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Asger Jorn, Modified Art, and the Importance of the Relation of the Human Animal to Capitalist Society

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I will analyze modern art and its relationship to the human experience and contrast this against how capitalism and the subsequent transition to a consumerist society has changed the nature of art. I will do so by looking at a few different views of art, starting with Leo Tolstoy and Theodor Adorno and following up with a focus on the work and values of Asger Jorn. Asger Jorn was a Danish artist who incorporated a variety of different mediums and applications of art, ranging from written publications and paintings to express his views on modern art and its relation to what he refers to as the human animal. I will showcase the way Jorn's different political and artistic affiliations, including being a founding and key member of notable avant-garde movements such as the COBRA art movement and the Situationists International, incorporated themes of community, expression, and artistic engagement and critique to challenge and bring forth change from the degradation of human life that follows consumerist culture.

KEYWORDS

Aesthetics, Art, Asger Jorn, Situationists International, COBRA, Capitalism, Consumerism, Theodor Adorno, Leo Tolstoy, Avant-Garde, Culture Industry

What unifies all art of the past and present, and thus has allowed different forms of art movements to bridge cultural lines, is that it is a uniquely human experience. In this paper I will focus on the state of the modern art experience and how the transition of art movements has not only paved the way for vandalistic arts such as the modification series by Asger Jorn but highlight the ways that this style is imperative in maintaining the status of art as a universal act of human expression. I will do this by first outlining the ways in which the transgression of art through the industrial and technological revolutions of the 19th and 20th century has left no choice for the art world other than a route of radical ideals to survive and how this is ultimately the most beneficial route for modern art to take. I will showcase Jorn's view on the status of art in contrast to both the previously held views of art and the views of art at the time of his career, in relation to both the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy and his definition of art, as well as a specific mention of the German philosopher Theodor Adorno whose views on the art industry were relevant when Jorn was an active artist. I will then discuss the relation of Jorn to the evolution of art and where it stands today. Finally, I will specifically look at the background of Jorn and show how his unique history and affiliations make him the perfect candidate to represent this revolutionary view, with a specific focus on his piece *Ainsi on s'Ensor (Out of This World—After Ensor, 1962)*, a painting from his modification series that I think best encapsulates this transition, both through its homage to another artist, James Ensor, and simultaneously an homage to the anonymous artist who unknowingly provided the base for which Jorn was able to create this painting. In this way, Jorn exemplifies the importance of the capacity of art to adapt to society while simultaneously challenging it, showcases the importance of the collective aspect of art making, and ultimately defines art as an integral key to understanding what he calls the "human animal".

The main reason it is so difficult to analyze a piece of art and understand its significance is because the very nature of art and aesthetics are so interwoven that it is far too easy to reduce art to the beauty it contains. The field of aesthetics can be thought to represent that which is beautiful but the aesthetic beauty of art is only one aspect, the likes of which is not always helpful when determining the significance of art. In order to break down the true meaning of art, one needs to start by determining how to decide what makes art beautiful. In the late 1800's, Leo Tolstoy rejected the necessity of beauty in art as he addressed the critical question of the nature of art in his aptly titled "*What is Art?*" Here

