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# Art in Utopia: Can Art Create Social Change?

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## Introduction

Can art create social change? When an artist creates an image or an object, they draw on experiences or subjects that they consider significant, usually hoping to communicate this to an audience. In many instances, they may choose to deal with subjects that are much broader than their personal experiences, that relate to the relations between individuals. They may even stray into subject matter that examines the basis for political organisation, but what is the artist really doing when they try to make a work that presents an alternative vision for society? The word 'utopian' is used to describe ideas of a hypothetical perfected society, but in common parlance the word has been expanded to often include any form of idealism applied to social planning.

To determine whether or not utopianism in art is valuable, it's necessary to examine the motivations behind such tendencies, and to compare the goals of the artist with the results. The desire of artists to change society is always in conflict with their need to use their artistic talent to make a living, this is something almost every artist needs to confront. When the ideal of a better society is suggested by an artist, is the purpose to seriously promote this ideal, or to simply provide the audience with a greater ability to speculate about their own values and aspirations?

In this thesis I will argue that the impulse among artists to indulge in utopian planning is inevitable, and it is best to try to understand and cultivate this tendency. While social planning is something that is inherently valuable, it is its own area of expertise. Art and social activism are separate and their disciplines should not be confused.

In the 19th Century many philosophers wrote about the role that art should play in society and whether art could be considered socially useful. The French philosopher Henri Bergson believed that the role of the artist was to offer the audience different possible realities, to attune them to what might occur in the future. He thought that the role of artists was to make visible what people did not naturally perceive themselves, and that artists were able to spend time contemplating things that were inaccessible to most people.<sup>1</sup> Likewise philosopher Auguste Comte, wrote that art naturally succeeds both science and philosophy and that the artist's real role was to awaken speculation in the mind of the viewer to allow for possibilities in science and industry.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1946,) Page 121, 161.

<sup>2</sup> Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte Volume 2*, (London: Trubner & Co, 1875,) Page 306.

A brief overview of many of the art movements of the 20th Century will reveal that there were many artists who saw their role as going much further than this. They attempted to merge art with a political goal to produce a new type of society that would benefit everyone. As we shall see, the Industrial revolution produced an environment where it was possible for individuals to actively build different types of societies, which aided the birth of the socialist movement. From then onwards in the beginning of the 20th Century, advancements in communications allowed for increasing government control. The result was the rise of art movements that sought a complete break with the traditions of the past to form a social order built on modernisation, often with extreme consequences. In the second part of the 20th Century, the utopian impulse in art waned as political revolutions began to appear ineffective. There was an outpouring of social idealism in the 1960s, followed by its swift decline and a strong revival in the 1990s, which will be the subject of the final section of this paper.

The very word utopian is often derogatory, implying that a goal is naive and unachievable. But in this thesis the word can be considered to be used in the sense of being 'idealistic' and projecting a vision of a different social order with explicitly political goals. For the sake of brevity I have chosen to focus mostly on the specific actions of art movements and collectives for this thesis. To judge whether utopian thinking in the arts is useful it is important to evaluate how successful different movements were in terms of their influence and in achieving their political goals. This has limited me to art groups that achieved significant influence and had explicit social motivations.

The motivations of these groups are diverse but what they share is their deep commitment to social change and belief in their cause. Examining the effects of their activities can tell us a great deal about the practicality of an idealised notion of art, and the proper role of artists in a society.

## The Blessing of Labour

The first explicitly artistic movement that saw itself as a method for achieving social and political change, was the Arts and Crafts movement of the 1880s. Prior art movements had occurred over a longer time period, and lacked the methods of organisation that were created during the industrial era in Britain. In the 1840s, Karl Marx had written an attack on the commodification of art that had occurred under industrialisation. Believing that the use of factories in artistic production had depersonalised art and separated it from pure human emotion.<sup>3</sup>

Although many of the early figures associated with the Arts and Crafts movement were not socialists, they were sympathetic to the concerns of Marx about the effects that factories were having on the decorative arts. Architect Owen Jones in his 1868 book *The Grammar of the Ornament* upheld that decoration should be simplified, instead of rendered realistically, and that the purpose of decoration was to emphasise the form and utility of the object.<sup>4</sup> The early movement was mostly influenced by the writings of critic John Ruskin.<sup>5</sup> Ruskin was novel in his belief that art should represent a moral and virtuous truth that would be reflected in its artistic execution. In his later life, he developed a romantic view of the medieval era, idolising Gothic Architecture as a period where there was no distinction between art and artisan.<sup>6</sup>

“Gothic architecture has been sufficiently vindicated; and perhaps some among us, in our admiration of the magnificent science of its structure, and sacredness of its expression, might desire that the term of ancient reproach should be withdrawn, and some other, of more apparent honorableness, adopted in its place.” -John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (1853)

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<sup>3</sup> Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001.)

<sup>4</sup> Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament*, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1868.)

<sup>5</sup> See Figure 1

<sup>6</sup> John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, (London: Biblioteca Virtual, 1878.)



Figure 1: John Ruskin

The thing that differentiated Ruskin, compared to previous critics, was Ruskin's belief that the art should be created simply for the fact that it was beautiful, rather than for any religious or monetary value. He believed that the noblest and best art was the kind that uplifted the moral character of a society, and should therefore be created to reach as many people as possible. To this end, Ruskin then saw gothic architecture as the highest form of art, as the common craftsman was as important as the architect himself, and each individual stone and beam of the building was a reflection of the enjoyment and labour expressed by the worker.<sup>7</sup>

The man who emerged as the leading figure of the Arts and Crafts movement, William Morris, would take the idea of noble labour expressed by John Ruskin and use it to envision an entirely new society organised around this concept. Morris worked as a book manufacturer publishing texts from the pre-raphaelite school in Britain. He wrote about the chapter of Gothic Architecture from Ruskin's book *The Stones of Venice*, as 'at once the truest and most eloquent works that can be written on the subject'. He envisioned an end to dull work and its replacement with the 'beauty of labour'. So that no one would have to toil under low wage slavery, and instead be free to take pride in their craft.

'there will be pretty much an end of dull work and its wearing slavery; and no man will any longer have an excuse for talking about the curse of labour, no man will any longer have an excuse for evading the blessing of labour. I believe there is nothing that will aid the world's progress so much as the attainment of this; I protest there is nothing in the world that I

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<sup>7</sup> Olivo L. Triggs, *Chapters in the History of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, (Chicago: The Bohemia Guild of the Industrial Arts league, 1902). Pg 7 - 40.

desire so much as this, wrapped up, as I am sure it is, with changes political and social, that in one way or another we all desire.<sup>8</sup>

-William Morris, *Hopes and Fears For Art*, 1882

Morris at the time was running a successful tea business in London, and in 1859 Architects *Morris and Philip Webb*, built a house in an orchard just outside the city that was to test out his ideas of labour and building decoration. This was to be Morris' famous 'Red House'<sup>9</sup>, built in a medieval, neo-gothic style, it was completely filled with decorated tapestries, rugs and ornaments all designed totally by hand with simple, elegant ornamentation.



