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## The Power and Importance of the Politics of Art with its Hegemonic, Revolutionizing and Feminist Uproar

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### ABSTRACT

Art is a creative form of expressionism. An art form is perceived through subjective perspectives. In other words, it is scrutinized under varying yardsticks, it means different to different eyes; yet it is the same artistic form under scrutiny. What, in art's 'being' pronounces it as 'different' albeit the same? Is it the aesthetic essence of art that makes it political? This paper, shall attempt to explore this aspect of art that makes it existentially 'artful' through its aesthetic and political being.

This shall be further investigated under the light of how art functions as being political, oppressive or emancipatory depending on the varying power structure existing between the three determinants of art, politics and protests.

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### INTRODUCTION

What is art? Is it a construction of a unique creativity by the producer or a representational body of the other world (Gaarder) as claims Plato in the example of the allegory of the cave?

In this paper, art is defined as everything that involves the 'construction-through-creativity' quotient. This proposition is grounded in the claim that the whole world is gallery of an artistic production, with God as its creator- the artist. For example, God has sculpted mankind, infusing him with power of the highest order. Man is the 'eye of the landscape (all of the universe)' as proclaims the Chinese philosophy of Daosim. This makes him the most powerful of his creations, without whom the existence of all other creations are rendered redundant. Power as claims David Easton (David 35) is always inherent with the force of the play of politics because it involves a hierarchical paradigm.

To extend this claim, can it be said that every creation plays politics with its beholders at various levels? I shall explore this dimension in my paper, functioning politics as a tool that plays games with its beholders, especially when an artistic production is under scrutiny.

‘Politics’ as understood here, is a product relational to power- that an artist holds for creating an art form. ‘Politics’ is ‘the authoritative allocation of values in a system’ as defined by the famous political scientist David Easton ( David 35 ). ‘Power’ is further understood as a quality that every artistic production possesses in its own accord. This paper shall further attempt to explore the ‘artfulness of art’ within the relationship existing between these three determinants of power, politics, purpose and expressionism, which will further be supported by Theodore Adorno’s ideology of art as:-

“All art is an uncommitted crime.” ( Adorno 115 )

This raises a significant question. Should the contents of the world be judged in existentialist terms of their own being once produced? Or should they be ‘grasped in terms of creators and producers, not recipients’ as believes Martin Heidegger ( Heidegger 5 ) ?

Along with the exploration of these questions, my paper shall also attempt to examine the two contradictory forms of artistic behavior that is of dissent and hegemony, when used differently.

The answer lies in the fact that artistic production radiates everywhere because the whole of the universe is a creation- an art form. God is the creator- the painter who has painted everything in the universe.

These are the dimensions that I shall attempt to explore in this paper in three separate sections. The first section will deal with the aesthetic quality of art, intertwined with the quotient of power and politics. The second section will deal with art functioning as hegemonic and revolutionizing in the political platform. The third section will deal with art as a medium of feminist expression against patriarchal domination.

### **1. The Political and Aesthetical Philosophy of Art:-**

As the story of Xuanzong goes - the Chinese Emperor commissioned a painter to paint the walls of his palace ( Sven ). One of the things that the painter painted was a cave with a door. When the painter escorted the Emperor to have a look at it and remarked, “In this cave, at the foot of the mountain, dwells a spirit. The inside is splendid, beyond anything words can convey. Please

let me show Your Majesty the way.” The painter then clapped his hands. No sooner did he do that than the door of the cave in the painting opened. The painter walked in through the door of the cave and this very moment the painting disappeared in the wall before the Emperor was given a chance to move. The creator- the painter and his creation- the painting both disappeared forever and was never seen or heard of thereafter.

The message that this story gives is significant. The aesthetics and values of art is authentically understood by the painter who creates it. Art, requires a mental and a physical involvement by the onlooker who undergoes a spiritual journey of the inner self to fathom its true meaning. Like in this case, where the painter invites the Emperor to walk through the cave and comprehend the inner meaning of the painting by a physical walk into the ‘inner/connotative meaning of the painting’. What is interesting here is the fact that though the Emperor, being a ruler, is mighty and powerful; he is rendered powerless by denying access to accomplish the aesthetic quality of the artistic expression.

