates a cohesion of threatening diversity. Rebellious gestures undergo a rapid process of domestication, and they delicately and shrewdly are transformed from a threatening essence into the fashion of the day, i.e., a conventional everyday situation (Hein, 1976, p. 145; McKee, 1977). In the present, various forms of high art cleanse and purify the blunt forms of protest of the past. Jazz and rock music, which were initially marginal phenomena, became assimilated under the label of avant-garde music, or progressive music. The Dada Movement, including its art techniques, was transformed from a movement that kicked against the conventions into a prolific source of artistic language and relocated itself at the heart of artistic consensus. Pop art, anti-art, all these and more were driven from the margins to the center of higher art, and their radical value was swept away in its own mainstream.

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3   Adorno and Horkheimer in their article, "*The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*," present in detail the process of how the hegemonic group, i.e., the capitalists, control through mass culture or what they call the "culture industry," the social order that enables their rule. See Adorno and Horkheimer, 1993, pp. 158-180.

The political role of the aesthetic experience comes down to, therefore, the preservation and maintenance of the social status quo. In any case, art and play are used to neutralize feelings of disappointment and potential revolutionary sentiments (Debord, 2001, Fragment 58; Hein, 1976, p. 145). At the same time, the styles created by the energies of oppositional elements are restrained by processes involving the acknowledgment of the establishment and its support, and thus protestors and rebels eventually become assimilated by the establishment. The anarchy of art is directed toward itself, and at the end of the day, it becomes a victim of law and order.

In the sections above, we have become acquainted with several critical approaches that focus on the subversive threat inherent to art and playfulness, and about the necessity to neutralize this threat. The ruling elites, who have in effect shaped the fabric of industrial-capitalistic society of the last two hundred years, have achieved this by channeling play, art and design into benign and harmless outlets. In contrast to these perceptions, there is another approach that treats the subject from an entirely different angle. The threat to order and law is not the inbuilt element in art, according to this perspective. The scholars who represent this approach put forward a completely inverse argument. They seek to find order contrarily in art, and attribute such importance to it that they claim this order is in effect the factor that constructs reality itself in society. The human creation, in all its varying forms, these thinkers argue, is a paradigm that enables most human beings to understand the world most accurately, including its law and order. For we understand the world itself—the world that we did not create and do not control—in the best way precisely through our little inventions, which are microcosms of world order. The world that is revealed to us in its barest form is a chaotic and incomprehensible world. It is an absurd and meaningless world and it will remain so if we don't impose meaning upon it by using our ability as human beings to organize worlds of meaning of our own (Carlyle, 2005, p. 8078; Dewey, 1980, pp. 25, 49-51; Shusterman, 2002, pp. 97-105; Zeltner, 1975, p. 50). Consequent to these actions of a formal (in the sense of "form" and in distinction from

"content"), aesthetic organization, we learn to appreciate complex appearances of order that gradually increase in complexity during our lifetime.

Within such a context as the above, the aesthetic ability is not actually a counterforce but rather a positive, obedient and amiable agent of political indoctrination. An example of this can be observed in Plato's writing. In his essay, *The Republic* (*Politeia*), he explains about the importance of music of a certain kind. If children of the guards listen to it, a love for order will rise up in them, and this will be converted into a type of discipline and obedience to laws (Plato, *Republic, Vol. III*, 1975, pp. 260-263). The same type of thinking is also present in The *Symposium* dialogue in which an initial assessment of beauty—whether sensible, concrete or material—is conducted, and which should ultimately serve as a step forward toward the appreciation and admiration of abstract forms of political institutions (Plato, *Symposium*, 1975, p. 139). This approach is also central to Kant's aesthetics. In his book, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, he writes about the imaginary force in charge of collecting materials and their assimilation before creating a conceptual order and imposing it as a form in the world (Hein, 1976, pp. 146-147; Kant, 1969, Clause 49, pp. 130-134).

The two approaches reviewed above emphasize the power and importance of play and art, which also exemplify the role of a free aesthetic activity without a purpose. In effect, these forces are "recruited" for the purposes of governance, sustaining the existing order as well as the organization of the future by those who know what is right for society. On one hand, play and art are perceived as subversive and threatening activities, and therefore they must be controlled and subjected to the rules of law and power (the first approach). On the other hand, the aesthetic embodied in them is perceived as rooted in the base of things in the world and holds the key to knowing the world and its perceptions of order (the second approach). From two opposing ends in the perception of the role of art, the result is paradoxically, "one." Art is held

in the grip of forces as responsible for education and understanding law and order in the world, as well as the supporting factor for existing law and order.