Figure 2: William Morris' 'Red House'

While living there, Morris would further develop his theories of socialised capital and labour. The most practical of these schemes was the *St George's Company*. The company was a compound that aimed to combine capital with artistic labour, and was built with the idea that agriculture and cooperative labour were the basis for true happiness. The colony was supposed to act as a beacon for Ruskinites, and inspire others across the country to adopt the same model of craftsmanship.

What motivated Morris and the other Ruskinites most of all, was the belief that the role of the craftsman had been lost in this new industrial era. These young socialists wanted to reclaim the handmade feeling of decorative arts, by using detailed and elaborate

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<sup>8</sup> William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art*, (London: Blackmask, 1882.) Pg 2

<sup>9</sup>See Figure 2

techniques that current machinery was incapable of. Their works introduced a new aesthetic that became popular in the late Victorian period and similar Ruskinite colonies started to appear all around Britain. What made Morris unique was that he saw these colonies as going far beyond art. He wanted them to be egalitarian communes, of the kind that utopian 19th century socialists had always dreamed of.

But quickly, Morris discovered that the only market to be found for these textiles, was the upper and middle classes. So the company was forced to charge high prices, and pay the workers low wages to stay open. Although the business venture was a success, Morris was unhappy, later describing his position as "ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich". His dissatisfaction would lead to his more active involvement with the socialist league in Britain. Where he spent the rest of his life campaigning for workers rights and the protection of ancient buildings.<sup>10</sup>

The Arts and Crafts movement may not have achieved the socialist ideals that Morris had envisioned for it. But it achieved international success after his death. 130 Arts and Crafts organisations were founded in Britain between 1895 and 1905. Many societies were developed around the same time that taught pupils the principles developed by Morris. As Industrialisation spread around the world, the Arts and Crafts movement spread with it, with similar societies forming in Germany, Belgium, France, and the United States. Although, like Morris' firm. The Arts and Crafts guild were only able to sell their work to the rich, they quickly became the prevailing style in Europe in the early 20th Century. And would go on to inspire the De Stijl and Bauhaus groups.

Rather than creating a community of shared labour, the Arts and Crafts movement became just one of the many styles that were to be produced by modern art over the coming century. Morris had seen his movement as a replacement for capitalism, but capitalism found a market for his products because people liked what he had to sell. It was a movement that in some ways created the first modernist design aesthetic, and was eventually overtaken by competing styles.

Morris and his followers were obviously talented craftsman and artisans, and contributed a great deal to design. Yet their business success was always secondary to their goal of adopting a labour system where workers could feel true ownership of their craft. The obvious flaw in this idea is that there was very little beauty that could be expressed in the making of furniture, tools and ornaments that were being produced across industrial Britain. One can admire the Ruskinites for their determination and ability to act out their

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<sup>10</sup> Olivio L. Triggs, *Chapters in the History of the Arts and Crafts Movement*, (Chicago: The Bohemia Guild of the Industrial Arts league, 1902.) Pg 43 - 95.



goals on a small scale. Many of them were Fabian rather than revolutionary socialists, believing that their ideas should be tried on a local level and then expanded. These types of artist communes were a follow on from the workers compounds developed by the industrialist Robert Owen in the 1840s, and would develop into the Garden City Movement in the later century.<sup>11</sup>

The comunes were not successful in allowing a high standard of living and abolishing dull work, but they developed into an international style that spread across the Western world.

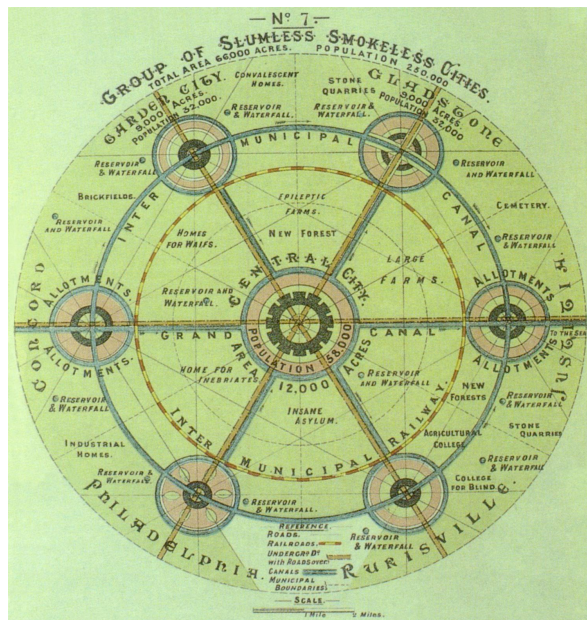


Figure 3: Garden City Plan

We can at least be confident that the commercial success of the movement Morris had helped create would have given him little comfort, as he made known his feelings on popular art in 1882:

“People say to me often enough: If you want to make your art succeed and flourish, you must make it the fashion: a phrase which I confess annoys me; for they mean by it that I should spend one day over my work to two days in trying to convince rich, and supposed influential people, that they care very much for what they really do not care in the least”<sup>12</sup>  
 -William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art* (1882)

<sup>11</sup> See Figure 3

<sup>12</sup> William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art*, (London: Blackmask, 1882.) Pg 6.

When the Arts and Crafts movement is looked at from the point of view of the role of the artist in society, it becomes clear that art itself is limited in what it can achieve in terms of social change. The communes themselves can be thought of as a successful business model, rather than a practice for the rest of modern society to adopt. William Morris represents a figure in the arts who repeatedly appears in any type of utopian art movement, someone who cannot take solace in the success of their work because it does not bring about the social changes that they want. This is something that any political artist has to confront, as they will inevitably have to choose whether their artistic career or their political goals are more important.

## Bring the Fist into the Artistic Struggle

It's important for anyone attempting to understand the marriage of art and utopia, to compare the two art movements; Futurism and Constructivism. Both of which began in the early 20th Century, both sought to expand art into all of public life, and both attached themselves to revolutionary political movements.<sup>13</sup>

Futurism, is best understood as a populist movement, rather than as a movement of the avant-garde. When Filippo Marinetti published his 'Futurist Manifesto' in *Le Figaro* in 1909, he was choosing consciously to declare his art as a form of political revolution. Marinetti was the first to use an art manifesto, until then, manifestos had been confined to political groups and its employment by Marinetti tied Futurism to a set of specific social aspirations.

Marinetti himself was a poet rather than a painter, and in the first few years after the manifesto, Futurism was a movement almost entirely consisting of theatre and public performance.<sup>14</sup> One of the first plays that Marinetti wrote, *King Hoot* depicted a castle of great wealth that is taken over by a popular revolution from the masses. The peasants after taking over the castle then eat the king, and bring him back to life by vomiting up his remains. Themes of cannibalisation and reincarnation were common in Marinetti's plays. But most of all it was his willingness to use violence in order to gain publicity that garnered him media attention and success. He and his cohorts would often intimidate audience members who tried to leave the theatre, and physically assault people who advocated for pacifism. Marinetti was serious when he exclaimed his intent to 'bring the fist into the midst of the artistic struggle'.