he evaluates what exactly constitutes a work as an *artwork* in particular and its role as a condition of humanity. Tolstoy's definition of art puts an emphasis on the emotional experience of art. He says: "Art is a human activity, consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them." (Tolstoy, 1897, 43) Tolstoy's theory of art characterizes art as something infectious, in which the artist infects the viewer with the emotion behind the art they have created. Tolstoy's view then creates a definition of art that makes art an inherently social act, one essential to human life, that allows us to communicate often complicated emotions and feelings with others across cultural borders and throughout the passing of time. Tolstoy's definition of art is not a perfect one by any means—for starters, it seems to reduce art to whether or not the artist has elicited an emotion properly, which takes away from the time and effort that artists put into the technicality of their craft. Tolstoy's definition is also too limited to be considered as a comprehensive theory of art as it does not take into account the crucial question of how to decide what is art, or more specifically in relation to his view, how to decide what an emotionally charged social interaction looks like in regards to art. Different people can and will have different reactions to different pieces of art and it seems too alienating to implement a definition of art that declares that art can only be good when it has communicated what the artist was intending to emote, instead of allowing for it to be open to different interpretations and emotional responses from different people across different times. While it may be true that art cannot be reduced to a mere transmission of human feeling, it is still important to remember that the inherent emotional labor that goes into art is a crucial aspect of what makes it unique from other technical crafts. I feel it is important to mention Tolstoy's view because it seems then that while there are flaws, it is a good base to start with in relation to Jorn as the themes of both human emotion and human nature in general were ones Jorn repeatedly emphasized in his artistic endeavors.

So then, how does this conception of art hold up, especially in relation to modern art? Tolstoy wrote "*What is Art?*" shortly after the Industrial Revolution had completely changed the economy of Europe and North America alike. The advancement of technology at this time brought in not only inventions such as the automobile and the airplane to allow people to move from place to place faster, but also the advancement of the camera and the progression of the field

of photography. With these modern advancements, the days where art was a necessary means of capturing an objective moment were gone—one doesn't need to paint a person to encapsulate their memory if one can simply take a photo. The photo will not only be produced more quickly than previous methods but will often also be considered a more accurate representation of what that person looks like. As technological advancements were happening at rapid speeds, art movements in the 20th century were moving more quickly as well. The time of art movements lasting over hundreds of years at a time, such as the Renaissance movement, which spanned over the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries, was over. The art movements of the 20th century lasted for much shorter periods of time, spanning only several years at a time with more overlap between movements. The increasing presence of consumerism in modern society is one likely culprit of this shift as the transition to a focus on capital gain meant that every aspect of human life was becoming faster, more disposable, and, most notably, revolved around the monetary value it contained. In addition to the increase of technology and consumer ideals happening at this time, artists were living in a world where the wounds of two major world wars were still very fresh. Movements such as the abstract expressionist movement, the first internationally renowned art movement originating in America, dominated Western culture and was a way for post-war artists to express themselves and the trauma from the wars in new art which focused on the artist and their expression as opposed to more objective paintings of people and landscapes of the past. Artistic camps varied between those dedicated to furthering this immersion into an increasingly technological form and those that opposed the influx of technology and desired a shift towards an emphasis on the humanistic tendencies behind art. At a time where artists and theorists alike were caught between an influx of new information and unsure of the proper route to take, philosopher Theodor Adorno was a prevalent figure and a hefty critic of what he deemed the shift into a "culture industry", a term he coined to represent this capitalist influence on popular culture at the time in his book *"The Dialectic of Enlightenment,"* written alongside fellow German philosopher Max Horkheimer. The 20th century reality of capitalism was no longer operating under the same constraints outlined by Karl Marx in relation to the beginnings of Industrial Revolution and capitalism. This meant that alienation in the 20th century is no longer seen from the perspective of a worker who is beat down with savage repression but instead is reflected in the ways that the everyday

