

# Art-Making as a Way of Becoming Harmonious with Others

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## Abstract

This essay proposes a new way to approach to social well-being by exploring the action of art-making within aesthetical, philosophical, and scientific considerations. It builds on art historian Ann Dezeuze's precarious art practices theory to address the issue of how art making could be understood as a way to approach social well-being. It extends Dezeuze's theory by drawing out Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Lévinas's theories to examine the action of art making. Their theories suggest that the nature of art-making is a matter of becoming harmonious with others. This discussion will center upon how the nature of art-making—becoming harmonious between one and others—could become a way to enhance social well-being. In which is not a metaphor for social well-being but rather a practical method to enhance social well-being. As such, it presents a way of enhancing social well-being; moreover, it is also a way to challenge people's understanding and methodology of social well-being.

## Keywords

*art-making, becoming harmonious with others, social well-being*

Since the 19th century, after the movement of modernism, art was often understood in terms of subject matter. Alongside the avant-garde movement, art became alienated from its history. Furthermore, the action of art-making became a political gesture against society and emphasized individual thoughts. Thus, art converted into a matter of creating *styles*. On the other hand, artists applied everyday material, waste, and life matter to their art to reflect the socioeconomic circumstances and in the early 1960s; their focus was on ordinary life and the ambiguous relationship between art and everyday life. As a result, artworks *nearly* disappeared from everyday life or “*almost nothing*” (Dezeuze 2017:9) as art historian Anna Dezeuze will describe. Dezeuze's theory of almost nothing is a shift from the danger of being nothing to a *way of life*—aesthetically, sociologically, ethically, and philosophically. Following her optimistic view of the ambiguous relationship between

art and everyday life, Dezeuze leads her readers to see how art practice can enhance audiences' awareness of others ethically. As such, in a sociological and ethical sense, this writing leads us to question the action of art-making in relation to social well-being. Thus, this essay aims to discuss the meaning of art-making within aesthetical, philosophical, and scientific considerations as a way of extending Dezeuze's precarious art practices theory. Furthermore, how this action has the nature of a harmonious relationship between one and others will be articulated through Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel

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Lévinas' theories.

First, this study provides a new definition of becoming harmonious with others, and a literature review of the ambiguous relationship between everyday life and art based on Dezeuze's writing. Next, the study examines the action of art-making based on Merleau-Ponty, John Dewey, and Lambros Malafouris' theories to articulate how becoming harmonious in the relationship between one and others is the nature of art-making. Last, this study draws out Georg Hegel's aesthetic theory and Emmanuel Lévinas' account of the "Other" as ways to articulate the importance of becoming harmonious with others in human society.

### *Becoming Harmonious with Others*

This section explains the phenomenon of becoming harmonious with others within aesthetical, philosophical, and scientific considerations. The phenomenon is a core concept of this writing to *gather* different sections, as the term suggests. By drawing out a broad consideration of becoming harmonious with others, this essay displays a *new* way to understand and enhance social well-being.

To become harmonious with others is often understood as a matter of being romantic, such as with the significant other or making connections with parents, family members, or friends. However, this article addressed a wider consideration of the social connection between individuals within a philosophical perspective of existence. In doing so, the new definition of art-making is delivered that exceeds the human relationship and awareness of the transience of life in relation to the world by extending Dezeuze's precarious art practices—a philosophical and ethical relationship with others—that will be examined in the following sections. This study differs from Dezeuze's precarious art practice theory by offering a deeper understanding of the nature of art-making. The second section—An Emergence of Everyday Life in Art History—will explain Dezeuze's writing in relation to social well-

being. The juxtaposition of the relationship between precarious art practices and Judith Butler's account of "other" leads to the unveiling of ethical and philosophical sides of art practice.

The parallel relationship between art practices and theories is not incidental but rather the nature of art practices. An equal relationship between art and philosophy will be articulated by juxtaposing American aesthetician John Dewey and French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories. Next, this study will analyze art-making while questioning how harmoniousness with others is the nature of art-making and human beings, and how art-making inspires thinking. These questions will be examined through an analysis of English archaeology scholar Lambros Malafouris' definition of "things."