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<sup>13</sup> Filippo Marinetti, *The Futurist Manifesto*, (Bologna: Gazzetta dell'Emilia, 1909).

<sup>14</sup> See Figure 4



Figure 4: A Futurist Soiree

The development of Futurism from a popular revolutionary movement to a serious avant-garde discipline was purely accidental. And was brought about from the happenstance encounter of three painters Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà and Luigi Russolo, who had decided to meet with Marinetti in January 1910. The following morning Marinetti told one of his poet friends in a Cafe, 'Futurism in painting was born today'.<sup>15</sup>

On a more conceptual level, Futurism can be thought of as the first really 'modern' art movement. It's founders really believed that they could use art to alter everyday life. Futurism was in some ways a reaction to the perceived traditionalism that prevailed in the arts. In 'A Technical Manifesto of Futurist Painting', Boccioni denounces the 'traditional concept of sculptural form' and said that 'One must abolish in sculpture, as in all the arts, the traditionally "sublime" subject matter'.

It was this fetishisation of machines and modern buildings that was the central tenet of the Futurist ethos and the rejection of traditional subject matter. It was the first art movement that sought an appeal to the masses, rather than the elites. The futurists attempted to

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<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Rainey, *Futurism: An Anthology*, (Yale University: Sheridan Books, 2009), p. 12 - 61

create not only plays and paintings, but also clothing, architecture, furniture and even food recipes.<sup>16</sup>

All of this can be seen in the context of Europe in the 1910s. In the preceding decade, anarchist terrorists attacks gripped the continent, assassinating dozens of European royals. In continental Europe, modernisation itself was fairly new, with thousands of people forced to move to cities to find work. This great movement created a demand for democratisation and Italy granted suffrage to all men over 30 in 1912, following many other European powers. The Fascist movement counted on the votes of this newly franchised public, and of newly unemployed labourers. Futurism spouted a different political program than Mussolini's but drew on the same popular support to spread its message of cultural revolution.

Whatever else can be said about the aims of the Futurists, they were certainly successful at gaining publicity through violence. Within the first few years since the launching of the manifesto, over 300 articles were written about Futurism internationally. As a political project Futurism was a utopian social movement that sought the revival of Italy through the unimpeded pursuit of technological progress, and the glorification of violence and military expansion. The movement was also anarchist, advocating for the abolition of bureaucratic government and its replacement with something greater.

In spite of similar rhetoric, it is not really fair to describe the Italian Futurists as a Fascist movement. They shared endorsement of violence and military expansion but differed in their approach to traditional institutions. They borrowed elements from anarchism, syndicalism and marxism.<sup>17</sup> And were among the first to advocate for an immediate overthrow of the Italian government after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. To the end, Marinetti opposed the politics of Mussolini believing in the abolition of the Vatican, but by the time Mussolini took power the Futurists had turned away from political activism and attempted to revive the movement as something called 'Tactilism', promising to engage the human spirit with unknown senses. But this announcement did not receive much attention from the press.

The Futurist legacy was undoubtedly a success. The ideas of creating a machine like art would inspire Dada, the Constructivists, and the Cubists who saw the fragmentation of the image as giving the artist a new understanding of objects. Just like the Fascist movement that it flirted with, Futurism was populist. Gaining public attention through its dramatic and violent *Soiree's*, theatre productions that gave it such publicity. In one sense they were

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<sup>16</sup> Umberto Boccioni, *Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto*, (Milan: Poesia, 1910.)

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Rainey, *Futurism: An Anthology*, (Yale University: Sheridan Books, 2009), p. 320.

simply trying to revive the greatness of their nation's past and advocated for the modernisation of everything. Their artistic achievements as an art movement are separate from their political goals, which in the end led them to becoming part of a tyrannical government that would make their artistic expression impossible.

But how are they to be judged in terms of their lasting value? Is Futurism a valuable movement in its own right? Or simply a stepping stone for future avant garde art movements to jump over? If we think back to Henri Bergson's idea that the role of the artist is to awaken speculation in the mind of the viewer, Futurism was able to do this beyond artistic institutions, extending this imagination to how the whole of society could be organised. The contributions of Futurism to painting were fairly simplistic, merely depicting fragmented objects to represent motion, it contributed far more to theatre and performance, which was its main method of gaining mass support. Whatever else can be thought about the goals of the movement, the fact that it was able to mobilise the public on a large scale is part of their achievement, even if it eventually resulted in the movement's downfall.

## Beat the Whites With the Red Wedge

Although the formal elements of Futurism lived on, its political aspirations were overtaken by other political ideas like Communism and Fascism. Another utopian art movement, almost the mirror image of Futurism also flourished in the early 20th century, after the revolutionary conditions that were to be its founding principles, were met in Russia. There are many examples of works completed by artists around this period that look similar but were working from vastly different strains of thought. Naum Gabo's 'Realistic Manifesto' in 1920, one of the first to describe the principles of Constructivism, openly imitated the first few lines of Marinetti's futurist manifesto, changing Marinetti's line 'Time and space died yesterday' to 'Space and time were born today'. Gabo wrote further that Russian art had transcended the limitations of Cubism and Futurism, stating that 'The Russian artist, no longer simply has nothing to learn from the west, he now has something to give'.<sup>18</sup>



Figure 5: Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge, El Lissitzky

In spite of these bold proclamations, Constructivist art remained loosely defined until the first group show in 1921 where the Working Group of Constructivists was formed. The Group claimed that while previous movements like Futurism and Cubism had been limited

<sup>18</sup> Naum Gabo & A. Pevsner, *The Realistic Manifesto*, (Moscow: Second State Printing House, August, 1920.)

to mere pictorial representation, their art would go further by embodying the spirit of industrial manufacturing. They described their art as 'scientific communism', rational art that would be used to benefit the people. In the aftermath of the revolution all segments of society were being reformed and restructured, debates were being had in all areas of government about how institutions could be set up to benefit the proletariat.

In 1920 the 'Institute for Artistic Culture' or Inkhuk for short was set up as a institution that would determine the course of art in post revolutionary Russia.

The next few programs at Inkhuk, involved a series of debates between two factions of the Constructivists about the proper direction for art under communism. The older and more experienced members of the group mainly Naum Gabo and Kasimir Malevich, advocated an idealistic approach to art, favouring the idea of the avant-garde they believed that artists could use their abilities to depict the ideals of the workers through suprematist and Constructivist forms.<sup>19</sup>

The other faction led mainly by Aleksandr Rodchenko and El Lissitzky argued that artists should instead, go into factories and workers compounds and dedicate themselves fully to designing industrial machines that could be used to help the workers. In one of the Inkhuk debates, Rodchenko himself declared that any notions of composition were a bourgeois anachronism because they related to subjective taste. He defined Constructivism as a new form of art that related to science and engineering, and was based on rational principles.<sup>20</sup>

But the most striking form of this utopianism comes from the designs created by Vladimir Tatlin. Designed in 1919, his 'Monument to the Third International' was a gigantic steel tower, planned to dwarf the Eiffel Tower by over a third at 400m high.<sup>21</sup> The four volumes were supposed to rotate around each other, with a cube in the centre for the Comintern to meet and plan global revolutions. The four rotating volumes of the tower were to house the executive, legislative and propaganda offices one on top of another.