Here, the politics of power play is perhaps mechanized by art itself. This can be interpreted by the fact that the Emperor who is powerful and holds of a kingdom of his own, is still unable to access art for its true meaning aesthetics. This fact provides the artist and its creation immense power to play politics with his onlooker. The significant question that raises here is whether art is not merely a representational form of thoughts, ideas and emotions but an experience of sort.

Conversely, the Chinese ‘Shanshui’( landscape of the painting ) (Trauvero) is representational of the abstract relationship that the contents of a painting establishes with the viewer who undertakes a spiritual, mental and physical journey to understand its motives, which more so comes to a life of its own.

This assertion can be anchored from the Freudian theory of the three divisions of the human mind as conscious, unconscious and the subconscious. The physical observation of the viewer at the conscious level, demands that the experience of understanding a piece of art comes through a deep penetration of the artistic production at an intellectual and spiritual level. This is possible only through the penetration of the ‘conscious’ participation of the viewer into the ‘subconscious’ of his mind through the ‘process of deduction’ ( Freud 519 )

The exploration of art at this level transports it to the realm of existential being which, brands itself independently for its own aesthetic quality. Art, checkmates the onlooker because it plays politics to suit its own demand that of a spiritual involvement; otherwise even the mightiest of the mighty will lose the game.

Interestingly, this power quotient inverses, if the Chinese concept of 'Shanshui' is applied from a different perspective. The Daoist concept of 'Shanshui' defines Chinese paintings through the landscape i.e. 'shan'(mountain) and 'shui' (water). It renders mankind as the 'eye of this landscape'. This proposes that man is the most powerful in the universe since it links heaven (above) and earth (below). A painting exists only because man has created it. In other words, man is the most powerful here. This argument changes the politics of power play among its determinants.

This analysis shows the existentialist quality of art that exists independently with accordance to its aesthetic idiosyncrasies. This, further establishes the fact that art holds intense power in its own being and massively controls its discourse with its own rules.

## **2. Art as hegemonic and revolutionizing in the historical and contemporary context:-**

History and the contemporary discourse of time bears witness to the politics of artistic implications of language of letters and images, which are both heavy with a connotative symbolic value of power and politics.

This is to make a claim that if an art form tries to oppress the mass, it becomes hegemonic; whereas, if the mass uses it against any hegemonic order, art becomes revolutionary. In simple words, if the mass uses artistic expression in any form to challenge the establishment at power, it becomes emancipatory through its activism; whereas if it is used by the establishment in power to subjugate the mass, it becomes totalitarian. In both cases, art formulates a politicized relationship between the two parties because it involves a complex power play of aesthetic value between the polity (people) and the head in power.

This assertion can be explained through three instances from history and the contemporary discourse of time. For example, the 1920s flag of the Nazis, which features a black 'hooked-cross' rotated at 45 degrees on a white circle on a red background. The image of the flag is an artistic expression charged with power and politics because it was used by the Nazi Party to symbolize

German nationalistic pride (Reference to Figure 1 to be made). On the contrary, to the Jews, the same piece of art became a symbol of anti-Semitism and terror. (Reference to Figure 2 to be made) This shows how an art form can serve a dual polarized purpose of politics that can be cohesive and adhesive at the same.



Figure 1

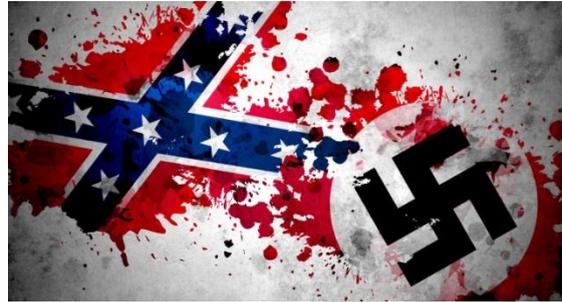


Figure 2

In the contemporary scenario, another example can be cited. During the 2017 Gorkhaland agitation in Darjeeling, the leaders of the GNLFF Party, made it a forceful rule to tag the word ‘Gorkhaland’ on every commercial or residential establishment (Reference to the following figures to be made). This action is subversive because the word ordered to be inscribed on the board was the artistic representation of the powerholders’ desire to mark territory. This claim leads me to understand language as a form of art- a medium that politicians use to win/ gain power over the public.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Interestingly, the two references made here delineate the hegemonic nature of an art production, which is symbolic to a kind of a tyrannical exercising of power. In both the cases, the art form whether in a physical state (the Nazi flag) or just in an image of a word (here, ‘Gorkhaland’), art emerges as a powerful tool of oppression.