Following Malafouris' cognitive archaeological, anthropological, phenomenological, and cognitive science consideration of the term "things" in a case study on the process of making pottery, we can observe that art-making is no longer pure self-expression but an act of connecting with others, or as Malafouris puts it, "events" (Malafouris 2018: 8) in which both the nature of art-making and human beings become harmonious. This echoes Dezeuze's analysis of event-like works in precarious practices, when she refers to Belgian artist Francis Alÿs' art and his idea of "collective actions" (Dezeuze 2009; Dezeuze 2017). As such, through the collective matter in precarious works and the juxtaposed relationship with the nature of art-making—becoming harmonious with others is achieved. Here, it takes the passive participle of the Latin *colligere*, "collective"<sup>1</sup>—a matter of gathering—to articulate the relationship. Following the etymology dictionary definition, an equal relationship between the terms becoming harmonious with others and collective actions can be observed. Contrastingly, becoming harmonious with others takes the collective actions to another level, a sense of "agreement of feeling, concord" (Harper 2021) as the online etymology dictionary

defines the meaning of harmony, and equally, one of the critical elements for approaching social well-being. In general, social well-being is understood as a state of being well with others. The research method is often based on quantitative research—a collection of data based on questioning people on their overall feelings related to health, happiness, and life. However, this paper does not provide research data on social well-being; it presents an aesthetical and philosophical consideration of social well-being by delivering a new way to approach it within the re-defined action of art-making.

Early Western art shows that art is not a subjective matter but rather embodied in societies, that is, art in service of religion. Christian images are predominant in earlier Western art. After the development of science and humanism, religion was no longer at the center of society. Consequently, art was no longer in service of others (e.g., religion, plutocrats, and public), but rather of oneself. For example, modernism allows us to see the bound relationship between artists and their artworks. As such, the tide connection between artists and their works might be problematic since it may fall into subjectivity or egocentricity. Arguably, subjectivity is not an issue but rather a common phenomenon in human beings. Thus, people cannot escape being subjectivity since subjectivity is the nature of human beings. Following this, this article likes to challenge the means of subjectivity and individuality by drawing out French artist Michael Duchamp's "refusal of work." The refusal of work allows people to question the relationship between art, and artists, and critique capitalism within the ethical-political and philosophical considerations of human existence. As Maurizio Lazzarato puts it:

Duchampian laziness lends itself to two readings. It represents a socio-economic critique and at the same time constitutes a "philosophical" category. It discloses new dimensions of existence and new forms of life which compel us to rethink action, time, and subjectivity (Lazzarato

2014:9).

Following this quote, readers can see there is a *philosophical* side to art-making; moreover, it is no longer a matter of the subjective but rather the collective. In doing so, the artist is freed from capitalist society, as such binding connection between art and society is at the root of Dezeuze's theory of precarious practices:

As I have demonstrated, precarious practices are similarly involved in maintaining the possibility of a political space of action and discussion, which is constantly threatened by the ever more efficient logic of capitalist work and consumption (Dezeuze 2017:303).

Following this further understanding of precarious practices by juxtaposing Butler's theory of the political body, the following section will introduce how their theories come across together.

### *An Emergence of Everyday Life in Art History*

The ambiguous relationship between everyday life and art is something that emerges in both art practice and research. How the emergence of everyday life in artworks affects human societies and vice versa is addressed by studying Anna Dezeuze's art history and theory debates on contemporary artworks from 1958 to 2009. This section aims to draw the readers' attention to artworks within a framework of social well-being at a specific point in time. The question of how the artworks are influenced *and* the influenced societies will be analyzed through a study of Dezeuze's precarious practice account. It then brings us to the question of how art-making becomes a means to enhance social well-being?

During the early 1960s, everyday life became part of a structure in art; for example, Fluxus and Dematerialization art movements included everyday life as part of their art practices; furthermore, they provided

aesthetic ways of living, or as Dezeuze describes it, “precarious practices” (Dezeuze 2017:5). Dezeuze’s book—*Almost Nothing: Observations on Precarious Practices in Contemporary Art* (2017)—shows that the ambiguous relationship between art and everyday life is problematic, particularly those artworks that *almost* disappear in everyday life. In her observations of contemporary art, she finds that the features of art practices can be categorized as ephemeral and precarious. The major difference between them being “man-made” and “less man-made.” Ephemeral practices are a matter of less man-made or “doesn’t make decisions,” as Dezeuze (2017) referred to Thomas Hirschhorn’s definition of the term.