As El Lissitzky described the tower, 'Iron is strong like the will of the proletariat, glass is clear like the conscience'

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<sup>19</sup> See Figure 5

<sup>20</sup> Victor Margolin, *The Struggle For Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy 1917-1946*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press,) 1997, pg. 10.

<sup>21</sup> See Figure 6





Figure 6: Tatlin's Tower

The tower itself, even if there had been enough steel in Russia to build it, was highly impractical and would likely never have functioned.

In the spring of 1932, the communist party decreed that all existing artistic and literary groups should be disbanded and replaced with unified associations of creative professions. The Leningrad school of painters was created, and the utilitarian ideals of the Constructivists were replaced with the socialist realist school under Stalin, Naum Gabo eventually fled to England to sell his art. El Lissitzky moved to America to work as a designer, while Vladimir Tatlin himself spent most of the rest of his life designing fantastical projects that would never be realised like flying machines.<sup>22</sup>

This sad end to the Constructivists is the predictable result of the subordination of art to a higher political goal. Because the Soviet State was run only to produce things that it considered useful, there was simply no reason that art should be allowed to exist. The older generation who upheld the symbolic and spiritual value of art were replaced with the younger revolutionaries who wanted to do use it to plan a fair society. Which meant that

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<sup>22</sup> Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, (Yale: Yale University Press, 1983) pg. 7.

artists were either reduced to producing state propaganda, or were sent to inspire workers in factories by suggesting constructions that they lacked the expertise to build.

Constructivism is one of the most striking forms of utopianism in the arts because of its sheer ambition, and most clearly highlights the rift between politics and art. The fact that artists were told to go to factories and inspire the workers with new construction ideas seems laughable today, but the Communists were operating under the assumption that everyone in their nation could be assigned a useful role. This absurdity shows clearly why a free society has to exist in order for any art to exist at all, for the role of the artist is never clearly understood by either the artist themselves or the people who choose to buy their work.

Both Futurism and Constructivism were movements that aimed to create society anew, founded on principles of modernity, and aiming for a revolution. Both movements had aesthetic influence but more importantly were early examples of the role of the artist being expanded to produce propaganda by the state and political parties. The tragedy of these movements is that they both pursued totalitarian governments on opposite ends of the political spectrum, believing that they could use the power of the state to improve their nations, but in the process they overthrew the institutions that protected their rights to be artists. The result was that they eventually found themselves in Mussolini's army, and Stalin's Gulags.

## The Revolution of Everyday Life

In looking at the history of utopian art movements it's important to understand that what we are really looking at is the history of failures. Failure of the dreams of young aspiring people who thought that they could change the world for the better. William Morris and the Ruskinites believed that their art would break down the boundaries between labour and leisure, leading to a society where everyone would only work because they wanted to. The Futurists believed that they could redesign everything to inspire efficiency. While the Constructivists thought that they could merge art with engineering to only produce things that were useful.



Figure 7: Brasilia

In the post-war era, many artists were aware that the history of avant-garde movements up until that point had failed to achieve their utopian goals. They had devolved into waiting for a revolution that would never arrive. This post-war generation would look at the failures of Futurism, Constructivism and Dada, and conclude that where they had gone wrong was by overestimating their ability to change the world. They concluded that what was needed instead, was empowering the individual to change themselves, by constructing situations that would make them more creative. Because the current urban constructions that they

lived in were being used by society to oppress them, and if they could change their actions not to conform to this, then they would be free to live the way they wanted. Belgian writer Raoul Vaneigem called this a 'revolution of everyday life'. Which meant that the society would be changed when people realised how the urban environment was organised to pacify them.

In 1956 in Alba, Italy a conference took place that was called 'the First World Congress of Free Artists'. Organised by an artist called Asger Jorn to describe what he called his International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus.<sup>23</sup> The Bauhaus was an art school in Germany founded by designer Walter Gropius who had taken the theories of William Morris and applied the same principles to the school, aiming to remove the boundary between arts and crafts. The Bauhaus was one of the most influential schools in modern design and its art would later become known for emphasising forms that were purely functional and simplistic. It went on to produce some of the best known designers of the 20th Century before it being closed down in 1933 by the Nazis for being 'degenerate'.<sup>24</sup>

When a group of artists tried to revive the Bauhaus in Germany, Jorn was dismayed at its output. He felt that the new Bauhaus was uninspiring because it paid too much attention to the academics at fine art academies, and that something far more radical was needed.<sup>25</sup> At the conference in Alba, the movement merged with two other groups. One was the London Psychogeographical society and the other was the Lettrist movement. They were being represented by the young filmmaker and writer Guy Debord, who the following year would write the de facto manifesto of the Situationist International.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Fred Stracey, *Marxism and Culture: Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International*, (London, Pluto Press, 2014,) pg. 114

<sup>24</sup> Rachel Barnes. *The 20th-Century art book* (Reprinted. ed.). (London: Phaidon Press, 2001)

<sup>25</sup> Opening Speech at the First World Congress of Free Artists in Alba.  
<http://www.notbored.org/speech.html>. (Accessed 18 Jan. 2018.)

<sup>26</sup> Situationist International, *Report on the Construction of Situations*,  
<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/report.html>. (Accessed 18 Jan. 2018).



Figure 8: Tel Aviv

The Situationists, in their early days, were reacting to what they saw as the intrusion of capitalist and bourgeois structures into all aspects of life. In the 1950s, many of the great cities in Europe had been reduced to rubble, and marshall aid meant that European governments were undertaking one of the greatest land planning projects in history. Now architects that came from the same school of thought as Brutalist architect Le Corbusier were being commissioned to design metropolises all over Europe. These structures were often pure concrete, with little attempt at symmetry. These momentous concrete constructions were erected in cities all over the world during the postwar years, from Lucio Costa's Brasilia to Patrick Geddes' White City in Tel Aviv.<sup>2728</sup> Everywhere the disciples of Le Corbusier were busy ordering cities to maximise flow of traffic and efficient living space. The French architect himself, in 1925 had outlined his 'Plan Voisin', a project which would involve the demolishing of most of central Paris, and its replacement with a group of 12 giant cruciform skyscrapers in perfect orthogonal arrangement.<sup>29</sup> The plan was met with scorn at the time, but the baby boom meant that now modernist architects were able to act out their fantasies from 30 years before.

