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The Artist as Cultural Producer: A Call to Thinking

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Abstract

New aesthetic frontiers often demand a re-examination of the fitting foundations of artistic practice; such is the case with the virtual image as an aesthetic genre. While several games satisfy ethical standards, numerous ones do not. This paper deals with the importance of an ethos of stewardship that comes with a vision for all games as a new aesthetic form in visual culture generally, but more explicitly, the applications herein of such ethics apply specifically to the group of games for which violence is a key element.

I will demonstrate the importance of twenty-first century technological breakthroughs regarding insights of the brain, and precisely, the adolescent brain, and through a Heideggerian and Lacanian lens, I call for thinking between neuroscience and philosophy in order to cognize a hybrid of knowledge for the greater good of humanity. I argue that the *long-term* effects in viewing violent, virtual images should be of the utmost concern in society. Within a framework of the ethico-aesthetic, cultural stewardship proves necessary for producers creating virtual images containing violence. Therefore, I favor the creation of and abidance with a newly-defined ethico-aesthetical framework of cultural stewardship, wherein artists and cultural producers incorporate the egalitarian core value of accountability in understanding the complexities associated with the virtual image. In addition, I call for courage in artistic restraint from evoking unbalanced explanations of social reality due to the manipulation of the fetishism of violence. These core essentials of cultural stewardship have the ability to function within the creative realm of the artist's freedom of imagination, while willing the good to society by looking at the face of the human other who calls upon society to care.

Key Words: artist as cultural producer, cultural stewardship, ethico-aesthetic, implicit egotism, team-of-rivals

Introduction

New aesthetic frontiers often demand a re-examination of the fitting foundations of artistic practice; such is the case with video gaming as an aesthetic genre. At times, it appears that some creators of video games neither realize they are part of a new aesthetic field of media nor do they possibly acknowledge a sense of responsibility to society as a producer of culture due to questionable standards displayed in the content of their works. While several games satisfy ethical standards, numerous ones do not. This essay deals with the importance of an *ethos* of stewardship that comes with a vision for all games as a new aesthetic form in visual culture generally, but more explicitly, the applications herein of such principles apply specifically to the group of games for which violence is a key element.

Regarding violence, Martin Heidegger experiences his own angst in association with the Nazi Party, whereby, perplexingly, he never takes the opportunity to recant publically or perhaps have his own possible dialogue with Posey.¹ However, his insights into technology cannot be ignored, for they are part of establishing the essence of technology in which artists become conscious of their own essence and the possible loss of that essence. Heidegger advocates thinking by inquiring on the essential "prerequisites" needed in order "to think with essential rightness" (1993, 383). Thus, what calls society to a state of thinking is current neuroscientific knowledge of the brain and its relevance with the virtual image, and more specifically for my argument, a virtual interaction by adolescents with a violent synthetic image, an image cultural theorist Paul Virilio defines as "created by the machine for the machine" (60). In other words, this virtual image of electronic optics culminates into a synthesis of "*computer-aided perceptions*," with "optical imagery" of refracted or reflected light, and a "sharing of perception" between a human subject and a machine accountable only to itself (Virilio 1994, 62, 59). Therefore, Virilio asserts that virtual images involve conflicts in the "fusion/confusion of the factual and the virtual" within mechanical imagery, an imagery differentiated from the imagery of painting, sculpture, photography, or even film (1994, 60). Due to neurophysiological studies in France, Virilio asserts that for the first time in over two hundred years, the tide of discourse within science and philosophy has shifted from the "objectivity of mental images" to the "question of their reality" (1994, 60). Thus, the call to think should now go beyond the surface of knowledge and take a "leap" to the region where thinking exists (Heidegger 1993, 377). Heidegger asserts that a person may believe he or she is thinking when actually no higher-order cognizance occurs, for what "properly must be thought" turns itself away from humankind from the onset (1993, 373). Therefore, complex logistics in virtual images warrant the importance of grasping the necessary prerequisites to synthesize knowledge and then go beyond that knowledge to the depths of cognizing with appropriateness for humanity for this process demarcates ethico-aesthetics. Within a synthesis of knowledge in *logos* as the rational appeal that helps oversee the world and intertwines with an *ethos* of credibility, the ethico-aesthetic discerns the essentials in relevance toward humanity.