Examples of ephemeral art that Dezeuze refers to are Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970) and Giuseppe Penone’s *Alpi Marittime* (1968). The results of the artworks are not controlled by the artists but rather by the nature of the tides and plants. On the other hand, precarious art involves a high level of human manipulation. Arguably, all artworks are created by humans; therefore, does it not mean that all artworks can be understood as precarious practices? These practices are a matter of man-made and human manipulation as well as the inclusion of everyday life as the very structure of art-making. Moreover, art practices often linger between art and everyday life, as Dezeuze noted:

[...] precarious works usually consist of daily activities, banal objects and situations, or rubbish — to the point of sometimes disappearing completely into the very fabric of the viewer’s everyday. Precarious works thus question the emergence, maintenance and disappearance of human constructions and endeavours [sic], and hence their potential success or failure. They articulate a fragile balance between presence and absence, material and immaterial, something and nothing (Dezeuze 2017:5).

Following this quote, people can get a sense of instability or uncertainty in precarious works, as also suggested eponymously. Furthermore, the ambiguous relationship between art and everyday life is what precarious artists explore and where they contribute. Besides defining the difference between the two terms, Dezeuze is not interested in classifying artworks based on these two features since some artworks can be understood as both ephemeral and precarious practices. Instead, Dezeuze is interested in the *in-between* feature in precarious practices—between something and nothing. Notably, it is a condition of “*almost nothing*” (2017:9), as Dezeuze described. Almost nothing can be understood as a term that exceeds Fluxus artist George Brecht’s “borderline” (Dezeuze 2017). Brecht’s borderline is a matter of “an art verging on the non-existent” and “an art at the point of imperceptibility” (quoted in Dezeuze 2017), as Brecht explained. However, for Dezeuze, Brecht’s concept of borderline could be parallelized by the meaning of precarious, both exists “between success and failure” and “value and waste” (Dezeuze 2017:9). Furthermore, they all face the risk of “being thrown out or disappearing into the banality of the everyday, this uncertain state between appearance and disappearance” (Dezeuze 2017:9).

Dezeuze aims to position precarious practices within examined art practices and exhibitions related to almost nothing. The ambiguous relationship between art and everyday life in art practices—from the danger of becoming nothing to ways of being *and* living—as she referred to Lauren Berlant and articulated the idea of “precariousness” as embodied by “way of being” (cited in Dezeuze 2017). As such, art practices are no longer understood as individuals and subjective matters but rather as a *way* to live together. Belgian artist Francis Alÿs’ artworks are one of the examples that Dezeuze examines. Alÿs is a performance artist whose works often engage with the public and public spaces. Two of his works, *When Faith Moves Mountains* (2002) and *Don’t Cross the Bridge Before You Get to the*

*River* (2008), show the intention of bringing people together within a specific time and space, or what he called “collective actions” (Dezeuze 2009; Dezeuze 2017). Following this *practical* way of becoming harmonious with others, this article challenges the meaning of art-making by evoking it as an action of social well-being.

Based on this, everyday life emergencies can be observed in art and how art transforms the world—a world that brings “‘awake’ to others” as Dezeuze (2017:279) referred to Judith Butler’s words to describe what precarious works approached—an ethical relationship between one and others. Dezeuze applies Butler’s precarious life theory to address the relationship between the artist and public space in precarious works, particularly refugees’ rights. The word precarious is explored within the sociological and philosophical consideration of existence. The term of others in Dezeuze theory follows Butler’s interest in Emmanuel Lévinas’ theory of Other. His theory will be introduced in greater detail in the next section. However, in short, Lévinas, a French philosopher who was interested in human existence within the context of ethics, propounded the theory of “Other,” which became a foundation of Butler’s theory of precarious life. Here, precarious life is not only a condition of human life but also a way to “contest normative discourses of exclusion” (cited in Dezeuze 2017) through the action of sharing. As Dezeuze puts it, “Butler emphasises [sic] the shared ‘precarious bounds’ that are ‘structured by the condition of mutual need and exposure’” (Butler 2012; Dezeuze 2017). Dezeuze then juxtaposes the spaces that Butler and precarious works created:

[...], Butler’s emphasis on precariousness as a ‘shared condition’ from which to build a political space of action aptly describes, in my eyes, the relationships that these works try to set up between the artist and the world and between the work and its viewers (Dezeuze 2017:278).

Following this, both precarious artists and Butler create a space that allows for precariousness. Moreover, it is a condition that requires us to unveil it. In doing so, our awareness of others is drawn out. Thus, art-making could be understood as a matter of an ethical collective.