Additionally, another perspective that demands an exploration in this discussion is that of the language of letters and words. The language of letters is a form of art that speaks a message that is not only authoritarian and totalitarian but also seditious. To exemplify this point, the prime

example that can be cited is Salam Rushdie's book 'Satanic Verses' which rebels against the dogmatism of the Christian faith, which it claims to be subversively sectarian and dogmatic. Language is a form of art because it requires a creativity of the mind. It is used by Rushdie as a medium of sedition. A similar thing happens in the case of all works of literature that protest through language. Perhaps language can be understood as significant form of artistic expression that posits the politics of play, which is powered because of its revolutionary nature that fights against a tyranny.

Another art form that shall be explored for its politics of power play against a hegemonic establishment is the calypso from the popular culture. Music is considered an art form because of the creativity quotient it holds. So holds because the artist works with various chords to create a piece of music. The calypso genre of music perfectly delineates the artfulness of an art form of dissent expressed from the lenses of an ethnos. The bouncy beats and joyful cadences of the calypso often serve up serious, subversive, messages, especially those characterized by the struggle of emancipation, racism, mental and sexual exploitation, etc. The 1974 dissent against the colonizers in Trinidad and The Caribbean Island show how powerful this art-form was in creating a feeling of solidarity in fighting the then power-holders against injustice.

Conversely, it can be asserted that art can use both- the tool of politics and popular culture to exercise a power hold on the masses to meet its demands. Here, art becomes totalitarian. Simultaneously, it also becomes a form of resistance against totalitarianism.

### **3. Feminism in artistic production/(s):-**

An artistic production can represent a duality of purpose in a feminist enterprise. This assertion can be well explained in reference to Charlotte Perkin Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper"( Gilman)

This story is a perfect example to showcase the evils of the psychological trauma of women who are caught in a patriarchal driven domestic sphere. It is based on the life of a housewife who is trapped in a dominating patriarchal domestic sphere. The protagonist here, faces intense existential crisis. This predominantly occurs in the hands of her husband, who withers her individuality by dismissing her mental trauma for a physical ailment. Gilman's protagonist is confined to her room because of this apparent body sickness just like prototypical exemplar of

women as the monster as analyzed in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Gilbert). Domestic confinement disposes her with nothing else to do but observe the crumbling wallpaper of her room. She begins to interpret the writings on the wall through pictorial images emerging as a story of her own subjugation.

The images perceived by the protagonist are understood as an artistic expression of the woman's plight in her struggles to an emancipation. Here, the worn out wallpaper is understood as holding a duality of purpose- one of the physical artistic expression on the wall that is interpreted by the protagonist and the other which Gilman herself uses through her writing of the plot to highlight the problems of a housewife whose growth is stunted like that of a bonsai's.

Furthermore, the scrapings on the wall on the wall is subjected to heavy artistic scrutiny that involves a mental and a physical involvement of the viewer just like in the case of *The Emperor Xuanzang* as discussed in Section 1. Here, the scrapings take the form of a painting that is to be made sense of by the onlooker. In this case, it explores the protagonist's traumatized self in the hands of her husband.

Therefore, the interpretative writings on the wall are kind of an artistic form that is analyzed by the protagonist to project her struggles. It also shows the interplay of the power quotient existing in a sexist, anti- feminist society through a display of the determinants of a conjugal relationship that is overarched in the destructive shadow of a chauvinist society.

Conductively, through the example of this story, the hierarchical relationship between art, politics and power is implicitly evident. The scrapings on the wall understood as a painting, underline the politics of power that the male dominated society play in order to keep the female chained with suppression. Whereas, the same scrapings on the wall are used by the protagonist as a medium of protest. They indicate the desire of the female to be liberated from the shackles of an unequal and an unjust society.

On a similar tangent stands the representative interplay of various feminist art forms. This dimension will be predominantly discussed in reference to the British artist Linder Sterling and the anonymous female artists of the magazine *Guerrilla Girls Talk Back* (Also referred to as *Guerrilla Girls*). The work of Sterling and those of the artists of the magazine *Guerrilla Girls Talk*

Back explore the politicized relationship between the objectified female body and the male gaze in the most fervent manner.