I will demonstrate the importance of twenty-first century technological breakthroughs regarding insights of the brain, and precisely, the adolescent brain, and through a Heideggerian and Lacanian lens, I call for thinking between

neuroscience and philosophy in regards to technology in order to cognize a hybrid of knowledge for the greater good of humanity. I argue that the *long-term* effects in viewing violent virtual images should be of the utmost concern in society. Within a framework of the ethico-aesthetic, cultural stewardship proves necessary for producers creating virtual images containing violence. Violence, which is predicated on a multiplicity and complexity of power, has the potential to reconstruct itself and resurface through a variety of avenues within society, in which the constraints of this paper allow elaboration only on implicit egotism of narcissistic origins. Therefore, I favor the creation of and abidance with a newly-defined ethico-aesthetical framework of cultural stewardship, wherein artists and cultural producers incorporate the egalitarian core value of accountability in understanding the complexities associated with the virtual image. In addition, I call for courage in artistic restraint from evoking unbalanced explanations of social reality due to the manipulation of the fetishism of violence.² These core essentials of cultural stewardship have the ability to function within the creative realm of the artist's freedom of imagination, while "willing the good" to society by looking into the face of the human other who calls upon us to care.³ Thus, the virtual image is in need of intricate analysis from neuroscience and philosophy so that creators of this image utilize appropriate freedom of creativity and not espouse oppression from violence personified as fetishism.

Relation of Art and Science

Understanding visual complexities through the lens of modern neuroscience proves invaluable for the creator of the virtual image. In past arguments regarding art and science, numerous debates indicate that the two domains together are inappropriate for creating and assessing the image. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel declares that the imagination withdraws itself from all scientific clarification, as science occupies itself with what is "necessary," whereas art avoids the "regulating activity of thought" and is inappropriate for "strict scientific discussion" (2004, 8). In similar fashion, Immanuel Kant distinguishes art from science, in that, an artistic genius imparted at birth is to be the rule of guidance and not science (2007, 137). In dealing with a non-synthetic image, that is, an image outside the realm of computer-graphic software, these past arguments perhaps have validity in facing counterarguments regarding the relation of art to science.

However, Heidegger states that "science itself does not think, and cannot think - which is its good fortune" and guarantees its designated place in academia; for science in its own manner always "has to do with thinking" (1993, 373). He continues this line of insight by arguing that science is "fruitful" only when the abyss is discernible, which "lies between thinking and the sciences" (Heidegger 1993, 373). I assert that the chasm is now discernible amidst the sciences and thinking, an ethico-aesthetical thinking, which encompasses a cultural stewardship of both *logos* blended with *ethos* to vault over the chasm and into a critical thinking of appropriateness between the relationship of art and the virtual image. Therefore, when dealing with the technological frontier of synthetic imagery from electron optics, I assert that with philosophy leading the way, the art world is better positioned to reevaluate its views of art in relation to the sciences in order to cognize the full realm of scientific knowledge and its impact on the human brain.

Complexities of the Brain and Virtual Image

Creators of the violent virtual image can best aid society through the egalitarian core value of accountability in understanding visual complexities processed by the brain. Neuroscientist David Eagleman asserts that seeing does not occur with the eyes, but with the brain.⁴ He posits that "all visual scenes are ambiguous," and the brain must unequivocally deduce "billions of photons streaming into the eyes" (Eagleman 2011, 23). Basically, Eagleman claims we turn our eyes to what interests us, yet we are unaware that we see only a restricted funnel of vision throughout our lives (2011, 24). In addition, he asserts that we experience what is called "change blindness" when we do not look carefully at each part of a whole visual (Eagleman 2011, 26).⁵ Once we do focus on an object, then the brain exhaustively attends to how an object *can* change so that *we* experience the change for ourselves, but only after an extensive examination. Therefore, Eagleman emphasizes that we are not seeing our world in the fine detail of implicit thought; instead, we are unaware of most of the visual field right before our eyes, as the brain processes only tiny portions of it (2011, 26, 27).

Like Eagleman, Virilio's knowledge in the intricacies of "*kinematic energy*," or speed of movement, confirms that "synthetic-perception machines," with extreme "high-speed operations," transport a person to a domain where visual capabilities are inadequate because of the restricted "depth of time" in the physiological intake (1994, 61). Virilio claims we are on the cusp of "synthetic vision," an observation of mechanization only, and questions the outcomes and consequences of our world with this type of "sightless vision" (1994, 62). To clarify the paradox in mechanized vision, Eagleman underscores the "looming chasm" between the brain's knowledge and what the mind is able to access of that knowledge (2011, 55). For example, Eagleman explains how patients with "anterograde amnesia" spend time learning a video game only to return the next day having no memory of the implicit learning that transpired in virtual interaction. However, upon examination of their performance of the game, the patients had improved on the skills of the game to the same degree as "nonamnesiacs" (2011, 59). In other words, their brains learned the game, but the mind was unable to gain entry to their consciousness.⁶ Eagleman explains that when the brain needs to decipher an undertaking, then it "rewires its own circuitry" until it accomplishes the endeavor to the ultimate productivity, while the endeavor itself becomes etched

into the “machinery” (2011, 71). The brain accomplishes this etching with “*speed*” of automatization and “*energy efficiency*” (2011, 74). Thus, the brain diminishes the energy needed to expose difficulties.⁷ Therefore, the more automation, the less consciousness humans can access, and thus, the deeper humans plummet beneath the multiplicities of unconsciousness (2011, 74).