Museums in the Shadow of Technocracy

In relation to art, the fate of museums, despite their relatively late arrival on the cultural scene, is not that different from art. Museums have inherited the "genetics" of art, described above, into their basic structure. On one hand, museums are a place where a configuration of forces became frozen in culture through the creation of order and harmony and, at the same time, the rules and codes of the concept called a museum coalesced around the interests of the rich patrons of the arts of the 18th century. Hence, other than the nature of art, which includes menacing libidinal aggressions on one hand, and is the source of order and comprehension of the world on the other, Art has been subordinated to patronage since ancient times. So, in addition to the roles of art in culture, art is also constantly being supervised by those who finance it and enable its material existence. Two examples of this type of regulation or outright control will clarify the depth of the problem.

In the year 2010, a proposal was submitted to the Tate Museum in London referring to an art workshop that sought to deal with the climate crisis. The workshop would also discuss issues related to the Tate Museum itself and its connections with the oil corporation BP (British Petroleum Oil Company), whose financial support for the museum was quite significant to the subsistence of the institution. It is worth noting that the former CEO of the BP Company, John Browne, was head of the Tate Museum Board of Trustees. The year 2010 was a bad year for British Petroleum, and consequently, bad for the rest of the world. One of the most polluting production companies in the world, BP was the source of a wide-ranging oil spill (and water and land pollution) in the Gulf of Mexico, which lasted five months between April and September of that year. The museum accepted the art project proposal but deman-

ded that the political activism be obfuscated or downplayed so that it would not be directed at the museum itself and against the institution's sponsors, including the major patron, the BP Oil Company. The final censored result clearly demonstrated how a public institution is capable of voluntarily providing cultural legitimacy to a powerful and controversial corporation. It also showed how such a company as BP, which is engaged in maximizing its capital gains at the expense of the environment, does not shy away from cynically exploiting a cultural and highly esteemed institution that is perceived by the public as possessing considerable moral integrity.

Another example pertains to the Royal Dutch Shell multinational company. The latter supported the London Science Museum for 20 years and in fact tried to pull strings regarding a museum program that again contended with climate change. The London Science Museum was involved in a different scandal in 2016, when peace activists protested against the main sponsor of an exhibition on Leonardo da Vinci and engineering. This sponsor was Airbus, the seventh largest weapons manufacturer in the world, which, among others, sells weapons to governments accused of violating civil rights.

In addition to corporate patronage supervision over a museum's mode of presentation, the rules established for representation and presentation on museum grounds also determine what is considered knowledge. A panel of experts, undisclosed to the public, generally decides what a good work of art is, and which work deserves to receive corresponding recognition. In effect, it determines the taste of the public, the artistic canon and consequently shapes a very narrow historical consciousness that eventually becomes acceptable to all. The museum, being an archive and archivist of art, as well as a repository of scientific representations (natural museums), and of historical facts and processes (historical, ethnic and archaeological museums), creates, for the layman—who is not an expert in any particular field or an expert in one of the many disciplines on display—a cultural and historical worldview.

Museums produce harmonious cultural networks in which culture is admirably catalogued and organized, seemingly without mistake, while adhering to objective rules of assortment, selecting, research and the dissemination of knowledge. The museum is a direct link to the past, to the greatness of the past. As a result, it is one of the most powerful instruments in shaping the collective memory of a people and their culture. But no less important, the community and general public also learn that legislation processes and the setting of norms and codes in museums are justifiably controlled by small and powerful groups of experts in their field. These intermediaries are subordinated to capitalists with their own financial and political interests as well as interests involved in accumulation, private collection, and the enhancement of their private assets. The modes of representation and the rigid codes that perpetuate them in the museum realm create a built-in elitism. Ultimately, the museum remains largely nontransparent to the majority of the population. Only certain people who specialize in art, curation, exhibits or similar, and have lots of free time, can derive pleasure from and develop a profound comprehension of the objects on display. These are generally people whose economic situation is comfortable and secure so they can invest a lot of time and energy in the development of a gratification which is very difficult to achieve from a work of art, or from extensive reading and the persistent observation of historical or scientific material. From the perspective of the elites, this is highly welcome. The knowledge ultimately remains in possession of the experts despite the fact that it is circulated and on display for everyone. This is reminiscent to a great degree of Egbert Schuurman's critique of planning processes headed by technocrats in Western democracies who at the same time circumvent institutions of debate and critique in many ways (Schuurman, 1983, p. 4). Even in museums that are supposed to be part of the core of the democratic structure, the knowledge that constitutes power stays lodged in the hands of the privileged and rich few. From all the reasons described above, we learn that museums are one of the most powerful

tools used by technocrats and their intermediaries in order to reinforce technocratic planning and the structure of knowledge. This is manifested in the following ways:

1. Knowledge is withheld by the elites and their powerful proxies in culture.

2. Planning the future and understanding the present relies on the past. This is a situation that produces linearity and a linear logic of perceptions of order and time that generate narratives accepted as the official truth.