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<sup>27</sup> See Figure 7

<sup>28</sup> See Figure 8

<sup>29</sup> See Figure 9



Figure 9: Le Corbusier, Plan Voisin

it was this uniform style that the Situationists found so off putting. One of their members, Ian Checheglov in 1953 wrote; *'We will leave Monsieur Le Corbusier's style to him, a style suitable for factories and hospitals, and no doubt eventually for prisons. . . . Some sort of psychological repression dominates this individual—whose face is as ugly as his conceptions of the world—such that he wants to squash people under ignoble masses of reinforced concrete'*.<sup>30</sup>

Yet the Situationists were not novel with their observations that overbearing urban planning was damaging to local communities. This was something they shared with Pop Art and Fluxus. What made them different was that they saw this as the authoritarian intrusion of bourgeois capitalism into the affairs of the proletariat. For the Situationists were not only attempting to fight against the perceived failures of the avant garde but also the perceived failures of socialism.

In 1956, Nikita Khrushchev, leader of the Soviet Union had given a speech to the comintern, detailing the crimes and mass murder that had occurred under Stalin, and denounced him as a tyrant. In the same year, Moscow had sent its army into Hungary to quell a revolution where the workers were attempting to overthrow the Soviet government.<sup>31</sup> Flying in the

<sup>30</sup> Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets 2002), pg. 21

<sup>31</sup> Bekes Csaba; Byrne, Malcolm; Rainer, Janos (Editor), *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents (National Security Archive Cold War Readers)*. (Budapest: Central European University Press.) p. 600.

face of Marxist doctrine. The effect of this was so striking that it caused a crisis for advocates of socialism all over the world, when faced with the reality that the implementation of a communist state, had been a catastrophe. They were forced to reexamine their philosophy, and many began advocating for a form of socialism that was not authoritarian. That liberated the individual from the inside rather than through the government.

This was the same situation that Guy Debord and his fellows were facing. Out of hope, they turned to the utopian visions of a Dutch architect named Constant Nieuwenhuys. Constant had been part of the CoBrA group, but had later spent time in London where he began planning the creation of imaginary cities. Constant met Debord at the conference in Alba and described to him his vision of a unitary urbanism that would inspire the creative individual rather than impede him. After some discussion, Constant and Debord joined together, and in 1959 Constant presented his vision called *New Babylon*.<sup>32</sup>

The project was a series of paintings and sketches that illustrated his vision of a post-revolutionary society. His idea was that instead of one uniform structure encompassing the entire city, his city would be made of a whole series of linked megastructures, some of them the size of cities themselves.<sup>33</sup> The Situationists claimed that modern engineering meant that interiors could be fitted with moveable walls and floors, and feature that would make environments more organic. And include 'houses where one cannot help but love'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Figure 10

<sup>33</sup> See Figure 11

<sup>34</sup> Sam Sadler, *The Situationist City*, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1998), page 151 - 153.

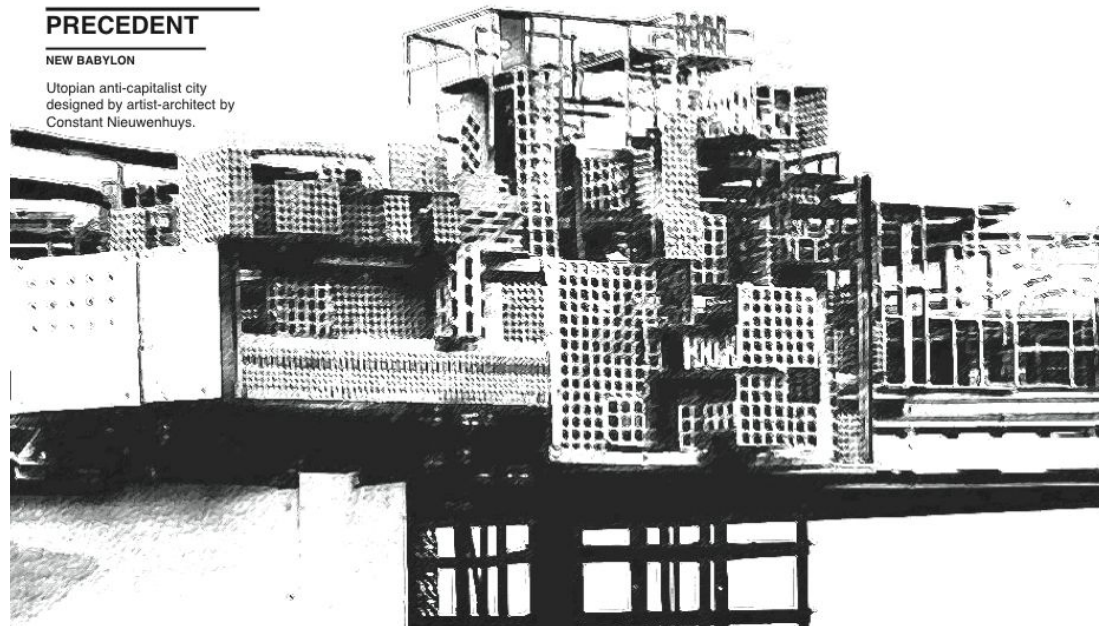


Figure 10: New Babylon

Although Constant admitted in 1966 that he was 'very much aware of the fact that New Babylon cannot be realised now', he and the other Situationists certainly wrote as if the creation of their egalitarian society was a plausible future. In the early 50s, they described their city as including architectural complexes that could be changed completely at the desires of the occupants. Other ideas they had included a city with multiple quarters, one of which the 'sinister quarter' would be filled with bells, sirens and grotesque decors where children could learn the 'anguishing occasions of life'.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Constant's giant megastructures were supposed to literally tower above the bourgeois capitalist society beneath it. The lack of detail about how the city would work didn't appear to overly trouble them, when questioned with concerns about the exact governmental system of New Babylon, Constant's answer could have come straight from the mouth of a 19th century utopian industrialist; 'we will enter a new era, in which production-labour will be automatic. For the first time in history, mankind will be able to establish an affluent society in which nobody will have to waste his forces, and in which everybody will be able to use his entire energy for the development of his creative capacities.'