According to Eagleman, Freud’s theory of the unconscious mind, with its instincts and drives, is “spot-on” (2011, 19). However, Freud did not have the technological advances in neuroscience, which are available today, and had to go outside the brain to try to assess the depths of the unconscious (Eagleman 2011, 19). Eagleman asserts that neuroscience can monitor the active brain with scientific technology capable of navigating throughout the “vast territories of the brain” (2011, 19). As a result, Freud’s theory of three competing parts (the id, the ego, and the superego) may have fallen from favor with neuroanatomists, though the crux of Freud’s concept remains the same: “brains are made of competing subsystems” (Eagleman 2011, 19, 110). Through a scientific lens, the two almost identical hemispheres of the brain are like a “team of rivals,” and with the knowledge of the multiple subsystems, these rivals are similar to what Eagleman references as a democracy with “overlapping experts” in competition (2011, 123, 107).⁸ The brain’s job is to collect data from these systems and then “steer the behavior appropriately” when called upon (Eagleman 2011, 5). Eagleman claims that the multifarious ways in which the “team-of-rivals” structure represents identical stimulus is proof that the brain does not have tidy compartments with simple, categorized tasks (2011, 130).

Neuroscience now reveals that the brain has a looping scheme. Remarkably, Jacques Lacan references a looping scheme, as well, in that “mapping the network” is essential for his formula, as he believes multiple layers of the unconscious are permeable as if translucent to light, but the deflection differs on every layer (1998, 45). Thus, Lacan references these layers as the “locus where the affair of the subject of the unconscious” is enacted (1998, 45). In likeness to Lacan’s loci, Eagleman describes a “zombie system,” operated by “alien subroutines,” which results in a lack of consciousness (Eagleman 2011, 132). For example, Eagleman affirms that when a person first begins to play a video game, consciousness is called forth for the purpose of learning the game but is excluded once the game has been programmed into the abyssal, subterranean structure of the brain (2011, 142). This means that an unconscious act of playing video games transcribes within “concealed subroutines” an “undeciphered programming language of proteins and neurochemicals,” where it can “lurk for decades” before summoned from the deep recesses of the unconscious (Eagleman 2011, 142). In other words, the zombie circuits take over in the actions of a learned virtual game of violence, while the offshoots of violence embed deeply within stealthy regions of the looping system in a language of neurochemicals undecodable for consciousness. In uncanny similarities, Lacan states that the construction of the *I* harbors itself deep within the safe dwelling of the *Innenwelt*, an area of inaccessibility and “obsessional inversion,” so that with each return to the mirror, a more aggressive *I* becomes engendered with an even greater sense of death instincts (2003, 622, 623). For Lacan, the mirror phase must take place, as I posit he acknowledges the Hegelian nature split out of spirit, in that for Lacan, we must be able to recognize our own nature in the mirror, otherwise, our social *I* slips farther away from reality into the seemingly safe harbor of the unreachable and fanatical, fostering traits of narcissism.

Complexities of Power in Narcissistic Origins

Lacan’s philosophical insight of “primary narcissism,” with its masochistic and sadistic tendencies, demarcates a period of major concern for the self before cognition of external realities and “semantic latencies” can explain the aggressive and forceful conflict between the “narcissistic libido” and the alien behaviors of the *I* (2003, 623). To clarify, primary narcissism is the first warning sign that external realities and conflictive meanings contained in those realities aid in forming aggression within the duality of the mind, while simultaneously suppressing the aggression. If we do not acknowledge the first signs of narcissism, then the passive aggression suppresses and finds its way deeper into the obscured subroutines that Lacan references in the *Innenwelt* and Eagleman in the recesses of the brain. The insight that narcissistic aggression has the potential to release and suppress simultaneously should be a major concern for society, regarding the long-term effects of ingesting virtual violence. I argue that the continual, unconscious interaction with a violent virtual image and failure to recognize narcissistic characteristics associated with the image result in long-term effects of hostility, whereby power is illegitimately nurtured through violent tendencies. The blurring of reality poses dangers among society in an implicit egotism of narcissistic origins.