3. Visual representation is based on order and harmony. This ranges from the architectural structures of the museums themselves to the halls, the methods of suspension of objects, the presentation of paintings and objects, and the consistent suppression of bodily impulses (do not touch, speak quietly, keep your distance from the displays).

4. Reinforcing the equation: History is equivalent to the grandeur of the human creation in science, art and technology. This point is debatable with respect to the scope and validity of the equation in art museums. In my opinion, it takes place in the art space no less powerfully than in museums of science and archaeology, but only in a more covert manner.

Part Four: Art and Play in the Context of Social Agents of Change

From what I have written so far, some readers might detect what seems to be a tinge of despair regarding the ability of art—within the restraints of the institutionalized world—to be employed as leverage in generating a greater or lesser radical revolutionary change. This is true about the institutionalized and established world of art such as museums and certainly repertoire theaters that rely on the capital of governmental technocracy and private donors alike. But there is another space apart from the established and accepted world of art where art in fact does produce significant change in

the social fabric. I will present examples here, regretfully, only a limited number, due to the restriction on the amount of words. In this context, I will present the Israeli case although there are many examples throughout the world.

In the last two decades, social movements have emerged in Israel whose general goal is to pursue change in communities where they chose to settle and be part of the community. Some of these movements decided on art as a main tool for creating change. The nature of these movements is similar to the grassroots movements type found all over the world, whose activities come from below, both in the community and with the interests of the community. These movements are often led by activists whose character is very different from the modern activist typical of the 20th century, on one hand, but whose actions are a sort of fulfillment of Marcuse's utopian vision: an ongoing revolution in the style of "society as a work of art." The ideological and cultural frame in which these groups operate, I call "hypo-modernism." This is a pattern of thinking and operation whose emphasis is the local; the community. It involves a type of social involvement and action from "below," and the agents of this mode of ethics, i.e., various organizations and societies, are often spread out like a network of rhizomes. I will also argue that the hypo-modernism presented here, in my opinion, constitutes a process of the realization of Marcuse's positive utopia. In activities conducted by hypo-modern organizations in the communities where they are operative, they engage in a type of venture that involves an interest-free playfulness and a certain type of artistic creation that qualifies as an "other" to the very role of art that is found in museum and gallery spaces.

Hypo-Modernism—The Utopian Realization of Aesthetic Play

I'll start by clarifying the concept of hypo-modernism. This is relatively a new phenomenon that includes the practices of criticism, resistance, and pragmatic action conducted in small and local communities. It is being characterized by modest action,

silent resilience, sort of a quiet shout, and social forces with ethical strength that are gaining momentum, both in the world and in Israeli civil society. "Hypo" is a prefix indicating a low intensity or low level. Its etymological origins come from Ancient Greek (ὑπο) and it can also be used as a preposition, meaning "under(neath)" or "below." If there is one quality that characterizes hypo-modernism, it is the fact that it is connected to the ground, the earth, and grows from it, that is, from below. Its discourse stands in stark contrast to the postmodern discourse and so does its aspirations in all realms of cultural praxis. In hypo-modernism, we will find social urban communities of activists assimilated into the population out of a sense of a deep and humble mission, while their sole aspiration is to help out the population that is being crushed under the boot of the "free market" of the wealthy. In hypo-modernism, we will find the human being creating and playing with recycled objects and inventing neighborhoods built from old shipping containers once transported by cargo ships. In hypo-modernism, we will find art and architecture engaged in a resistance to post-modern narcissistic forms of self-realization. The hypo-modern message is a humanistic one. It brings back the individual, being of vital essence, to the center of the cultural arena, while the ethics of the common good is its guiding beacon. This is a message that comes from below, from the roots, a quiet statement, devoid of razzle-dazzle and pathos. It has no hubristic tendencies and no traces of uninhibited ambition indicating "conspicuous success." Hypo-modern activism is marked by a desire for compassion, by a long-term, concrete, day-by-day praxis, by dreams of a better world. This is in contrast to dreams of "the good life," typical of the post-modern, post-truth era. The latter life can be summed up in an endless desire for visibility, ostentation, and a satisfaction of narcissistic needs. The post-truth life involves a fragmented ego that strives for self-actualization and unattainable perfection which creates dependence on all types of self-appointed experts and coaches who boast a scientific or religious reputation, or some type of exotic spirituality. A hypo-modernist is a pragmatic agent of change who pursues change in his or her own way, without violence,

over a long period of time, when his/her positive actions amount to a resistance whose purpose is to *both* physically and politically clean up the environment (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010, p. 480).