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<sup>35</sup> Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology*, (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2002) pg. 22



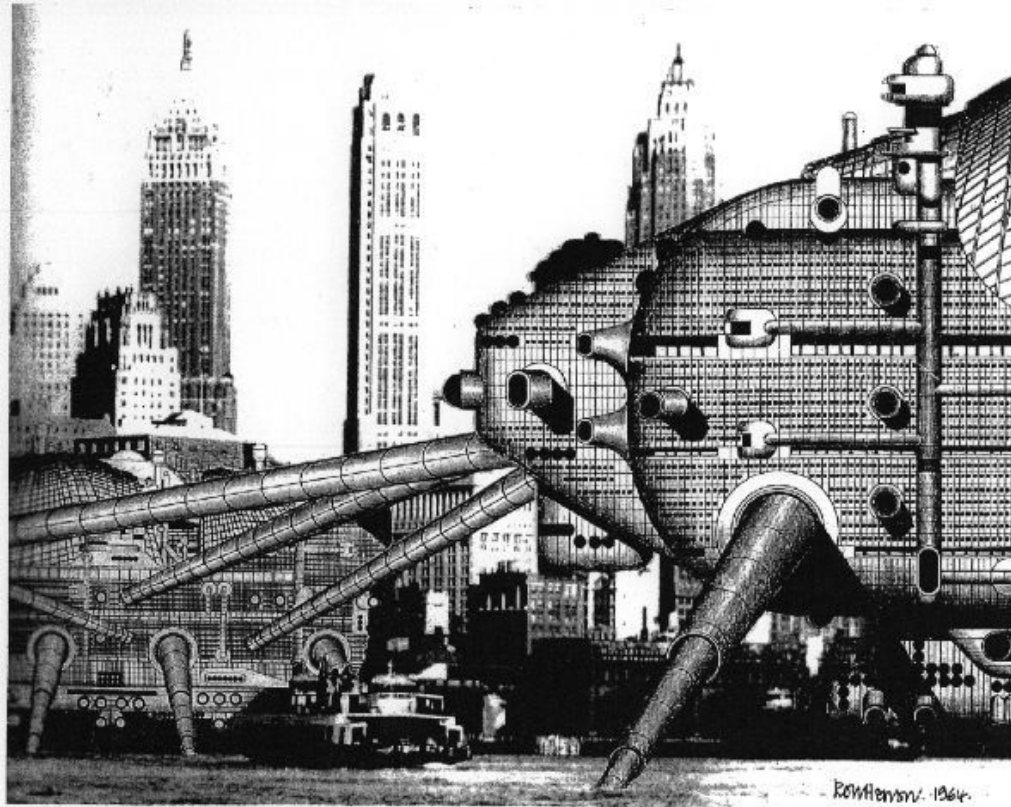


Figure 11: Situationist Megacity

But before long it dawned on the Situationists that their city was unachievable. Guy Debord and Constant argued over the exact nature of unitary urbanism, and in 1960, Constant was kicked out of the group accused of plagiarising the ideas of Situationism. From there the purity spiral continued and another split occurred between the followers of Guy Debord and the 'Nashists' who wanted to continue to produce art works while the debordists wanted to dedicate themselves fully to activism. They accused the Nashists of aiding capitalist structures by continuing to work with fine art institutions, while the Debordists were working towards a revolution.

This split within the group is a common feature of revolutionary avant garde movements, inevitably one faction within the group wants to work within the artistic establishment, while the other wants to take their art outside the institutions. They want to overthrow the existing establishment and replace it with something better. In the end both of them are right, as it's impossible to be a successful artist in a society while simultaneously advocating for its replacement.

The activities of the remaining Situationists from 1960 onwards turned away from art and mainly toward revolutionary theory, the theory of 'derive' or 'drift' can be understood as

the Situationists desire to introduce spontaneity and self identity to the monotony of urban life. Debord drew on ideas developed by the surrealists in the 1920s who would go for walks together in the countryside in the hopes of encountering something unexpected.<sup>36</sup> Debord used the same principle to imagine that the whole of the urban environment could be used as a space for play and poetry, which would be the first step towards non authoritarian communism. The only exhibition that the Situationists ever created was in Odense, Denmark in 1963 and included examples of uprisings in Algeria and Venezuela that the Situationists hoped to emulate. One part of the gallery was devoted to a series of paintings by Debord that were written slogans that would be graffitied on the streets of Paris on the day of the uprising.<sup>37</sup>

When the May 1968 protests in Paris actually took place, there were very few Situationists left in the movement. Their numbers had been declining for years so the ones that took part in the protests were only about ten people.<sup>38</sup> Though the Situationists were able to take on a prominent role during the protests for which they had been preparing for years. They helped organise occupations all across France and slogans from Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* were written on the streets. But by the end of the protests the French government remained in power and the occupy movements were dissolved. The aftermath meant that many revolutionary movements were banned and its members imprisoned. By 1972 only Guy Debord and one other Situationist member remained, who then fled to Italy and was unable to return to France. After having exiled almost all of his fellow philosophers from the group, Debord dissolved the Situationist International in 1972. He spent the rest of his life drinking heavily and working on his films. His final work which was never published, *His Art and his Times* explored the social poverty in 1960s Paris, which he made before committing suicide by gunshot to the head.<sup>39</sup>

The Situationists represent the last attempt of the artistic avant garde of the 20th Century, and the end of the idea that a revolution through art was possible. They can hardly be blamed in the 1950s for imagining that their ideas of urban planning could inspire a new generation of architects to design cities to foster creativity. Like many utopians that came before them, they believed that the technology of their time could be used to make work obsolete and free people from a mundane life. Even many of the Bauhaus architects would

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<sup>36</sup> Situationist International Online, *Theory of the Dérive*, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html>. (Accessed 20 Jan. 2018).

<sup>37</sup> Fred Stracey, *Marxism and Culture: Constructed Situations: A New History of the Situationist International*, (London, Pluto Press, 2014), pg.77

<sup>38</sup> Guy Atkins, *Asger Jorn, the Crucial Years: 1954–1964*, (London: Lund Humphries, 1977).

<sup>39</sup> The Guardian, *The Suicide of Guy Debord*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/jul/28/biography.artsandhumanities>. (Accessed 20 Jan. 2018).

live to see their own Constructions become weather worn and dilapidated, so that many were torn down and became uninhabitable. The same thought processes took place where they believed that their new art would make all art of the past totally irrelevant. That either their style would dominate all others or that they needed a revolution to have the power to implement it.

Just like William Morris and the Ruskinites, the Situationists wanted an end to dull labour and the merging of art and political activity. Their 19th century counterparts were also forced to work within the capitalist system they so despised until they eventually gave up in disgust. One can also see echoes with the Constructivists in the theories of Constant Nieuwenhuys in his belief that art should be created 'with the supervision of scientists'. The futurists before them had waited eagerly for a revolution that would allow them to create their new society. In the same manner the Situationists saw the revolutions in Africa and South America as helping them achieve their goals. The truth is that even if their revolution had succeeded in overthrowing the French government, the resulting chaos would have left very little material wealth that could have been used to construct their New Babylon, as was the case 50 years before in Russia.

What ultimately led to their downfall was their prioritisation of their politics over their medium. The Situationists exiled not only their most prominent artists, but also any theorist who failed to conform to their specific standards of unitary urbanism. The only exhibition they ever held did not show many paintings or artworks, but rather ideas of how to conduct an uprising. Their aim was the merging of art and activism but what this meant was that ultimately their political goals were always more important than their art. Situationism can be seen as the last old avant-garde because it was the last time a revolution really appeared possible.

Situationism can actually be considered less successful than its predecessors, both at achieving social change and at producing artistic quality. For apart from its revolutionary activities it is barely remembered today and produced very little in terms of artistic merit. This implies that artists who want to achieve change through their art should attempt to produce art in the political establishment that they find themselves in, and work with institutions rather than against them. The alternative is to spend all of their time as political activists, and in the end political activities are fleeting and change year by year, while artworks will last as long as the material they are made of lasts.