person has become subdued with an influx of illusions and consumer goods, the value of which is imbued by mass culture and marketing characteristics that they don't actually possess. This transition of society and culture from actual needs to those artificial needs based on capital is the key concept behind Adorno's culture industry critique. This standardization of capitalism determining societies needs has created a society where people are less and less able to both think for themselves and to assess life critically, and therefore have become psychologically dominated by the capitalist infiltration of everyday life. Artists might seem to have gained more freedom of expression with the evolution of modern art but this freedom is an illusion as the artist is now bound to the demands of the consumerist standards in order to create art that society deems beautiful. Adorno provides more detail on what he believes beauty to be by contrasting it with the concept of the ugly, which he outlines in his *"Aesthetic Theory."* Adorno's view holds beauty to be a harmony which the deformity of ugliness interrupts (Adorno, 1970, 46). For Adorno, this relationship between beauty and ugliness is important in determining a cohesive definition of art and its societal role through the ways that these themes reflect the role of modern art in society. Art cannot be reduced to that which is beautiful because art needs ugliness to reflect the ugliness of society. Beauty is not enough on its own to account for the impact of society on art and actually is a reflection of people's aversion to that underlying ugly truth of the world which makes them uncomfortable. It is important to understand Adorno's theory in relation to Jorn as there are undeniable similarities between the philosophy of Adorno and Jorn's outlook on society and capitalist culture. Adorno and Jorn both believed in the power of art to reflect and criticize society but the main difference lies in the way that Adorno overall holds too far of a pessimistic outlook. Adorno's theory holds little hope for an outcome where art is able to make significant change in this commodification of practical life whereas Jorn remained playfully optimistic about art's ability to construct meaningful societal change. Art may be an ever-elusive topic to both navigate and define, but the beauty of Jorn is that he exemplified the beauty and purpose of art in a way that both revealed its importance and place in society while allowing it to still retain an air of mystery. This places art somewhere in between the realms of Tolstoy's matter-of-fact definition of art as expression while also allowing art to showcase its role in human emotional expression and societal and political critique.

It is important to continue to address and emphasize the change that was happening in this post-war society supported by a dedication to reform and a new capitalist economic basis, with an emphasis on immersing every aspect of life into the constraints of that which could be commodified, and see that art was no exception. The ability of art to overcome the influence of a culture increasingly dominated by this influence can only be produced by an equally resilient form of art, one that emphasizes a shift in the priority of art from one focused solely on the value it contains in relation to a price value by utilizing itself as a means of challenging the norms of that society. Jorn's importance is best seen in the way he sought a different route not only for art but the artist and all of humanity. He co-founded and participated in several coalitions that combined artistic and political elements in an attempt to rally against the increasing themes of banality he felt corresponded with this transition of post-war society. Groups that Jorn was affiliated with include: the Danish Helhesten group (1941-1944), COBRA (1948-1951), the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIB, 1953-1956), the Situationist International (1957-1972), and the Scandinavian Institute for Comparative Vandalism (SICV, 1961-1965). Jorn's affiliation with these groups, all of which he co-founded in addition to being an active member, illustrate an emphasis on his resistance of the increasingly present influence of capitalism on art. It was through these groups that Jorn built a resistance network through like-minded artists and utilized these relationships to spark conversation on the state of modern art. While the groups differed in views, themes of community, collaboration and expression opposed to consumerism were important themes touched upon throughout his involvement in each organization. In addition to self-exploration, Jorn was a trained artist, having enrolled himself in Fernand Léger's private art school in 1936. One year later, he returned to his home of Denmark where he was enrolled in the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. Jorn's varying group affiliations with fellow artists in addition to his more formal training highlight the way that he was dedicated to learning and immersing himself in the art world, allowing him to absorb influence from a wide range of styles and people. I will focus on Jorn's involvement with the specific groups of COBRA and the Situationists International, as I think these were his most foundational affiliations and the ones that had the most significant impact on him as an artist and thus reflect the strongest in his artistic output, especially in relation to his views on modern arts role in capitalism.