Eagleman addresses implicit egotism as “influencing the products” people choose and consume, as he indicates implicit egotism encompasses “arbitrary features” of oneself, along with “what and whom” one favors and one’s choice of profession (2011, 62). Ultimately, Eagleman asserts that people are swayed by the “drives” of which they are unaware of and have slight access to, be it not for the facts that reveal them (2011, 64).⁹ Therefore, indicators of implicit memory involve the “*illusion-of-truth effect*,” which implies people are more likely to believe something that they have heard before even if that something is not true (Eagleman, 2011, 65). Thus, dangers come about when people are repetitively exposed to illusions in the guise of truth. Ironically, Eagleman stresses that much of the unconscious begins in the “form of conscious plans” (2011, 69). According to the neurological evidence exhibited thus far, I assert that in the first stages of interaction with virtual violence, consciousness energizes to the maximum. However, since the brain is extremely adept in learning, unconscious zombies soon take over in their own hording of a secretive language that begins from

consciousness but results in violent illusions-of-truth from the merging of the virtual and the real. The subliminal messages of the virtual real will inevitably surface when the brain is altered in some capacity.

Causality of the Virtual Real

Writing almost two decades before Eagleman, Virilio upholds that problems within the synthetic image involve not only mental consciousness, but also the influential “virtual images of science and their paradoxical facticity” (1994, 60). In other words, whenever electron optical systems come into the equation with art, a merging of the factual with the virtual produces confusion over reality. To clarify, the imposition in aspects of reality placed upon a virtual image (the reality effect) causes a misunderstanding for the reality principle in its vast undertakings within the sub layers of the unconscious. Virilio questions why we consent to a “factual nature of the frame” and discard the visual retentiveness, which is not produced by the retina as once thought (1994, 61). Instead, the nervous system archives “ocular perceptions,” information enclosed within visible light; therefore, Virilio asserts that a problematic structure in the paradoxical “real nature” of the virtual image posits a subliminal effect (1994, 61). He asserts that we are in the “age of *paradoxical logic*” and cannot seem to cognize the cybernetics of this contradictory logic in the digital age (Virilio 1994, 63).

Within the digital image, the “tyranny of real-time” interchanging the “tyranny of real-space,” unfolds the surprise or the “accidental transfer” (Virilio 1994, 64). To clarify, as in the “cinema,” the “videoframe” favors the surprise over the influence of a message of positive, long-lasting sustenance (Virilio 1994, 62, 64). Virilio confirms that real-time and delayed time have evolved from the computer programming system, with real-time possessing part of the present and part of an instantaneous future, due to the spectator reversal as spectacle; in other words, the spectator is the spectacle of visual choices in order to keep the narrative most exhilarating (64). Therefore, Virilio confirms that this “paradoxical image” of spectator reversal results from the limited amount of “depth of time” and does not allow for a physical intake (1994, 64, 61). To clarify, the favored surprise from the human spectacle of the virtual world causes the time and space of violence to act as a tyrant over the human spectacle who falls prey to the effects of causality due to limited time in the physical intake.

In connection with neuroscience, Eagleman indicates that the timing of movement and sensory signs is pertinent in unraveling the “problem of causality;” for the brain can manipulate time discernment and cause events to appear to take place simultaneously, due to previous anticipations that “sensory consequences” should come directly after motor acts without hesitation (2011, 53). He asserts that causality requires a “temporal order” discernment, which necessitates our consciousness to ask questions of whether the motor act appears first or last regarding the sensory participation and to keep precisely determined the concept of first and last in regards to the path of high speeds (Eagleman 2011, 53). Eagleman deduces that our “sense of time” can be easily manipulated by the brain, as is our vision, because the brain makes “time-saving and resource-saving assumptions” and tries the best it can to see the environment only as needed, and in my argument – assuming only as needed in a virtual environment of violence (2011, 53, 54).

Remarkably, Heidegger so prophetically warns that in discerning the essence of technology, we must ask questions, for instrumentality can lead to causality. According to Heidegger, to understand what is instrumental, we must ask where means and ends properly fit; a means is “effected” and achieved; a cause has an effect as its result, and thus, an end has the potential to be a cause (1993, 313). Therefore, causality exists alongside instrumentality where means and ends are enacted. Heidegger insists that questions of proper ends and means should derive from human beings, or causality paired with its instrumentality and its fixed delineation of technology will persist as “obscure and groundless,” in other words, that which cannot bring forth revealing of insightfulness (1993, 314, 318). The use of the synthetic image of electronic optics necessitates further inquiry in order to think beyond to the cognitive layers of consciousness. To achieve this, Eagleman explains that what we discern regarding vision and time from the external world is induced by portions of the brain that are inaccessible to us; thus, a process of questioning will aid in the necessary “self-excavation” (2011, 54). These neuroscientific insights of questioning, along with the Heideggerian theory that an end can potentially be a cause, reveal the crucial necessity in the act of questioning a violent, virtual image and its subliminal nurturing of the multiplicities in narcissistic tendencies.