## The Community Arts Movement

For the final section of this thesis, I will argue that today the main artistic trend that can be described as Utopian in a real sense. Is what is known as 'Community Arts' or 'Socially Engaged Art'. Which is art that involves the participation of the community and has its roots in the fluxus movement in the 1960s.

It is important to note that most utopian trends in the arts today can be found on the left wing of the political spectrum. The political right has its own form of utopianism but this is rarely manifested in the contemporary arts and far less represented in institutions today. Throughout its history a utopian society has been pursued by socialists, though not exclusively as was dealt with in the section on Futurism.

One can observe a continuity between the aspirations of the earlier socialist art movements and the community arts that are practiced today. A common theme is the idea that new technology creates the impetus for a more equal community with less labour, and the ideal of a type of agricultural community where no one has to work for money.



Figure 12: The Artist Placement Group

The late 1960s saw a wave of student protests across developed western countries that developed a number of new art movements, notably Fluxus, Pop Art, the Situationists and Conceptual Art. However another art movement that is particularly relevant but fairly unknown today is the community arts movement that originated in Britain. In 1966 a young artist named John Latham and his partner Barbara Steveni founded the Artist Placement Group (APG). Latham had been involved with the fluxus happenings in Britain

and the assemblages that had taken place during the decade. He founded the APG based on his idea that artists should fulfill a functional role in society by operating within businesses and government institutions to help them become more creative.<sup>40</sup> The idea was Steveni's, she felt that artists could do more working within factories than outside them and together the pair tried to negotiate with businesses to allow artist placements inside their workspaces.<sup>41</sup>

The APG's stated aim was to bridge the gap between artists and workers hoping to inspire them with new ideas or create something of artistic value. Although the proposal seems to be a terrible business model on the part of companies (they were expected to pay £2000-£3000 per artist) the negotiation managed to produce the first instances of artist residencies that are today a commonality in the contemporary art world.<sup>42</sup>

Britain was not the only country to attempt such ventures which can be seen as part of the wider cultural atmosphere of the 1960s. Other art-business collaborations include the Groupe Recherche d'Art Visuel in France and the Experiments for Art and Technology group in America. These artist collaborations not only coincided with a counter cultural youth willing to engage with such activities, but also an expanded welfare government, allowing the Arts Council of Great Britain to fund the APG during the 1970s.<sup>43</sup>



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<sup>40</sup> See Figure 12

<sup>41</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, (London: Verso, 2012). Page 185

<sup>42</sup> See Figure 13

<sup>43</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, (London: Verso, 2012). Page 191-203

## Figure 13: APG Residency

Despite the lasting relevance of groups like the APG, its success rate at the time of its operation was minimal. Out of over 100 applications the group was able to secure 6 artist residencies mostly in factories. The work entirely depended on the artist's decisions while working at the factory which produced mixed results. One residency chose artist Stuart Brisley who worked in a furniture factory. He had the idea of painting the production machines the colours of the workers' favourite football teams, and building mobile notice boards that the workers could push around to each other.

While Latham described himself as apolitical, believing political parties to be a waste of energy, he was clearly submerged in the revolutionary politics of his generation. One of his ideas that he had for social change was something called the 'Delta Unit' which was supposed to be a new way of measuring human value that could be used instead of money. His experiments with artists in factories did not produce much of a lasting impact, but he was able to continue to work with government programs to promote his ideas of community art. His later activities would involve going into underdeveloped communities and asking them to participate in performances that in reality were types of social games designed to raise their consciousness about their place in society. Examples involved assigning the participants fictional roles in a society with different houses and giving some participants the power to enforce laws over others.

The APG would ultimately fail to keep itself going. It's funding was cut off in the late 70s after its exhibition at the Hayward gallery attracted the lowest audience attendance of all time. But by the time of its demise in 1989 there would be whole host of similar groups operating in Europe and America.<sup>44</sup>

These kind of community arts groups were a product of the more idealistic movements of the 1960s. Just like the Constructivists they saw the role of the artist as benefiting all of society by employing artists to inspire workers in factories with ideas. It is small wonder that so few companies were willing to employ artists to do this and that the group had to seek funding from the state. The later devolution of their practice into social experiment seems to at best be a form of patronisation of people and at worst a way to produce social unrest by trying to draw people's attention to the social constraints that they are under. It can be considered a more successful extension of some of the ideas of the situationists in using art to try to inform ideas of social relations. But the fact that the movement was forced to rely on state funding to exist is evidence that it produced little of artistic value.

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<sup>44</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, (London: Verso, 2012). Page 210-225

## Relational Aesthetics

While site specific work and artistic residencies had existed before, they were a somewhat marginal feature of the art world until the 1990s when a new group of artists would come to fame, associated with the theories of relational aesthetics developed by Nicolas Bourriaud. His idea being that this new generation of artists were more engaged with everyday life, and instead of art being autonomous from the world, the relationship between artist and society took precedent.

In 1993 an artist residency took place that would include many of these artists who would later be associated with the movement. The exhibition was called *Unite d'Habitation* and it would involve 40 artists working together as the role of inhabitants on the theme of 'unfulfilled utopian pragmatics'. Rather ironically the residency took place in a run down council estate built by Le Corbusier in France. The building was a huge apartment block situated at the top of a hill in a small town named Firmine and was in an extremely bad state. Only the lower parts of the building were habitable with the top remaining unfinished. The idea was for the artists to live with the lower income residents and create work about their experience.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 14: Unite d'Habitation

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<sup>45</sup> See Figure 14

The exhibition included the artists Mark Dion, Dominique Gonzalez Foerster, Phillip Pareno, Martha Rosler and several others who would be part of the relational aesthetics crowd. Theorised by Bourriaud and further developed by the curator Hans Ulrich Obrist. They produced works such as video interviews with the residents, a fake music collection for the town, and doll houses based on the same architecture as the council building. None of which received much enthusiasm from critics but the intention of community building with the exhibition became part of a much wider trend around the world.

By the late 1990s the ideas of community arts practice were well established. They included works like Rirkrit Tiravanija cooking a Thai meal for gallery visitors, Mark Dion collecting debris from rivers to archive and Philippe Parreno's pile of candy bars for the audience to take away and eat. Other examples include Superflex founding a TV station for elderly residents in Liverpool and Thomas Hirschhorn creating an installation dedicated to philosophers for hosting lectures and workshops. All of these projects were dedicated to living among and improving the conditions of local communities through either light entertainment or education. Other artists would found fake companies, or choose to work mundane jobs as part of their practice.<sup>46</sup>

This kind of community engaged art is based on the idea that artists can do more than produce art for wealthy people, and act as props in a staged gallery for passive consumption. Bourriaud wrote about how the society had become the realm for all exhibitions to take place, and this was realised by the generation that were disillusioned by the commercialised art of the 1980s. This expanded idea of the exhibition was also made possible by the emergence of computer technology and the internet enabling curators to play a much more active role in organising and staging exhibitions. Therefore the desire of the artist to play the role of community organiser allowed curators to provide the concept for the works that would make up the exhibition.