The first of these was the COBRA group, a group of artists, mostly known as painters but included poets, photographers and anthropologists alike with mutual intentions of criticizing the nature of the state of the post-war society in which it was formed (Kurczynski, 2019, 161). In this era, there was a theme of renewed hope, an emphasis on a fresh start after the end of the horror of two major World Wars. The problem with the mainstream societal view of change then was the emphasis that this fresh start was built around the increasing capital culture that grew from the Industrial Revolution. This culture rooted in institutionalizing every aspect of human life was slowly turning traditionally creative ventures, such as art, into something that could no longer be differentiated from other commercial ventures. COBRA emphasized a restructuring of this culture into an art industry that was no longer an industry but instead a realm where artists could pursue what they deemed true creative and meaningful artistic endeavors. One way in which they attempted to achieve this goal was to replace the traditional Western influence on a solitary artist, an idea which had been increasingly motivated by this influence of capitalism making art more about the monetary value of the artist's labor as opposed to art as a social interaction amongst artists and audience alike, with a view that instead emphasized the importance of collective art making. COBRA as an art group began in an untraditional way—the artists gathered and held discussions, collaborating with each other on their thoughts and ideals just as frequently as they did their art. The group collaborated in this way over the three years in which their coalition spanned and combined their artistic abilities to instill themes of artistic collaboration and elements of experimentation into a society they saw as intent on stifling the genuine creativity of humanity. COBRA showcased their emphasis on the collective by working together on several murals and publications, highlighting the importance of art as a social interaction in contrast to the ideal of individualism. COBRA was much more than just an avant-garde art group but instead a revolution of human nature through the implementation of political theory on art for societal change. It is in this way that COBRA can be seen as an integral part of understanding Jorn and his art and how the themes implemented in this group, although short-lived as a collective, followed him throughout his life.

The second movement crucial to understanding the psyche of Jorn was the Situationists International. This group was initiated out of a dynamic between Jorn as the leading artistic figure and Guy Debord, who was the leading theorist and

wrote *"The Society of the Spectacle"*, a pivotal text in understanding the concept of and beliefs behind the group. In this book, Debord described the current state of society as having been reduced to a spectacle or what he considered a mere image of what it once was. For the Situationists International (here-on out referred to as SI), authentic relationships between beings have been replaced with relationships of ownership, the likes of which is only the appearance of actually owning anything. The commodification of everyday life has replaced authentic human relationships with relationships based on the commodities provided by capitalist infrastructure. The "Situation" aspect of the name came from the group's emphasis on a tactic deemed "Situationism", in which the members attempted to revolutionize against their environment by creating situations that forced the everyday person to be removed from their immersion into the spectacle, even if only for a moment. They used mediums such as graffiti, posters, and road signs to deliver their message, cleverly vandalizing the city, in an attempt to use these alternative forms of art and messages to politically critique commodity culture. Similar to COBRA, the group was known for working as a collective, publishing several articles both as individuals and sometimes as an anonymous group, in their journal *Internationale Situationniste*. While this group started out with a focus on art as a vehicle for political change, the dynamic grew increasingly political with less of an emphasis on art and it is for this reason that Jorn disbanded from the group in 1954 although he didn't sever his ties completely; he continued to offer monetary support to Debord and the group for years after he left (King, 1998, 6-7).

Both of these groups are important not only for the ways they provided artistic influence and sparked political controversy in society but because they are so representative and integral to the evolution of Jorn as both a person and artist. COBRA and the SI are but just two small pieces of the enigmatic puzzle that is Asger Jorn. Understanding Jorn and his beliefs is a path riddled with playful contradictions, much like the theme of playfulness and humor that he imparted in much of his artwork. Jorn balanced the initial trainings of Fernand Léger, a strict mentor of Jorn and an artist with a prominent focus on cubism and modernist art, from an academic standpoint to his eventual transition to a more spontaneous personal style much different than that of Léger. He met his COBRA co-founder Christian Dotremont at the International Congress of Revolutionary Surrealism in Brussels yet went on to later criticize surrealism in a COBRA journal (Kurcynski,