The activist of the 21st century, namely, the hypo-modern activist, has evolved and departed from the pragmatic activist of the postmodern era. He or she is not the consummate romantic figure of resistance, with forelock fluttering in the wind, brandishing a speech full of fervor and revolutionary jargon, as the typical modernist activist. The activism of today is often based on a process that is in contrast to the traditional processes of "being an activist" and on the rejection of the old mindset of the denunciation of the "other."[4] The militant activist of the 20th century was built largely on the definition of his/her "other": capitalist, fascist, dictator and similar—together with a deeply entrenched rejection of this "other." The contemporary activist, i.e., the hypo-modern one, being a direct successor of the postmodern activist, objects to the binary divisions of "otherness" and of values. Acceptance of a variety of values, a pragmatic orientation in achieving goals, professionalism—all these distinguish the activistic political being of the hypo-modernist (ibid., p. 480). The new movements are marked by a strong desire to reject simplistic divisions between the activist and his/her "other." Although the "other" of the new activist is still owner of the means, capital, real estate, i.e., the exploiting capitalist and the like, as the movements become more local, the "other" who has now become the target of the activist's labors, is often the non-militant and commonplace civilian. So, paradoxically, there is often a lack of trust between those who present themselves as professional producers of social change, who know what is right, who have the tools and skills to create resistance, and between the citizens themselves who are supposed to benefit from the change (Anonymous, 1999, pp. 160-166; Chatterton, 2006, pp. 259-282).

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4   City-based social communes named after the old kibbutzim, that work and live within the urban communities.

Hypo-modern activists are engaged in resistance that is not at all romantic and in actions that cause him or her to "get dirty" while dealing with the daily squabbles they encounter. Hypo-modernists tend to reject ideals, shake off stagnant identities and abandon the transcendental search for the ideal good subject. Instead of all these, the involvement in political projects is defined via a complex and intricate multiplicity of identities that are always in a process of evolvement and movement on the basis of experience and negotiation (Castree, 2003, pp. 3-12; Gibson and Graham, 2006; Grosz, 1999; Whatmore, 1997, pp. 37-53). Contemporary activists are involved in new "self" practices, and their political identity grows from their daily actions, which are aimed at specific projects and campaigns.

Marcuse's book, *The End of Utopia*, consists of a collection of lectures and discussions that documents Marcuse's conversations with German students in 1967. In this book, the image of the hypo-modern activist can be identified by his/her actions whose features we are familiar with today. In one discussion in the book, Marcuse responds to a participant who asks, "If the vital need for freedom and happiness is to be set up as a biological need, how is it to materialize?" The following excerpt is from Marcuse's answer, which sounds to me like an incisive observation made by a revolutionary futurist with a view toward hypo-modern thought and action today:

> Marcuse: By "materially convertible" you mean: How does it go into effect in social production and finally even in the physiological structure itself? It operates through the construction of a pacified environment. I tried to indicate this in speaking of eliminating the terror of capitalist industrialization. What I mean is an environment that provides room for these new needs precisely through its new, pacified character, that is, that can enable them to be materially, even physiologically converted through a continuous change in human nature, namely through the reduction of characteristics that today manifest themselves in a horrible way: brutality, cruelty, false heroism, false virility, competition at any price. (Marcuse, 1970)

Hypo-modernism is first of all the creation of a peace-seeking environment, an environment that attempts to achieve genuine change in human nature. In the example I provide below from a number of campaigns that have been carried out in Israel, hypo-modern agents of change utilize art and play as key tools in creating both environmental and human change. Unfortunately due to limitation of words, the example is lacking and limited in scope.

