

BETWEEN ARTISTIC LICENSE AND ART CENSORSHIP: A LEVINASIAN ACCOUNT OF HOW THE *I* SHOULD RESPOND TO THE ALTERITY OF ART

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The creative industry frequently confronts the need to reflect on artworks' moral and political implications. Controversial films, interpretations of classic novels, and other artworks beg the question: "Where does true artistic freedom lie?" Two extremes are often encountered concerning artistic freedom: artistic license and art censorship. On the one hand, artistic license is often invoked when artists intentionally or unintentionally create an artwork that contradicts a faithful representation of reality. On the other hand, art censorship restricts creative freedom and freedom of expression in the name of political expediency. Such restrictions led to banning books and labeling topics as taboo. In this regard, I clarify the moral implications of Emmanuel Levinas' theory on art, demonstrating the convergence between art and ethics. This study expounds on my claim that the realm of art can both (1) incite infinite responsibility towards the radical alterity of the artwork—consequently also spilling over towards other Other that bear a trace in the artwork and (2) reinforce the self towards sameness and an evasion of responsibility. Given these two possibilities, the appropriateness of whether to evoke artistic license or employ art censorship is clarified.

Keywords: alterity, censorship, creative freedom, ethical dilemma

INTRODUCTION

The creative industry frequently confronts the need to reflect on the moral and political implications of artworks. Controversial films, interpretations of classic novels, and other artworks prompt us to clarify where true artistic freedom lies. Two extremes are often encountered concerning artistic freedom: artistic license and art censorship. Artistic license is often invoked when artists intentionally or unintentionally create an artwork that contradicts a faithful representation of reality. As Goodsell and Johnson

(2007, 2759) defined, artistic license involves a distortion of fact with a purpose in mind. The primary intention is to enhance the aesthetic experience, but the inaccuracy should not transgress its limits, lest it becomes a distortion.

A contemporary example of this license invocation is the controversial movie Darryl Yap's *Maid in Malacañang* (MIM). MIM depicts the story of the three days leading up to the EDSA People Power Revolution's overthrow of the Marcoses. Since the film is told from the vantage point of an unidentified maid, Ocampo (2022) reminds us that it is a film that uses creative license and cannot be judged as a doctoral dissertation in terms of its accuracy. In this way, artists sometimes abuse the license that allows them to overcome usual conventions. Following the juxtaposition of Ojano (2024, 15), I agree with her analysis of MIM that such a film, though not claiming to be totally accurate, commits a "theft of the vocabulary of the anti-dictatorship resistance" and omits the context of the overthrow, leading to a distortion of the pertinent historical narratives.

Despite the MIM example, it must be noted that historical inaccuracy or any other form of inaccuracy does not necessarily diminish the aesthetic experience, nor should it be treated as flawed fictional art (see Bartel 2012, 213–222). Thus, the question remains: How do we clearly recognize an abuse of artistic license? Some nations delegated this task of distinguishing abuses and employed state-led censorship.

Art censorship led to banning books, labeling topics as taboo, and restricting creative freedom and freedom of expression. This censorship can be employed in different degrees (e.g., a complete ban of materials in selected places, cutting scenes, restricting to selected audiences) and may be justified for different reasons (e.g., religious, political, moral). An example of this censorship that was eventually re-evaluated is Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, an adaptation of Anthony Burgess' novel. In 1971, the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC), an independent, co-regulatory body in the United Kingdom that assesses and classifies films, rated *A Clockwork Orange* as an X-rated film with no cuts. With its main character's violent, criminal, and anti-social actions, the press and the public express the possibility of such immoral actions being imitated by people (BBFC n.d.). Kubrick withdrew the circulation of his films after alleged reports of copycat violence. In other places, the film was not screened after being associated with sensationalized stories of delinquent youths, as reflected in newspapers such as the *Sun*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Daily Mail* (Biswell 2019). However, the film has been eventually re-released in cinemas, leading to a more somber evaluation of its content.

Literature and censorship have a complex relation that interpenetrates one another. Censorship prohibits those not deemed allowable, while literature explores and contests the limits of what should not be allowed (Moore 2016). The rationale for censorship is to cater to the public good, but its abuse can be a tool for an authoritarian regime to suppress dissent. Hence, exploring artistic freedom with traces of ethical responsibility is necessary.

In searching for ways to grapple with this question of artistic freedom, I propose using a Levinasian philosophical framework for three main reasons. First, Levinas experienced the drastic effects of art misuse during the Second World War. In recent studies, it has been uncovered that both the Allied powers and Axis powers used censorship and propaganda arts to shape public opinion to their advantage. On the one

hand, the Nazis used poster art to impress the public with the accomplishments of the regime and adopt specific communal values such as communal radio listening (Welch 2017, 19). In the concerted action, the public has become more susceptible to adopting the behaviors being inculcated. In the case of Levinas, Levinas suffered further as art, such as propaganda films, that reinforced the anti-semitic attitude, were pervasive during the Second World War. Based on Brown's analysis, during the Third Reich, propaganda films were concealed as the regime used illusion and not fear to impart the ideology. On the other hand, Allied powers, especially in America, war posters represented the dictators in Europe as imminent threats, using images that incite emotions, especially fear (Welch 2017, 101).