2019, 165-167). His work can be seen as influential on the post-war trend of abstract expressionism yet he was a key member of the SI which rejected this trend, stressing instead an importance on the way art can express itself through persons and their lived life through the groups concept of situations. It is evident that although he is frequently grouped with both the surrealism and expressionist movements, he opposed being associated directly with either of these styles. Jorn also criticized COBRA for a lack of political focus in their art yet left the SI when the Debord insisted the group shift away from a focus on art and the group became too theoretically politically focused. When one looks at the development of both Jorn's personal and professional life, they can see a clear resistance to being pinned down, having never settled into one specific art style nor allowing himself to be boxed into one neat ideology. It is this aspect of Jorn that is both charming and unique, and why I feel he is the perfect candidate to represent the complexities so often attributed to understanding art. Both art and Jorn in particular resist being catalogued because they are nuanced and multi-faceted much in the way that human nature innately is. People grow and evolve in the same way that art does, which is why it is at best a complex and uniquely human experience that, much like human existence itself, should be allowed to experiment and exist for people without the implication of monetary value skewing the priority of it's potential.

It is this resistance to change and emphasis on human complexity that can best be exemplified in Jorn's concept of the human animal, seen encapsulated in a work by Jorn that was discovered posthumously, titled originally in Danish as "*Mennsekedyret*", which can be translated into English as "*The Human Animal*." Jorn's interest in animal nature and it's relation to humanity can be seen especially in the work produced during the COBRA era, which placed an emphasis on child-like art styles, using motifs of animal representation and themes of Nordic myths to show an opposition to a Humanist emphasis on the importance of Western culture as the embodiment of culture and human nature. Jorn stressed the importance of art in relation to human nature but disagreed with these commonly held beliefs of post-war Humanism that put an emphasis on Western culture as being the standard for that which was good art. COBRA, and Jorn specifically, instead put an emphasis on embracing a more primitivist approach, although not from a standpoint of fetishism that can be seen displayed frequently at this time but instead as a nod to the importance of the inclusion of all cultures, not just those

from the West, in the art world. Jorn's continual emphasis on community amongst artists and appreciation of the influence and contribution of others can best be seen in his Modifications series, in which during the years of 1959-1963 Jorn frequented flea markets and purchased paintings that embodied the Academic style art at the time, art that put an emphasis on Western 20th century trends such as impressionism, and revalued the art with his own modifications.

Jorn's concept of modifying art was a form of *détournement*, a method implemented frequently by the SI, which involved taking a pre-existing image (such as a painting in Jorn's case) and changing the meaning of the original piece by changing it (Jorn, 1959). The way Jorn executed his own personal method of *détournement* was through his modifying of the thrift store painting purchases he made, combining both a critique of the culture the art represented while simultaneously allowing his re-imaginings of the previous art to show a way that art can instill change in that very culture. Jorn's modification series is also a very critical example of Jorn's unique ability to tread the line between the dichotomy of individual expression combined with collective effort in the spirit of political and social reform. By taking artwork that Jorn felt exemplified the art of the bourgeois, art which represented the very transition of art towards banal, mass-produced pieces, and vandalizing it with his own personal touches, Jorn had incorporated themes of collectiveness, humor, and an aspiration for political change into a unique series. Jorn did not mean for these modifications to be seen primarily as a critique of the work of the former artist but rather used it as an ironic opposition to this increasing influence behind the popularity of that particular style of art, the influence of capitalist exploitation of art. While the overlying theme of Jorn's modification series involved the base of a repurposed piece of art, as stated previously usually depicting some representation of what was considered academic art at the time, such as paintings of portraits and landscapes that represented the kitsch art of the time, and combined with the addition of Jorn's vision, this is the extent to the physical similarities behind the paintings. However different they may appear on the surface, the modifications hold a similar underlying essence as a critique of culture but vary greatly in their physical representation of this matter. The painting from this series that I feel is the most critical to represent Jorn and his ideals expressed not only throughout his lifetime but especially throughout this series is his painting titled *Ainsi on s'Ensor (Out of this World—after Ensor)*, 1962. In this painting, we can see what can best be described as a somber scene

of a hanged man which Jorn modified with touches of dark humor—most notably the inclusion of a vulgar mask onto the face of the hanged man, which was a nod to painter James Ensor, who's work was of notable influence on Jorn. It is at this point that I will focus most specifically on how this painting in particular captures the spirit of Jorn as a person and an artist as well as combining the themes of creative collectivity, artistic influence, and political and social reform in a uniquely humorous, ironic and revolutionary way to represent the ties between humanity and human nature and art that Jorn stressed throughout his life.