As noted earlier in Duchamp’s theory of refusal of work, to introduce art-making is no longer subjective but rather collective. However, Dezeuze exceeds Duchamp’s refusal of work account approach to question the danger today of the ambiguous relationship between art and everyday life in relation to art and society. This ambiguous relationship was one of the main reasons the two German theorists, Peter Bürger and Jürgen Habermas, critiqued the unsettled nature of avant-garde art through the problematic ambiguous relationship between art and everyday life. Their theories show the sociological, aesthetic-political, and intellectual considerations of art. Critically, their theories cannot situate the movement, since it is at the very structure of human life, as Hal Foster noted, the problems of constructing it yielded the importance of shaping a new family tree for avant-garde art in his study of it:

[...]: the ideology of progress, the presumption of originality, the elitist hermeticism, the historical exclusivity, the appropriation by the culture industry, and so on. Yet it remains a crucial coarticulation of artistic and political forms. *And it is this coarticulation of the artistic and the political that a posthistorical account of the neo-avant-garde, as well as an eclectic notion of the postmodern, serve to undo. Thus the need for new genealogies of the avant-garde that complicate its past and support its future* (Foster 1996:5).

The difficulty of locating avant-garde art and the emergency of reconstructing it are unveiled. Moreover, the new genealogies of avant-garde are not alienated from the past but are instead *after* the past, as Foster

referred to Simon Fried's *nachträglich* account to articulate the relationship between postmodernity and modernity when he said:

[...], for *rather than break with the fundamental practices and discourses of modernity, the signal practices and discourses of postmodernity have advanced in a nachträglich relation to them* (Foster 1996:32).

Postmodernity extends from modernity rather than being alienated from it. Furthermore, it also maintains the *difference*, as Foster referred to Jacques Derrida's theory of *différance* ([1967] 1973; 1978) to articulate what *avant-garde* is. Derrida's *différance* takes us to the question of origin, specifically, the meaning given in language. It is not a matter of being against the origin but instead seeking the new through the origin. As such, the ontological consideration of one and others allows us to see that art goes beyond the individual and questions the boundary between one and others philosophically. Thus, we can understand that the relationship between one/modernity and other/postmodernity is intricately bound. This essay attempts to determine the nature of attitudes of one and others in relation to human society.

### *Examining the Action of Art-Making*

Readers will notice that there is a philosophical consideration in the action of art-making. Art-making is no longer an individual activity but rather a cooperative activity; it is a way to enhance social well-being. This writing aims to provide a *difference* with the event-like art in Deuze's precarious art practices account—an engagement with public, time and space—by drawing out the *nature* of art-making within aesthetical, philosophical, and scientific considerations, particularly, focusing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Lévinas' theories.

This section begins on an aesthetical and phenomenological study of art-making by introducing Dewey's expression and abstract

account and Merleau-Ponty's theories of body and perception, following American aesthetic theorist Dewey's book, *Art as Experience*, published in 2005 (first published in 1934). Dewey contributes a definition of art and shows a bond connection between one and other, as he noted:

Works of art that are not remote from common life, that are widely enjoyed in a community, are signs of a unified collective life. But they are also marvelous aids in the creation of such a life. The remaking of the material of experience in the act of expression is not an isolated event confined to the artist and to a person here and there who happens to enjoy the work. In the degree in which art exercises its office, it is also a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity (Dewey 2005:84).

Accordingly, expression becomes a crucial action in the process of art-making and a motivation to become harmonious with others. Following this new definition of expression, art-making presents the artists' feelings and thoughts, a way and an action to connect with others. As such, artworks become an "expressive object," as Dewey (2005) describes. Therefore, expression is not only a verb, but also a noun, "EXPRESSION, like construction, signifies both an action and its result" (Dewey 2005:85). He subsequently suggests expression is "[t]he oppositions of individual and universal, of subjective and objective, of freedom and order" (Dewey 2005:86). Here, to draw the same line with precarious art, what is added is the tension in the in-between relationships; however, the difference with Dewey is that he allows us to see an infinite relationship between one and one's expression rather than a sociological connection with others.

When the public refers to expression, they may think it refers to abstract art. However, Dewey provides a new concept of the abstract by suggesting that art-making is a process of abstraction, wherein it is not a matter of being

intellectual but rather of being expressive. Dewey refers to Paul Cézanne's still-life as examples of how abstraction works:

There are still-lives of Cezanne in which one of the objects is actually levitated. Yet the expressiveness of the whole to an observer with esthetic vision is enhanced not lowered. It carries further a trait which every one takes for granted in looking at a picture; namely, that no object in the picture is *physically* supported by any other. The support they give to one another lies in their respective contributions to the perceptual experience. Expression of the readiness of objects to move, although temporality sustained in equilibrium, is intensified by abstraction from conditions that are physically and externally possible (Dewey 2005:98).