Subliminal Tantalization

Allowing reflection on the complexities of power stemming from violence underscores essential insights regarding an inappropriate usage of power and its vulnerability in subliminal effects. Violent video games laced with terroristic acts of murder echo Peter Sloterdijk’s definition of terror as the “maximal explication of the other from the point of view of his exterminability,” where extermination creates sadism in its crude form (2009, 28). Sloterdijk defines a terrorist as one who gains an “explicative advantage over the implicit conditions of the enemy’s life,” exploiting those innate conditions for the sake of the act (2009, 29). In other words, a terrorist is one who disturbs containment and converts the “harmless into a combat zone” (Sloterdijk 2009, 29). From the moment a violent game of simulative terror begins, the player is the terrorist and transforms into a killing machine, killing unarmed, innocent people. These virtual-reality games of terroristic violence recall the Hegelian moment of terror in the master/slave relationship, where each is faced with the moment of choosing life or death. However, in this type of simulated terror, these slave victims are not allowed a choice of freedom or death; they

are exploited for an act of machine-like killing in order to irradiate the terrorist's desire, a narcissistic power of vast levels. When a negative, illegitimate usage of noumena is enacted, and in this case that of terroristic power, an open space forms within the mind that cannot supply a "possible experience" or "pure understanding" (Caygill 1995, 302). Thus, power is inappropriately applied to a concept and renders restriction of human comprehension, allowing for a space of venerability.¹⁰

As a result, paradoxical logic sets in and lines blur between reality and the reality effect, with the "real-time image," or the virtual image, controlling actuality (Virilio 1994, 63). One problem with the synthetic image of computerized perceptions stems from the shared, mechanized perception between human and machine, for the machine will remain accurate to its function with no capable regard for its shared, living subject comprised of multiplicities. Thus, without realizing, the video-game player interacts with terroristic mindless killing, while a withering of compassion, emotional separation, and levels of superiority hibernate in the unconscious. In a terror-like video game, supremacy rules for the player-terrorist throughout the duration of the game. However, it is the superiority "over the space" where the "law of pain" dominates and allows for, as Ernst Jünger asserts, supremacy to the highest degree, as mastering pain tolerates all methods of supremacy (1992, 19).¹¹ In other words, desensitization allows for tolerance in the complexities of superiority, where they harbor in the subregions of the brain, awaiting eventual surfacing. Finally, Sloterdijk states that the "art of the new" is immersed in the "thrill of the latest novelty" and comes forth by imitating terror in connection to war (80). He emphasizes that a desire for the reign of unadulterated sensation instigates a "terror of purification," requiring an absolute submission of spectator perception to the artwork's "real presence" (Sloterdijk 2009, 81). In a violent video game, the presence of violence, with all its ideologies and complexities of power, illegitimately enters into a problematic realm of implicit egotism, where a person's sensitivities lie vulnerable to a nurturing of narcissism.

Through a psychoanalytical point of view, Lacan refers to the subliminal message as "the barred S [\$]," second to the signifier, which represents the subject but is not the subject, instead is the sign (1998, 141). In other words, Lacan specifies the first signifier assures that the subject who "killed one" will not become "confused in his memory" when he has slain "ten others" (1998, 141). To clarify, the video-game player who has killed one human target in virtual reality will not be confused when he or she slays others, for the brain programs the video-game strategies on how to kill the most human targets without the player perishing. Lacan asserts the subject will not have to remember which is the 'one' and which is the 'ten' because by a solitary stroke, he or she will tally them all (1998, 141). According to Lacan, within the complexity of the mind, the subject scripts him or herself with a "tattoo" marking of "one one," (the subject can now recognize the first signifier with this tattoo), and this marks the first split that allows the subject to differentiate him or herself from the sign (1998, 141). To clarify, the smaller subsystems of the brain encode the memory of multiple killings in manifold perspectives on the secondary memory trajectory in which the amygdala has the ability to retain and recall them in "flashbulb" capacity (Eagleman 2011, 126).