The first notable theme of this work is the aspect of collectiveness that it incorporates. As displayed by his involvement in several groups of artists coming together to create and inspire, Jorn believed in and stressed whole-heartedly the importance of the relationship art had on the social life through these recurring themes of the collective artist over the individual artist working in solitude. In the bottom left-hand corner of *Ainsi on s'Enseigne*, one can make out the signature of what is most likely the original artist of the piece. Jorn often kept the original artists signature intact when modifying a painting, which can be seen as a representation of his commitment to using *détournement* not as a method of appropriating previous art forms but to pay homage to a forgotten artist while critiquing the institution of which the art represented. Through this, it can be seen that Jorn considered this a way of art to be repurposed and revalued in a way that plays on these themes of the community of art and represented a social form of art, focused on rebellion against the society of which both the original artist and Jorn were apart of. And thus, through this revaluing of the previous work, Jorn highlights this importance of the human relationships behind art, both between the artist or artists and the audience. He shows the way that art is a mode of human expression that can change and adapt, just as the society in which it was created changes and adapts. Jorn states in an essay titled "*Détourned Painting*", published by the Rive Gauche Gallery for an exhibition catalogue: "ALL WORKS of art are objects and should be treated as such, but these objects are not ends in themselves: They are tools with which to influence spectators. The artistic object, despite its seemingly object-like character, therefore presents itself as a link between two subject, the creating and provoking subject on the one hand, and the receiving subject on the other. The latter does not perceive the work of art as a pure object, but as the sign of a human presence." (Jorn, 1959) One can see in this the way that Jorn intended for his *détourned* paintings to represent a rebirth

of the concept of painting, straying away from the focus on the institution of art while instead highlighting a focus on the social relationship not only between artists but the way that art should be an essential component of the relationship between the artist and their life in general.

Another important theme captured in *Ainsi on s'Enser*, a theme that is also representative of Jorn's dedication to the importance and influence of artists on one another, is the homage he pays to James Ensor. James Ensor was a Belgian artist of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, producing art associated with the expressionist style prominent at the time. In 1937, a young Asger Jorn was introduced to Ensor through the German art collector Herbert von Garvens, who had an extensive collection of Ensor's work (Andersen, 1994, 93-96). It was this point in time, a pivotal moment in Jorn's career as he was coming into his own artistic style, that the influence of Ensor on Jorn was born. Jorn appreciated the themes of dark humor and angst that Ensor incorporated in his art, the influence of which can be seen throughout much of Jorn's work. Jorn's emphasis on the collective then was not just an importance on artists physically working together but also the ways that artists can learn and adapt through each other. Through the combination of Jorn's academic training, time spent learning and working with many different styles of artists throughout his various group affiliations, and inspiration he drew from others such as Ensor, he was able to create a unique voice in his art, a voice that represented him, his ideals and the influence on his peers on both of those aspects. Jorn strived to use his artistic voice to help transition popular art from its current focus to one that put an emphasis on all artists' ability to have this same personal experience with art.