Abstraction can subsequently be understood as integrating the perpetual experience of the objects and the images of objects. As such, consideration of abstraction also can be seen in Merleau-Ponty's account of embodiment, which is one of the key terms in his phenomenology. It is a matter of embodying one and others through the medium of the body, where body is a complex term. It is a matter of the physical body and the body of the universe, that is, the human world. Moreover, body is at the center of Merleau-Ponty's perception account, as Merleau-Ponty wrote in one of his well-known writings, *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002, first published in 1945):

The theory of the body schema is, implicitly, a theory of perception. We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge which we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body (Merleau-Ponty 2002:239).

This quote shows the equal relationship

between the theories of body and perception and breaks the relationship between subjects and objects. Indeed, body is not only a subject but also an object, that is, body is both a subject to perceive the world and an object to be perceived, as Merleau-Ponty notes:

[...] remaking contact with the body and with the world, we shall also rediscover ourself, since, perceiving as we do with our body, the body is a natural self and, as it were, the subject of perception (Merleau-Ponty 2002:239).

Besides the importance of the body in perception, what Merleau-Ponty critiques is traditional knowledge, and particularly its clear relationship between subject and object. For Merleau-Ponty, the boundary between subject and object remains unclear. This critique on knowledge can also be viewed in the juxtaposed relationship between Merleau-Ponty and Dewey's theories in this essay. Indeed, the relationship that this essay provides introduces a sense of breaking traditional knowledge.

In general, Merleau-Ponty and Dewey's theories are often understood as opposed to rationalism. However, this article argues that their theories share a similar consideration of artists and objects and how perceptual experience works in the process of art-making within an analysis framework of the terms expression, abstract, body, and perception in their accounts. Furthermore, both refer to Cézanne's paintings to articulate their theories. Merleau-Ponty is a philosopher who had a great interest in art, primarily paintings, as expressed in his essays "Cézanne's Doubt" (1945) and "Eye and Mind" (1964). "Eye and Mind" also is understood as a re-writing of "Cézanne's Doubt" and is the last essay on Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Furthermore, for him, painting is a field of vision as another kind of philosophy. As Merleau-Ponty noted in the "Eye and Mind":

Yet this philosophy still to be done is that which animates the painter—not when he expresses his opinions about the

world but in that instant when his vision becomes gesture, when, in Cézanne's words, he "thinks in painting" (Merleau-Ponty 1964:178).

Following this quote, painting and philosophy share the same target—to lead people to a contemplation space. This new way of understanding painting takes us to see art-making as the very structure of thinking.

### *A Model of Thinking*

The idea that how the human body acts affects the mind has emerged in recent research. It breaks the traditional consideration of thinking; thinking is a matter of how the brain functions. This section will show how art-making is one of the thinking models emerging in human evolution and development by introducing the English archaeology scholar Lambros Malafouris's theory of material engagement, to extend the above argument of art as *another* kind of philosophy. In doing so, this section will explain how becoming harmonious with others is the nature of art-making.

The value of drawing out Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is that it allows the observation of an equal relationship between art and philosophy. Furthermore, they all require *practice*. When Merleau-Ponty analyzed the relationship between philosophers and their readers within the context of the responsibility of a philosopher in his phenomenology, he wrote:

[...] the opinion of the responsible philosopher must be that *phenomenology can be practised [sic] and identified as a manner or style of thinking, that it existed as a movement before arriving at complete awareness of itself as philosophy* (Merleau-Ponty 2002:viii).

Following this practical consideration of philosophy, "practice" becomes an essential element in art and philosophy. Thus, art is not transforming to philosophy but is rather understood as *another* kind of philosophy.

Philosophy, as a transition of art, can be seen in American art critic Arthur Danto's "after the end of art" theory. One of his well-known books, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (1997), provides a radical view of art today. For him, the "end of art" can be overcome by making art a philosophy. He refers to Joseph Kosuth's philosophical question, "Why am I a work of art?" (cited in Danto 1997) and then suggests that art should no longer be viewed as objects but rather as thoughts. Consequently, there are differences between Merleau-Ponty and Danto's theories. For Danto, art-making is problematic, and the relationship between art and philosophy is unequal.