Regarding the complexity of the subliminal message, Lacan cautions not to confuse the task of the barred \$ with the image of the subject, for the subject views him or herself as a "precarious image of mastery" (1998, 142). In other words, the player of the violent video game sees him or herself as master, yet consciousness understands and views the tattoo marking, not as reality, but as the signifier, the sign of the subject divided. Lacan warns that if we look at reality and not the sign in the mental processes, then we fall within the deprivation of the psychic structure of subjects who view themselves as the manipulators of their desires. Therefore, looking at reality only in the subject's present state and not examining the mental processes of a subliminal language add to long-term risks for the subject in erecting a foundation of an unhealthy sense of self-mastery.

The Adolescent Brain

Perhaps the most compelling evidence in this argument is that not all brains are structurally equivalent; adolescent brains are not like adult brains. Eagleman asserts the frontal cortex, which houses "unmasked behavior" and our "base impulses," does not fully develop until a person reaches his or her early to mid-twenties (2011, 184). Therefore, "becoming socialized" is establishing "circuitry to squelch" these base impulses (Eagleman 2011, 184). He continues to advocate that the more we comprehend the brain, the more we can focus on devising "societal incentives to encourage good behavior and discourage bad behavior" (Eagleman 2011, 191). Cognizance of this process is crucial for video-game artists and demands an ethico-aesthetical framework to prevent children and young adolescents from naively consenting to an addiction to consumer products laced with violence. I acknowledge opposing views in that these violent video games come with adult ratings, which only adults can purchase. However, the reality is that many children are playing these games, and no rating system alone is efficient in keeping the games out of their hands. Therefore, I assert that the knowledge of both nurture (environment) and nature (biology) aid in the process of adolescent development. Artists have the opportunity to enhance positive direction in the lives of adolescents by freely choosing to utilize both *ethos* of credibility and *logos* of reasoning in understanding the complexity of human interaction with a virtual image and the importance of positive contributions to the environment that call for both nature and nurture equally.

Eagleman underscores that the balancing of both nature and nurture is vital. Decoding the configurations of actions concentrating on both "internal machinations and by interactions from the surrounding world" is the only way to understand the full spectrum of the mind (Eagleman 2011, 219, 220). In other words, decoding present external patterns of

interaction alone do not give a full spectrum of insight to the cognizance of individualities. In comprehending the long-term effects of external activity, I assert that society benefits in absorbing a philosophical view of the internal activity, together with the knowledge of the inner complexities of the brain's intricate systems and its process of visual perception in order to attain a broader understanding of the effects of the violent, virtual image. I recognize that key psychologists have conducted studies regarding behavior and video gaming violence with data resulting in both positive results of aggression release on some studies and negative results on other studies.¹² However, with the assertions from neuroscience that the brain will deeply encode patterns and recall them when the brain is altered, I argue that the long-term effects of interactive violence with a synthetic image warrant the far greater attention and respect in displaying best practices for success in the young adolescent mind now and in the future.

Ambiguous wording in a California law resulted in the Supreme Court ruling to allow young children the right to play violent video games.¹³ Conflicting psychological data on outward aggression and obscure wording disallowing lawful scrutiny of young children ingesting virtual violence have caused an impasse between societal views regarding the violent, virtual image. Sloterdijk reminds society that the artist is continually confronted with the choice of advancing as a "saver of differences or as a warlord of innovation" alongside societal views (2009, 80). I assert that a needed answer in guiding artists to a place of re-evaluation of cultural products laced with violence lies within Maurice Merleau-Ponty's critical assertion that the artist's desire "commands from afar all our useful activity" (2003, 771). I advocate for artists to utilize the useful activities in neuroscience, philosophy, and cultural theory in order to come into the well-lit realm that reveals the most concealing constrictions on the artist as cultural producer. Therefore, it is at this juncture that I call for courage in artistic restraint from evoking unbalanced explanations of social reality through fetishtic violence.

I posit that Marx's view of a commodity as having "mystical" characteristics that mirror humanity's social physiognomies and establish objective dominance releases the answer to why the social representations of so-called shared beliefs in communities regarding violence are powerless against the dominant physiognomies of society (1990, 164). The mirroring of violence in all its multiplicities of power within the virtual image are not harmless as much of society chooses to believe because of short-term sight; instead, the complexities anchor themselves in the subterranean regions of the brain, waiting long-term results that will remain a mystery to society if we refuse to acknowledge and act on the warning signs of present egotistic traits (1990, 164). Redirection is necessary for artists to ensure the safety of their own essences.

