

COMMUNE/Notes to Selves

Michel Henry's reading of Marx, which is oriented around the conceptual reciprocity of "the individual" and "immanent life," bears witness to this. In this regard, "by principle the individual escapes the power of the dialectic" (Michel Henry, *Marx* [Paris: Gallimard, 1976], vol.2, p.46). This might permit me to preface everything I have to say with the following general remark: there are two ways of escaping the dialectic (that is to say mediation in a totality) – either by slipping away from immanence or by opening up its negativity to the point of rendering it "unworked" (*désœuvré*), as Bataille puts it. In this latter case, there is no immanence of negativity: "there is" *ecstasy*, ecstasy of knowledge as well as of history and community.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), ed. Peter Connor. p. 156 note 4.

A community, of course, is made up of individuals. I'm organizing COMMUNE for Black & White Gallery's summer show (May 21-June 27) because I am thinking of what happens to a community in times of stress and peril. I am organizing COMMUNE using the art - world's "group show" mechanism to draw out personal and intrapersonal themes that have pressed down on me; that is to say that the economic crush has affected me not only financially but has become a trigger for me to acknowledge that as all artists we consistently take our inspiration from political or social concerns that are in the air. COMMUNE is centered on a community of like-minded individuals in singular pursuits of individuation achieved through a variety of means. There is a lot of joy, for me, knowing that I am surrounded and supported and sustained by artists. Art making, the pursuit of a creative and self - actualizing life, becomes something to cherish, to celebrate as validation and perhaps even as vindication. COMMUNE has me involved in reflections on the relationship between the one in the many and the many of and in the one. I am thinking of wholeness, holism. And in light of our economy: holes, black holes, despair, the void, and of immanence. COMMUNE bears down on community as it bears down on self-reflection, communication, reflection and connection of the Self with the Other.

"A commune". To commune with. Noun. Verb.

I think in some way that the twin-theme of the show developed as a result of my bearing down on the political praxis that exists in today's cratered economy and how aesthetics as well as the artist and the art community can make a difference in the tenor of our time. COMMUNE also comes out of my reflections on how much artists are affected by whatever happens to their surroundings (for better or worse). What has been salient in terms of deep structure has been my re-readings of the writings of Erich Fromm (*The Art of Loving/To Have or To Be*) and those thinkers who came out of the nineteen-sixties and seventies who affected the counter-cultural movement and who were trumpeting the failures and dangers of a viral psychopathic capitalist economy (German Jews who were influenced by Walter Benjamin: Horkheimer, Adorno, Herbert Marcuse; the Frankfurt School etc); I am also led on by my re-discovery of the work by self-actualization guru Abraham Maslow, who in describing the autonomous artist as the paradigm model for the future of mankind, takes his cues from Alfred Adler, the psychotherapist who began seeing the individual and the community through a "holistic" lens. This leads to Maslow's seminal study: *Religions, Values and Peak Experiences*.

I would like to believe that COMMUNE pertains to the re-calibration on the part of artists as to the question (or: how to question) values and beliefs...in light of how artists see themselves in a secular/capitalist society gone flat corrupt and sour. I am of the mind that artists can be a collective mirror that reflects an image of integration and self-supporting autonomy to the rest of the tribal members who aren't artists but followers...

COMMUNE is a summer gallery show which means it is poised to sell smart work, not expensive work. Nothing "grand." But everything "smart" and sharp. Am in fact not looking for an "up-up and away type of spirituality" but am looking for art that deals with the tension between ideals and reality, that lingers in that zone between desire and heartbreaks, and, finally, am looking to present art that knowingly acknowledges the urge and the fear to penetrate "illusion bubbles."

COMMUNE as in "a commune": I am looking for artists who suggest through their work the notion of a (possible) community or its outright disappearance or its unworkableness, its evacuation, or decay as well as the sense of some sentient creature connecting to a living presence whether a person or a mountain that "looks back" at the beholder.

COMMUNE as in "to commune": Walter Benjamin writes in his essays on Baudelaire "...[d]erivation of the aura as the projection of a human social experience onto nature: the gaze is returned" as he harkens to Charles Baudelaire's idea of correspondences as well as to a Swedenborgian "universal language that connects all things" through which a palpable connection takes place visible in nature which points to an inward spiritual cause. Also: the sub-theme of exstasis, that is standing outside of oneself/out of place (histanai) and out of time (stasis) is implied through the energy of communing with and through the Other. SO:

I am thinking of COMMUNE both as a noun: "a commune" / a small community of like-minded people sharing responsibilities, insights, goals, anxieties etc as well as the verb "to commune": to relate intensely with one's surroundings, nature, people etc. Your vision incorporates these concerns. This title infers that the work I am looking for will suggest aspects of Caritas/communitas /communities/connection/communication and/or the absence of such thereby inferring severed connection-isolation-communicative impasse or aporia- totalitarian/fascistic impulses or strictures; Commune will infer/suggest utopic/dystopic conditions or irrealities.

Sharing comes down to this: what community reveals to me, in presenting to me my birth and my death, is my existence outside myself. Which does not mean my existence reinvested in or by community, as if community were another subject that would sublimate me, in a dialectical or communal mode. *Community does not sublimate the finitude it exposes. Community itself, in sum, is nothing but this exposition.* It is the community of finite beings, and as such it is itself a finite community. In other words, not a limited community as opposed to an infinite or absolute community, but a community of finitude, because finitude "is" communitarian, and because finitude alone is communitarian.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), trans. Peter Connor, p. 26.

Oh, and, yes, COMMUNE is dedicated to the memory of Georges Bataille.

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