However, for Merleau-Ponty, art-making is an act of thinking when he refers to Cézanne's idea of "thinks in painting" (cited in Merleau-Ponty 1964). Moreover, for him, art is *another* kind of philosophy, as argued earlier. Furthermore, Danto's idea that art transforms into philosophy could suggest that art is a matter of thought. Indeed, both Merleau-Ponty and Danto view art-making as an act of thinking, yet Merleau-Ponty allows us to see the *nature* of art-making instead of redefining it as a matter of thinking. Here, to simplify the above argument, Danto states that art-making is replaced by thinking philosophically; moreover, it becomes a way to rescue the end of the art.

Danto also alerts us to the danger of art's transformation to philosophy, that is, how art relates to human history and society became a critical issue<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the transformation also provides *another* way to look at art history by drawing out the tension between art and institutions philosophically<sup>3</sup>. However, what Danto allows us to observe is a radical consideration of art. The action of art-making is no longer about existing but is instead replaced by intellectual thinking, as articulated by his reference to Georg Hegel's aesthetic theory. Arguably, Hegel believes in the value of the action, as his idea of "beauty" shows us. Beauty could be understood as the highest approach of the spirit, as such, the spiritual consideration of art is related to the epoch in which Hegel lived—the age of solid



religious belief. Thus, art-making becomes spiritual and could bring out the connection between one and others spiritually similar to the power of religion. Following this, art-making becomes a way to enhance social well-being. Moreover, Hegel allows us to question the body and mind relationship in the process of art-making.

Although how the human mind works is still a mystery, an English archaeology scholar, Lambros Malafouris, highlights the value of *engaging* with materials through his cognitive archaeological, anthropological, phenomenological, and cognitive science study of pottery making in his essay, “Mind and Material Engagement” (Malafouris 2018). Furthermore, Malafouris allows his readers to see how things affect humans and their surroundings by referring to Martin Heidegger’s “thing” and “thinging” theories. Heidegger’s theory of “thinging” helps Malafouris examine how internal and external things act together in the process of engaging with materials. “Thinging” in Heidegger’s account is about gathering one and others, including space and time. The term is central to Heidegger’s idea of “being-in-the-world”. However, Malafouris differs from Heidegger’s theory in that Malafouris is not interested in the entities and representation of “things,” but rather how they become, as he questioned: “how things come to be (as ‘events’), that is, how things come to possess ontological specificity or multiplicity in the course of their life history” (Malafouris 2018:8). Following this, Malafouris provides a new definition of “thinging”: “thinging” is a matter of thinking. Furthermore, “things” become the “non-biological stuff of mind on a par with other biological stuff like bodies and neurons” (Malafouris 2018:8). This new perspective of thinking shows that the mind is no longer about how the brain and body function but rather about how elements outside the body work within the context of human evolution and development. Therefore, “thinging” could be understood as pre-engagements, as Malafouris explains:

[...], the starting point is not the mind

as we know it from the “inside” but a relational or extensive mind as we know it from “outside”. Thinking *about* presupposes the thinking *with* and *through* (both evolutionary and developmentally). This I call primacy of material engagement. We human are *thingers* (Malafouris 2018:8).

After this complex theoretical debate of mind and body with material engagement, Malafouris provides a practical and straightforward way to understand the theory by examining the process of making pottery. However, it is unsurprising that Malafouris chooses this kind of art-making as an example since it has a great history in human life. Nevertheless, the value of drawing out Malafouris’ research is that it allows one to gain a new understanding of human intelligence in the art-making process and within cognitive archaeological, anthropological, phenomenological, and cognitive science research. Overall, art-making is more than producing art; it is at the very structure of thinking—a *model* of thinking—in which it breaks individual subjectivity. As Malafouris concluded in his theory of material engagement, the bound and long-term relationship between one and others can be viewed in the action of art-making within the transience of time and space. Malafouris writes:

The drawing of a line, the making of a stone tool, or the forming of a clay vase provide a unique perspective for understanding the enactive and material bases of human thought as it becomes constituted in deep time history. Material Engagement Theory offers the means to interrogate those elementary practices and their transformations in time (Malafouris 2018:13).

Following these cognitive archaeo-logical, anthropological, phenomenological, and cognitive science considerations of art-making, being harmonious with others is the nature of art-making and human beings. The

following section will push this dimension further by questioning how art-making becomes a way to increase social well-being by examining the term “other” aesthetically and philosophically.

### *Art-Making and Social Well-Being*

This section builds up in questioning how art-making becomes a way to increase social well-being within the context of examining others after provide an ontological sense of art-making. To address this question, this section will focus on Hegel’s aesthetic theory to analyze the relationship between art-making and social well-being, and examine Lévinas’s “Other” theory to provide a further understanding of becoming harmonious with others.