The Courage of Restraint

In the early part of the twenty-first century, with violence being a prominent invisible value-commodity in the arts, society experiences an even more profound problem concerning artists as cultural producers and viewers as consumers. Decades earlier, Karl Marx anticipates problems with commodities and the fetishes that derive from them. When a product's use-value establishes only through the aesthetic, then the product "transcends sensuousness" into a realm of embodiment with mystical traits, originating from the "physiological fact" that the commodities are "functions of the human organism" (Marx 1990, 163, 164). To clarify, through corporations, the power of labor transfers the value of the creator to the product of the creator. Within the social relation of the exchange process between product and consumer, the product assumes a value equivalent to human value and human characteristics (Marx 1990, 166).

In the exchange process, Marx asserts the "value character" in a product solidifies completely with products acting as "magnitudes of value," fluctuating constantly and independently of the "will, foreknowledge and actions" of consumers (1990, 167). Marx states that value and its vastness are invisible and undetectable except through the social hieroglyphic, established by value itself in the transformation of value from creator to product. To make matters more complex, people will try to decode the hieroglyphic in order to reveal and sustain its secrets. In addition, Marx argues that the consumer identifies the "impression" of the product, not subjectively, as the consumer viewing product embodiment with enthusiasm, but objectively with product subjectivity viewing the consumer as object from "outside the eye" and within the suprasensible, bearing "peculiar social properties" (1990, 165, 167). Thus, consumers are not in control when products become fetishes. Artists are not in full control when their human value has been transferred to the product; therefore, capital is in control. Capital concerns itself only with the monetary, for it is incapable of concern for anything other than its nature.

Incorporating theories of Marx into present day, political philosopher Maurizio Lazzarato underscores the "debtor-creditor relationship" of exploitation and hegemony within all junctures of society, and where no incongruity occurs between consumers and producers because all are "debtors" and "guilty" before capital (2012, 7). According to Lazzarato, Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari cleverly reveal that capitalism conceals the roles of money acting as "*revenue* and as *capital*," retaining the capacity to select and regulate future construction of commodities, while manipulating partnerships with "power and subjection" (qtd. in Lazzarato 2012, 74). To clarify, Lazzarato argues that money power does not evolve from higher buying power; instead, capital's power surpasses the "purchasing-power flow of workers," for capital controls the funding flow, its intervals, its "choice, and decision" (2012, 85). Capital sustains vehement, schizophrenic flows within the flux and reflux of consumer addiction. This present age needs clarification regarding the violence of art, which we create, sell, and purchase. Clearly, challenges derive from all areas of the social structure. Therefore, an analysis of exploitation and hegemony through a Heideggerian sense of trapped existence proves essential.

Heidegger asserts that "the essence of modern technology lies in enframing," while "enframing belongs within the destining of revealing" (1993, 330). When 'destining' controls within the method of 'enframing' (total manipulation), then

ultimate danger occurs when the “unconcealed” (insightfulness) matters no more to humankind, “even as object,” and becomes entirely as “standing-reserve,” in constant debt to and on standby for technological domination (Heidegger 1993, 309, 332). Thus, Heidegger argues that humans are in an objectless existence and have no status but as the “orderer of the standing-reserve,” removing all possibilities of revealing insightfulness (1993, 332). As a result, he believes that humans will neither see themselves as the ones addressed nor confront themselves alone and will remain in an object-less existence (Heidegger 1993, 332). However, Heidegger believes that all hinges on our proper manipulation of technology as a means, or otherwise, technology will “slip from human control” (1993, 313). Due to the complexities of the human psyche in the hypercapitalistic society such as we endure in the West, the need for a counterbalance can be found in the assertion of ethico-aesthetical relations, the absence of which leads to unhealthy imbalances of social reality throughout society.

Summary of Evidence

I assert that neuroscience contributes a key role in understanding the complexities of the brain, which Freud reveals, and which Eagleman asserts twenty-first century neuroscience acknowledges and surpasses. Through a Heideggerian lens, the abyss is now distinct in cognizing the long-term effects in viewing a violent synthetic image, whereby unconscious interactions with multiplicities of violence reside in the subterranean structures of the brain and shelter sometimes decades before being summoned. Heidegger’s insightfulness in questioning the essence of technology can lead artists to their own dialogue with Poesy in asking to what end, right, and limit will thinking allow a vision of open-mindedness. Lacan’s intricate study of the unconscious through the subject and signifier, along with his insight of narcissism and semantic latencies, advances his theory of charting the network where undertakings of unconsciousness come forth. Marx’s prophetic insight of the suprasensible commodities with their reversal of human values and Lazzarato’s reflections on capitalistic tyranny set the stage for the ethico-aesthetic exemplar.