Sterling's work of feminist art is well known for photography, radical feminist photomontage, and confrontational performance art focusing on questions of gender, commodity and display. Her highly recognizable photomontage practice combines everyday images from domestic or fashion magazines with images from pornography and other archival material. A few selected posters of protest by Sterling are as follows:-



Figure 1



Figure 2

Cut and collaged by hand using a scalpel and glue, the juxtapositions recall a rich art history harking back to the Dadaists.

Likewise, since their inception in 1984, the Guerrilla Girls have been working to expose sexual and racial discrimination in the art world. Dubbing themselves the 'conscience of the art world', in 1985 the Guerrilla Girls began a poster campaign that targeted museums, dealers, curators, critics and artists who they felt were actively responsible for, or complicit in, the exclusion of women and non-white artists from mainstream exhibitions and publications. The theme of female commodification is clearly indicative in the following posters selectively selected from their collection:

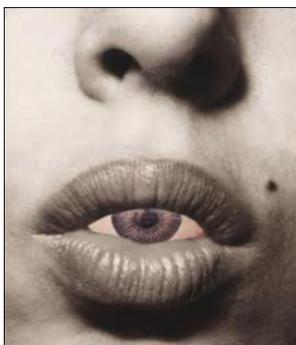


Figure 3



Figure 4

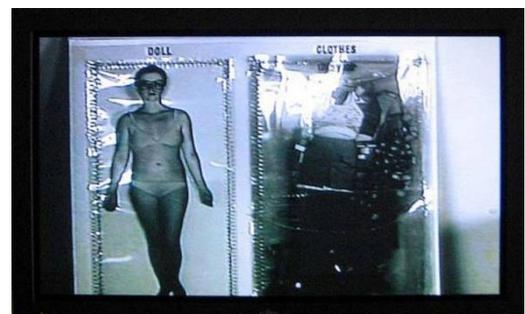


Figure 5

All the above photographs manifest a controversial analysis of the fraught relation between political and representational visibility of artistic expression in the sociology-cultural purview. The world of media and art has been significantly transformed by the presence of these powerful work of art forms that protest against female subjugation in a very challenging manner. The images clearly indicate an overt expression that raises its hands without any inhibitions. They show the harsh reality of female exploitation. It exposes the prejudices and stereotypical assumptions about the gender question. For example, Figure 1 and Figure 2 expose the societal conditioning of categorizing the woman sex with the domestic sphere where she is limited as a sexual object and an unpaid servant doing all the household chores. Figure 3, 4 and 5 too speak similar messages of the limitations of the woman. However, the politicized link between the private and public is more evident.

Conversely, the three examples mentioned above establish the political and aesthetical being the work of art forms in the world of feminist strife.

### **Result and Discussion**

There are several indispensable questions relating to the relationship existing between art, power and protest that surface in this explorative journey. Is art inherently aesthetic and existentialist? Does the politics in an art form infuse it with power. If an artistic expression If the power structure between these three determinants change according to the functionality of an art form, do these exist in a hierarchical structure? What defines this power structure?

### **Conclusions**

Finally, art as explored in the three sections prompts one to ascertain several assertions on its relational discourse with politics and power, which are intertwined in its collective existence. Three major proponents can be asserted in this research paper.

Firstly, the whole of the universe is a creation - an artistic expression of God as the artist. All of God's creation is political in its existentialist being because it demands an interpretative perspective in the eyes of the beholder of an artistic form. Due to this inherent politics, an art form becomes aesthetic since it involves a subjective eye to weight the beauty and idiosyncrasies of its being.

Secondly, the relationship between art, politics and protest exists in an interesting hierarchical structure. These three determinants co-exist although with paradigmatic changes, that subtly nuances the power holder's position as one who is hegemonizing or revolutionizing. Thirdly, the feminist echoes of an art form can be understood as a powerful weapon to fight all forms of tyrannical patriotic.

Therefore, all in all, it can be asserted that art is not a political weapon of transformation but also a political consciousness that makes the human feel collectively social and cultural. Moreso, if politics is removed from art, art becomes trivially dysfunctional or dead. If all is political, all is art and if all is art then all is aesthetically existentialist.

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