In Hegel’s book, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (1975), art is understood as the highest value of human beings, as he notes, it reflects “the deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of spirit” (Hegel 1975:7). Here, “spirit” relates to a religious context, particularly Christianity. Furthermore, for Hegel, the relationship between religion, philosophy, and art is equal. They all share a similar effect of drawing out people’s inner experiences; however, he believes that the methodology of art is unique. Art allows people the freedom of sensory experience and provides therapy for the soul, as Hegel noted:

Art shares this vocation with religion and philosophy, but in a special way, namely by displaying even the highest [reality] sensuously, bringing it thereby nearer to the senses, to feeling, and to nature’s mode of appearance. What is thus displayed is the depth of a suprasensuous world which thought pierces and sets up at first as a *beyond* in contrast with immediate consciousness and present feeling; it is the freedom of intellectual reflection which rescues itself from the *here* and now, called sensuous reality and finitude. But this breach, to which the spirit proceeds, it is

also able to heal (Hegel 1975:7–8).

Following these values of art, Hegel goes on to articulate why art is not an illusion but rather a natural and direct appearance of truth. For Hegel, what art provides is the *Ideal* that draws out “our minds the true interests of the spirit” (Hegel 1975:9). Following this consideration of art, Hegel’s theory clearly follows Plato’s philosophy of idealism. However, unlike Plato, who provided a paradoxical account of art, Hegel leads his readers to see an equal relationship between the Ideal and art; as Hegel noted, “For everything spiritual is better than any product of nature. Besides, no natural being is able, as art is, to present the divine Ideal” (Hegel 1975:29). Since both art and philosophy are able to present the “Ideal”, art can be understood as *another* kind of philosophy. Indeed, for Hegel, art and philosophy are equal: “Art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is” (Hegel 1975:11).

Nevertheless, the danger of this claim is that art no longer exists and has become an idea. However, compared to the Danto’s “after the end of art theory,” in Hegel’s theory, the action of art-making is not replaced by thinking but rather by a similar religious purpose—to connect one and others spiritually. Moreover, it is a matter of gathering the whole, that is, ideas, sensations, materials, and surroundings. In doing so, people create a sense of *beauty* and *spirit*. For Hegel, beauty is “free, self-conscious, but also *sensuous* beings” (Houlgate 2007:xv-xvi). Furthermore, beauty is one the very structure of being, as Houlgate noted:

Being achieves such self-consciousness in human beings. Human beings are thus not just an accident of evolution: their existence is made necessary by the very nature of being itself—by being’s inherent drive toward self-consciousness. Note that, for Hegel, there is no cosmic consciousness or “world spirit” apart from or outside of

human existence. It is in human beings alone (and in other finite, self-conscious beings that may exist on other planets) that being attains consciousness of itself. *We* are being-that-has-become-spiritual (Houlgate 2007:xiii).

Following this, becoming spiritual could be understood as a way to become harmonious with others. Specifically, art-making is a way to become harmonious with others spiritually. A spiritual connection between one and the other leads individuals to view a relationship between body and mind. Additionally, Hegel believes that art could bring positive influences in human society, such as a way of improving morals. The significant impact of art also brings out a revolution of education, as he noted:

For the theory that art was to curb rudeness and educate the passions, remained quite formal and general, so that it has become again a matter of what *specific* sort of education this is and what is its essential aim (Hegel 1975:49).

Based on the above quote, the connection between ethics and education that art highlights is a lightness of ethical education. The connection between art and ethics can also be observed in Emmanuel Lévinas' aesthetic theory. However, unlike Hegel, Lévinas believes that art is not about ethics because it is outside of reality; moreover, the action of art-making is a laboring activity. Stephanie Belmer provides the following analysis of Lévinas' aesthetic perspective:

[...] any kind of work precludes the possibility of ethical expression, as the person who is *present* in speech is always *absent* from his or her work, whether that be a piece of writing, a painting or any other product of labour [sic] destined for exchange (Belmer 2014:34).

This quote shows why Lévinas believed

that art is not ethical and is a laboring activity. Besides his radical view of writing, painting, and other creativity, Lévinas takes us to see that these activities require high physical engagement. As such bodily relationship consideration of art-making and writing could echo Merleau-Ponty's embodiment account—the body is an essential medium to approach the world. Moreover, it is the body that is *within* the world. As such, the bound relationship between one and *others* takes us to the point of questioning existence philosophically. As Merleau-Ponty said:

[...] *associated bodies* must be brought forward along with my body—the “others,” not merely as my congeners, as the zoologist says, but the others who haunt me and whom I haunt; the “others” along *with* whom I haunt a single, present, and actual Being as no animal ever haunted those beings of his own species, locale, or habitat. In this primordial historicity, science's agile and improvisatory thought will learn to ground itself upon things themselves and upon itself, and will once more become philosophy... (Merleau-Ponty 1964:161).