Contributions from Virilio and Sloterdijk in understanding culture as well as technological complexities assist in comprehending a wider range of knowledge regarding the question of the real fused with the virtual. Jünger’s revealing of his authentic, psychoanalytical pattern in resisting sensitivities involving pain opens the door to a wider understanding of how desensitization comes forth and harbors within subliminal messages. Utilizing a hybrid of knowledge through a wider lens brings into focus all aspects in the panoramic view of insights affecting humanity. Accountability in cognizing the complexities associated with the virtual image and restraint from evoking unbalanced explanations of social reality fall within the framework of the ethico-aesthetic to enhance artist effectiveness with well-informed, creative choices.

Artists as cultural producers have the potential to become exemplary leaders for others in new frontiers of a worldwide, aesthetic media by engaging a synthesis of thought from expert fields that have pertinent evidence available in understanding the complexities of creating a virtual image for cultural consumption. Heidegger claims that “reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it” are essential in a sphere that is both kin to the marrow of technology as well as essentially different from it (1993, 340). That sphere is art; but only if art contemplates “its part” and turns its eyes to see the “danger,” keeping the danger ever before it with the advancement of the “saving power,” a power that brings forth and reveals insightfulness (Heidegger 1993, 340, 338). Lévinas reminds humankind to sustain a face-to-face encounter with the human other who calls upon society to care and to compel service toward humanity. A call to cultural stewardship is not a call to restriction of creativity, but a call to thinking in fostering the steps toward the process of questioning in order to make the leap in re-evaluating fitting foundations within the creation of the virtual image.

Notes

¹ Poesy is the ground beneath the Mother of the Muses where thinking flows backwards in recollection. Heidegger concludes that we cannot participate in discussion with Poesy until we ask to “what end,” what “right,” and what “limits” does our thinking allow us a dialogue with Poesy. See Heidegger 1993, 376 and 383.

² In this paper I refer to the Marxian idea of social reality in the concept of false consciousness. For Marx, people experience false consciousness when their social relations mask realities through mystification, fetishism, and exploitation. Lazzarato’s insights also contribute, in that, capitalism conceals the roles of money to select and regulate future construction of commodities. For more on these concepts see Marx 1990, 163-167; Lazzarato 2012, 74.

³ Thomas Aquinas references “willing the good” to another as choices made in desiring success for the other, while Emmanuel Lévinas asserts the importance of a face-to-face encounter with the other, as this face “orders and ordains” us into service toward humanity. For more on these concepts, see Aquinas 1981, I-II and Lévinas 1998, 95.

⁴ Eagleman is Director of the Laboratory for Perception and Action of Baylor College of Medicine. He expounds on a device called BrainPort, comprised of hundreds of tiny electrodes attached to the tongue as a brain machine interface, allowing Erik Weihenmayer, a blind mountain climber, to see when scaling the walls of Mount Everest. See Eagleman 2011, 41.

⁵ Eagleman references Levin and Simons 1997, “Failure to detect changes to attended objects,” whereby the camera angles change, yet people do not recognize that actors change into different actors in the process.

⁶ Eagleman references Cohen, N. J., et al., 1985, “Different memory systems,” while citing examples from Brooks and Baddeley 1976, “What can amnesic patients learn?”

⁷ Eagleman cites neuroscientist Read Montague 2008, *Your Brain Is (Almost) Perfect*.

⁸ Eagleman cites several sources for substantiation: for brain conflicts, Edelman 2008, *Computing the Mind*; conflicting agents, Livant and Pippenger 2006, “An optimal brain;” Tversky and Shafir 1992, “Choice under conflict;” Festinger 1964, *Conflict, Decision, and Dissonance*; Cohen 1985, “The vulcanization,” and McClure et al., 2007, “Conflict monitoring.”

⁹ Eagleman references research from Graft and Schacter 1985, “Implicit and explicit memory,” 501-518.

¹⁰ In this paper, I follow the Kantian definition of the illegitimate use of noumena in making “pure concepts,” as power itself, noumena or an equivalence to noumena, the thing-in-itself; Caygill 1995, 301- 302.

¹¹ Jünger was a prominent German soldier in WWI who wrote on a “second consciousness” of “colder” qualities in order for soldiers to understand how to transmute into a machine-like status of “self-detachment” from pain. See Jünger 2008, 38, 46.

¹² For strong points of view on different aspects of the issue, see Ferguson and Kilburn 2009, 759-763; range of experiences related to media violence, see Buckley and Anderson 2006, 363-378; Anderson and Gentile 2006, 225-246.

¹³ Justice Samuel A. Alito Jr., along with Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., voted with the majority but did not acquiesce with majority views. Justice Alito indicated the California law was elusive, and a law cautiously worded might have withstood constitutional examination. See Liptak article, 2006.

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