"Culture Movement" as social-artistic Movement for Utopian Aesthetic Play-Oriented Realization

In the year 2004, six young art graduates from high schools around the country convened together and decided to apply their art to social purposes. After completing one year of community service in the fields of art and education, the six founded "Culture Movement", which established groups of artists-educators who were chosen to work in the peripheral populated areas of Israel in what they call: "urban kibbutzim"[5]

The idea was simple: All those taking part in the project went to live in the towns and neighborhoods in the geo-political periphery of Israel and engaged in artistic-educational activities with children, youth and adults. The notion behind the project was to get these artists-educators to see these new places as their home, so they would become attached to these locations and at the same time commit to the cultural activities they launched there, activities that would be much more than just professional work whose goal was to earn a living. The movement's site states that members of the Culture Movement "are committed to creation, education and culture and these are their main mission and activity at the location [...]" "Culture Movement" appears to espouse in its vision the other utopian reality that Marcuse foresaw: "The unification of technique and art, work and play, of the 'kingdom of necessity' and the 'kingdom

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5   https://tarbutmovement.org/.

of freedom' [...] this means an 'aesthetic' reality—society as a work of art." (Marcuse, 1971, p. 185)

In what sense, then, is Culture Movement a hypo-modern movement? It seems that quite a few of the statements noted above and on the movement's website are reminiscent of modernist manifestos of anachronistic idealistic modernist groups. However, several features of "Culture Movement" indicate a dramatic difference between the former and the modernist movements that attempted to change the world. "Culture Movement" indeed aspires to shape the image of Israeli society, and, in this aspect, it bears the modernist fingerprint, but at the same time the movement focuses on a small community through local activity in the region it wants to empower. "Culture Movement" is not interested in mounting a revolution that will smash to pieces the world as we know it. Its people believe in a methodical "doing," on a small scale, a focused "doing" in which *pathos* and *manifestos* do not command a main objective, but rather where the purpose is the artistic venture—anonymous but intimate—which is pivotal to the community where they belong and where they share each day with its members.

The art of "Culture Movement" is an ethical-practical means of changing the world, but this change resides in small-scale, everyday actions that are replicated via hard work. They adhere to Marcuse's motto, "society as a work of art" (ibid., p. 185), while Schiller's philosophical spirit walks between the lines of theory and praxis. The modernist manifesto movements, such as, the Dada Movement, Fluxus, Futurism, Expressionism, and more, were ultimately preoccupied with an audience that would follow them, and, most importantly, observe their work. Whereas, "Culture Movement" is devoted to a local community and not an audience; they are committed to

"doing" and not "showing." In this respect, they themselves declare: "To say farewell to the audience and connect with the community!"[6]

Another quality that makes "Culture Movement" a hypo-modern movement is its rhizomatic-network structure. It is a movement that spreads its socio-cultural agenda by means of a branching-off procedure, typical of a horizontal network. The rhizome has no starting point and no primary principle. It consists entirely of embranchments, mazes, unexpected encounters. The rhizome is defined by connectivity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp. 7-15; Lechte, 2003, Volume I, pp. 186-188). The rhizomatic aspect of "Culture Movement" is manifested in the fact that it is spread out over 15 localities in the Israeli social and geographical periphery and numbers some 1500 members, and all this without a rigid leadership hierarchy.

Part Five: Summary

Can art and play assume a role in significant social change? This article indicates that this role is indeed practicable and, as such, one that fulfills itself in small social frameworks. The latter takes place in the context of communities in which forces of change use art and play for creating a better society and more or less consciously strive to create "society as a work of art." It would appear that the prima facie natural space, the source site of the call for change—led by art and play—would seem the institutionalized art world. But, oddly enough, there is clear evidence that this same site is serving oppressive forces in society. The two potential factors of social change, that is, of art and play, therefore, co-occur at this site simultaneously, i.e., in the service of oppression and as a potential force of change.

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6   From the document of the movement's founders. For further information (in Hebrew), see https://tarbutmovement.org/.

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About the Author

Eli Bruderman is a Senior Lecturer at the Art Institute of Oranim Academic College of Education.

He has published extensively on the intersection of Art, technology, culture, and education. He is the author of Beauty of Consumption: An Aesthetic Investigation of the Designed Product (Bar-Ilan University Press, 2017) and Joe in the Cloud: Artificial Intelligence, Technological Singularity and the Question of Human Value (Pardes Publishing, 2023). His forthcoming English-language book, Turning Artificial: Technology, Consciousness and Human Purpose (2025), examines the philosophical and ethical implications of human-AI relationships through a Hegelian framework of mutual recognition.

From 2016-2019 Bruderman served as Chief Curator and Head of the Youth and Education wing at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem—overseeing educational programming and curating educational-art exhibitions. He previously served as Art Education supervisor for the Northern District of Israel's Ministry of Education (2009-2016) and was chief editor of Platform, the Israel Museum's journal of museum education.