This philosophical consideration between one and others is understood as painting resources, and the painter through painting *practices* the relationship between one and others. Again, as this article has articulated, becoming harmonious with others is in the nature of art-making. This essay aims to show readers how this nature could lead to social well-being. Here, to echo Dezeuze's interest in how precarious works are ““awake” to others” (Dezeuze 2017:279) ethically, Dezeuze refers to Butler and Lévinas' words to help her readers understand her ethical and philosophical consideration of art practice.

“Other” is a significant term in Lévinas' ethic philosophy. For him, it is a matter of becoming aware of others, which is unlike problematic theories of others such as Jacques Lacan's account of “Other”. For Lacan, “Other” is a negative term to

describe one's illusion of others. Lévinas also provided a method to approach "Other" by suggesting "to be *responsible* to others." To be responsible to others not only makes people aware of others but also undoes the problem of self-centeredness in Western philosophy. As Lévinas yields radically, "The other individuates me in the responsibility I have for him. The death of the other who dies affects me in my very identity as a responsible "me" [*moi*]" (2000:12, initially published in 1993) in his book, *God, Death, and Time*. Following this equal relationship between one and others, we can see a sense of moving beyond the philosophical consideration of Being (, that is discourses of human beings) and exceeding the limitations of human life. Moreover, psychologically, Lévinas' theory of "Other" could become a way to keep healthy in the process of being responsible to others, as Paul Marcus writes:

In this view, in a sense, "the ultimate act of freedom is to give oneself," with the fullness of one's being, to and for the other. Levinas makes this point by quoting the Jewish proverb credited to the Lithuanian rabbi, Israel Salanter (1810–1883) who said that "The other's material needs are my spiritual needs." In other words, we can say that, for Levinas, the psyche, at least in part, is only "healthy" (to use a psychoanalytic term), to the extent that its responsibility-driven search for the Good takes precedence over its freedom-driven search for the True (Marcus 2008:44).

Following this quote, the readers can understand that Lévinas' account of "Other" is not only an ethical philosophy but also a methodology of keeping *healthy*. In the sense of well-being and the practical matter of being well, Lévinas' theory can be understood as a *way* to bring out both individual and group benefits. Equally, what art-making approaches exceeds the individual and a matter of becoming harmonious with others.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper allows us to observe that art-making is no longer understood as an individual and subject matter but encapsulates social well-being. Isolation in modern art is broken by engaging with everyday materials and expanding by questioning the nature of art-making—becoming harmonious with others as a way to enhance social well-being. As mentioned earlier, we articulate the *difference* with Dezeuze's account of precarious art practices by examining the meaning of art-making within aesthetical, philosophical, and scientific perspectives, mainly to dwell on Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Lévinas' theories to redefine the action of art-making. Therefore, "Art-Making as a Way of Becoming Harmonious with Others" extends Dezeuze's ethical and philosophical considerations of event-like works in precarious practices and takes us to see that art-making has the nature of becoming harmonious with others. Indeed, Derrida's *différance* theory shows us the importance of seeking the new through the origin rather than against it, by examining the action of art-making in Merleau-Ponty and Lévinas' theories. Their theories allow us to see that the nature of art-making is a matter of becoming harmonious with others. Thus, art-making as a *practical method* to enhance social well-being is established within an aesthetical, philosophical, and scientific framework. In conclusion, this writing presents a bound relationship between art-making and social well-being by studying Hegel aesthetic theory. Overall, this writing *opened* up a new definition of art-making and social well-being by suggesting art-making as a *way* to enhance social well-being.

## Notes

1. The etymology of the word "collective" discussed here is based on the Online Etymology Dictionary entries. <https://www.etymonline.com/>
2. Whatever art is, it is no longer something primarily to be looked at. Stared at, perhaps, but not primarily looked at. What, in view of this, is a post-historical museum to do, or to be? (Danto 1997:16).
3. The artist, the gallery, the practices of art history, and the discipline of philosophical aesthetics must all, in one or

another way, give way and become different, and perhaps vastly different, from what they have so far been. I can only hope to tell part of the philosophical story in the chapters that follow. The institutional story must wait upon history itself (Danto 1997:17).

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