This line of thought is still very much with us today. The Turner Prize in 2015 was won by artistic collective Assemble, whose practice involved going into poor communities in Britain and volunteering to make creative furniture and household appliances.<sup>47</sup> Another example is the American artist Theaster Gates who is famous for restoring abandoned buildings and turning them into cultural centres. Yet the epitome of this kind of community arts is undoubtedly Tino Sehgal. His works involves groups trained to perform a specific

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<sup>46</sup> Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, (London: Verso, 2012). Page 235 - 48

<sup>47</sup> Dezeen, Assemble Wins the Turner Prize, <https://www.dezeen.com/2015/12/07/assemble-architecture-collective-wins-2015-turner-prize-liverpool-housing-regeneration-project/> (accessed 02 March 2018).



tasks that helps the audience think about their place in society. For example they will engage the audience with philosophical dialogue or ask them to segregate themselves based on perceived wealth and privilege.

The whole idea of empowering communities through engagement with the arts is somewhat lacking in sufficient evidence. The early experiments performed by the APG in Britain were unsuccessful at promoting any lasting relationships with business, they simply managed to expand the funding of governments into more obscure art practices. However they were successful in producing a model for artists that today is incredibly valuable, the artist residency, which has been essential in creating the field of site specific practices. It can be argued that the expansion of art into everyday life and the creation of community participation is somehow inevitable due to the possibilities created by the internet. However this does not mean that the types of work produced cannot be evaluated on their own merits. It is noticeable that many of the works created by this group are often lacking in any real content or substance and often simply promote cooperation for its own sake without any experience to reflect upon. Other artists stray so far into the roles that they have assigned themselves that they almost have no need to call themselves artists. It was noted by one critic at the time of the 2015 turner prize that if judges wanted to award prizes to art that was 'useful' why not simply nominate Oxfam or a hardware store? This highlights the point that in some instances there is no criteria for some of these volunteer groups being artists other than self definition.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Figure 15



Figure 15: Assemble

There's no doubt that many of these collectives provide great benefits to the communities that they operate in and that volunteer work is admirable. But the scale of real community improvement is slightly more doubtful especially when public money is being used to fund such events. What's more, confining the artist to the role of charity worker means that they are restrained in terms of the content that would appeal to an artistic audience. So by discarding the gallery setting, they also discard the framework that allows their work to be judged by an artistically engaged audience.

Like a lot of utopian or idealistic art, when judged in terms of its social goals, the project of community arts can be considered as rather short sighted. However when judged in terms of its contribution to artistic mediums, it can be evaluated more highly. These types of works have allowed for the development of interactive art and a type of festivalism where traditional performance art involving very few participants has been expanded to involve dozens of delegate performers, eroding the boundaries between theatre, installation and performance.

If we look past the value of the works themselves, the community arts movement can be seen as part of the break down of autonomous art that has been occurring for the last few decades. Art today is now very undefined in terms of its space and relationship to the audience. The internet in a sense has created more of a desire for experiencing real events

which is evident in phenomenon like Escape Rooms and the Punchdrunk Theatre company which uses entire abandoned buildings for a masked audience to walk through. In this sense much of contemporary art involves the artist as a kind of stage manager where aesthetics are delegated to a backdrop for a performance which involves the audience.

However many of the community arts movements are extremely vague in their goal of promoting artistic dialogue and in creating art for everyone they often create art for no one, I think in terms of their ability to produce speculative material, they could be far more effective in spaces designed for such an event where the audience knows what to expect.

## Conclusion

When examining utopian art movements as a whole, it becomes obvious that these movements invariably dissolve when their political aims appear futile. An obvious and easy conclusion to this would be to say that utopian thinking in the arts is always fruitless and should be abandoned. But the people who made up these movements were often aware of this but were not deterred from pursuing their own form of idealism. This suggests that utopian thinking in the arts is inevitable and that it is a natural human instinct to want to imagine a better society to aspire to.

In terms of the historical avant garde, the early socialist movements contributed a great deal to the aesthetics of 20th Century design both with the arts and crafts movement and the Bauhaus, and these same influences can still be felt today. The artistic contribution of a movement should be judged in separation from their political motives. The pictorial representations of the Futurists in the early 20th century were really rather limited and were merely attempting to abstractly represent speed. Yet their experiments in theatre would prove far more influential, aiding the development of Dada and surrealism. The Russian Constructivists produced work that was visually similar to the Futurists but were operating on the opposite end of the political spectrum. The idea that the arts can be merged with industry to foster creativity among workers is something that was tried by the Soviet Union and is still being attempted by many artists working today. The experiments in both times show the limitations of this belief. As the ability of the artist to inspire others is necessarily confined to those who share a similar taste in aesthetics.

The situationists in the 1960s believed that mechanical automation would mean that mankind would soon be free from most labour and that this would allow the creation of entire cities designed to inspire creative thought. Similarly today there are many who believe that automation means that there will be less and less jobs leading to the creation of a larger welfare state and perhaps a more egalitarian society.

None of this means that idealistic visions of society should not be valued in the arts. Rather the opposite, it should be valued with the recognition of what it is, an ideal. And something that is constantly open to change and revision. The general lesson to be drawn is that most specific conditions for a new society will often be proven wrong, but general ideas of creating lasting value are far more successful.

Henri Bergson was right that the proper role of the artist is one of imagining the possibilities that do not exist in nature. One of these possibilities is a future society that

people would want to live in. By embracing increasing forms of social control, artists in the past have thrown away their liberties that allowed them the freedom to imagine such a future in the first place. If they allow themselves to be subsumed by a higher ideal then they eliminate everything that is unique and individual about their art.

In my own work I have explored themes of historical utopian thinking among corporations and political movements. My video essays have attempted to uncover the motivations behind these groups from the early 1800s to today, and discover how utopian thinking is still present in current political discussion. Upon examining the literature around utopianism it is clear that the technological advances of the 19th century gave birth to an inherently optimistic vision of the future, where technology would create a world that was more peaceful and secure. This view changes during the 20th century after the first world war where dystopian ideas become far more popular. These apocalyptic visions continue into the 20th century until the 1990s where social planning becomes more popular. Today utopian thinking can be observed in political movements like environmentalism and libertarianism.

The format of the video essay is useful in combining video footage with an opinion articulated by the author. It differs from a documentary because it does not attempt to report on a topic as an objective news source, instead it is an attempt to formulate an argument using video footage as evidence.

The utopian spirit then, is valuable when it remains abstract and used in such a way as to help people imagine future possibilities. It can also be extremely useful in illustrating the values that people share and when they are in conflict, but when specific political goals become dominant, they subsume all other modes of artistic creation and flexibility that are essential for the free exchange of ideas. Societal aspirations are constantly changing and shifting, while an object created by an artist can last through the generations.

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