Lastly, the most important theme I feel that is integral to this piece is in the very element of *détournement*, specifically in his examination and incorporation of kitsch through the modification of that very style to highlight the problems within the culture it represents. *Ainsi on s'Enser* is a reflection on aesthetics in its anti-popular aesthetic nature. On the surface one can easily argue that it is not a beautiful painting but it is this unsightly and haunting appearance that draws attention to its revolutionary components that makes it both crucial to the modern theory of aesthetics as well as its relation to society. The design Jorn implemented disrupts the norm and interrupts the viewers thought process, forcing them in to the situation at hand and thus making them evaluate what this means for not only this specific piece of art but art in general. It sparks a social commentary on what

the nature of art is and offers a new idea of art, one that strays from art that is exclusive to those of status and driven by commodity and offers instead a form of art that represents the very heart of art to Jorn and its importance as a mode of satisfying a basic human need for expression, a need Jorn felt was at the center of all human behavior. Jorn's own spin on détournement through the implication of his modification series was yet another exemplar of his ability to expertly tread the dichotomy between individual expression with the collective effort, as he took a concept used by many in the SI and executed it with his personal style through these modified paintings as a means to illustrate an artistic response which was accessible to a society confronted with the reality of the dilapidated state of the art—a response through which he sought to inspire societal reform. In an excerpt from Jorn's essay, "*Détourned Painting*", he includes the following poem at the beginning:

Be modern,
collectors, museums.
If you have old paintings,
do not despair.
Retain your memories
but détourn them
so that they correspond with your era.
Why reject the old
if one can modernize it
with a few strokes of the brush?
This casts a bit of contemporaneity
on your old culture.
Be up to date,
and distinguished
at the same time.
Painting is over.
You might as well finish it off.
Détourn.
Long live painting. (Jorn, 1959)

An introduction meant to be read as a tongue-in-cheek reflection on the current state of culture, combining a reference to the famous saying: "The king is dead;

long live the king” as a way to highlight the parallels between the notion that “painting is dead” as a mourning of what painting once was while simultaneously endorsing the transition with the line “long live painting”. This ironic contrast through a historical reference highlights the adaptability of art in a fashion that is very true to character for Jorn. Jorn’s reference here is a perfect example of the ways he contested the current state of art by use of direct opposition to it through his modifications and through this opposition, attempted to spark a revival of the true spirit of both painting and art as a whole in action. Jorn’s claim that painting is dead is an example of his resistance to the existential and unproductive angst associated with both artists and art critics alike at the time in relation to the state of art. Jorn did not truly believe in the death of painting but instead held on to the notion that art could produce meaningful change within itself through itself.

It is undeniable that the world of aesthetics, and its relation to popular society, has always been complicated but has become increasingly so as the lines between the two have become more and more blurred. Art has long been viewed through a superficial lens, a lens that makes it hard to determine exactly how to define what art is at its core. This inclination to reduce art to its aesthetic beauty in addition to the increasing commodification of the everyday has attempted to turn art into something which can be bought and sold much like any other commodity. Asger Jorn resisted this, rallying for a reality in which art can be what it was intended to be, a mode of expression, a place where any average person can express what it means for them to be unapologetically human without the worry of whether or not the outcome will make a good financial project. Our increasingly modern society calls for increasingly modern solutions, and rather than take a defeatist stance of pure pessimism, Asger Jorn maintains his optimism in art as he roots for the average person. He spent his life exploring and creating in an attempt to help facilitate a shift to a society where art can simply be what humanity needs it to be—while simultaneously understanding that what that looks like is as equally complex of an answer as our very nature as human animals. Although Jorn might not have revolutionized the art world completely, he dedicated his lifetime to exploring art as it related to his own human condition and repeatedly attempted to bring about a world where this was the norm through his art. Asger Jorn’s art, especially the piece *Ainsi on s’Ensur*, might not always be what society deems as aesthetically beautiful but that is because art does not always have to be reduced to these very rigid standards. The beauty in this piece, and all of Jorn’s work, thus

stems from the meaning behind it and how it relates to humanity and our relation to what it means to be human in capitalist society. Jorn's work is refreshing and hopeful in an era where the outlook is perpetually dismal, offering little room for optimism or possibility for change. Beauty can be seen in Jorn's work through its emphasis on the power of creativity to create new social relationships through art. It showcases an accessibility of art, outside of the culture industry in which the everyday person can create art simply to express their inner human animal with no regard for the capital they may acquire.

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