Second, the influence of Emmanuel Levinas significantly shaped the discourses toward a renewed interest in ethics and its connection to art, especially literature. Michael Eskin (2004, 558) affirms this influence when he notes how Emmanuel Levinas' growing influence, among a confluence of myriad factors, had set the fertile ground for the double turn: the recognition of the significant role of literature to moral philosophy and the ethical turn in literary studies. However, Emmanuel Levinas' impact on that particular discourse is often rooted in his phenomenological and moral concepts that are sometimes eclectically utilized.

This point leads me to the third reason. Levinas attempted to create an account that accommodates the radical alterity of an artwork. This attempt remained incomplete and unorganized, and there was no sustained discussion. In addition to the challenge of referring to his philosophical view on art, his name bears a stigma after sharing his controversial perspective on art. Looking into his life, at the onset, Emmanuel Levinas acknowledged the significant role of art, specifically literature, in his intellectual development. In an interview with Miriam Anissimov, Levinas admitted that Russian literature served as his preparation for philosophy (see Levinas 1985). This explains why Levinas often used literary passages to capture the philosophical ideas he wanted to convey. From this indebtedness to the link between literature and philosophy, Levinas attempted to write in literary terms and explore firsthand its potential. This truth only came to light after the posthumous publication of his unpublished poems and drafts or fragments of his unfinished novels (Hand 2019, 530). During his lifetime, Levinas was often considered a staunch critic of art, especially when he published the essay "Reality and Its Shadow." Since Levinas practices the creation of artworks privately, is Levinas, then, a hypocrite for publicly criticizing art and art's possible abuses? Given this historical background, I adopt Sean Hand's stance that readers and scholars should accept the enigmatic aesthetic theory of Levinas and dispel some misconstrued perceptions. As Sean Hand (2019, 545) suggested, "If we are to read Levinas in a nonreductive way, our knowledge of this crucial phase in his thinking must inform— and necessarily complicate— our understanding and representation of his philosophical publications." A complex paradigm of art as intersecting various dimensions of human affairs becomes more noticeable if his scattered discussions on art are revisited.

With these in mind, this article aims first to present a balanced view regarding Emmanuel Levinas' view on art, which embodies both the possibility of a positive rupturing of the self towards encountering the alterity of the Other that intrudes and the inherent negative risk of causing the self to dominate art into the language of

sameness. This philosophical exegesis becomes the foundation and inspiration for the second intent of this study. To engage the main question of this article, I utilize Levinasian concepts and hermeneutically stretch their application to the distinct moral disposition appropriate to both the creation and encountering of artworks. I argue that the realm of art can both (1) incite infinite responsibility towards the radical alterity of the artwork, consequently also spilling over towards other Others that bear trace in the artwork, and (2) reinforce the self towards sameness and an evasion of responsibility. Once proven, these claims can become the basis for sketching broad ethical guidelines to recognize whether to censor or evoke artistic license.

In arguing for this claim, my discussion proceeds as follows: the first part develops a philosophical account of Levinas' phenomenology that criticizes the totalizing ego. This phenomenological perspective situates the evocation of the ethical call that haunts the I towards an infinite responsibility. The second part focuses on elaborating the philosophical concepts mentioned in "Reality and Its Shadow" and "Transcendence of Words," the primary works of Emmanuel Levinas that clarify the ontology of an artwork and the possible aesthetic experience it can provoke. To further enrich the concepts mentioned in these works, I refer to his interview with Françoise Armengaud to make sense of the ambivalence regarding art. The third part draws the connection as to how the second part of this study clarifies some of the ambiguities in the first part. This part lays the foundation for the obscure and elusive connection between art and ethics. The last part sketches possible ways of gauging the appropriateness of employing censorship and evocation of artistic license.

LEVINASIAN PHENOMENOLOGY AS A CRITIQUE OF THE TOTALIZING EGO

Phenomenology with and beyond Husserl

Phenomenology is a methodical approach to unveiling the truth behind phenomena and overcoming the human being's predisposition to view the world *via* the natural attitude. Levinasian phenomenology began as a philosophy that is largely indebted to the findings of Edmund Husserl. However, several aspects of Husserlian phenomenology remain limited because distinct aspects of reality are not included in its primary scope. In this study, I focus on three important divergences that made Levinas unique. These divergences are considered monumental insofar as they mark a new brand of phenomenology that transcends the cognitivist representational aspirations towards an assumed rigorous objectivity.

Levinas (1998, 36) understood that the world is not "encased" in consciousness. Phenomena has a concrete freshness that originates from its irreducible originality. This realization prompted Levinas to explore the representational function of consciousness further, which led him to the first divergence, i.e., to create an alternative account of the role of the perceiving subject in engaging the world. In *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, Levinas (1998, 166) contests that a rupture happens because the perceiving subject attempts to contain the uncontainable "liveliness" of life. Thus, the main criticism against the perceiving subject is the assumed representational

function of consciousness towards the perceived other. In the fifth meditation of *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl (1982, 94) claims that the Other analogically, with an unusual sense of analogue, mirrors the ownness of the perceiving self. Then, he proceeded to explain how the phenomenological method attempts to understand the Objective world in its full signification. Levinas revised this analogical notion of the Other and pushed for radical alterity, for the Other is not necessarily a mere representation nor accurately constituted by the perceiving subject. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas (1979, 34) considers this point further, stating that the metaphysical need drives the self to see the alterity of the other and not a mere absorption of what is not-I into the I's own identity as the perceiver or thinker. To be an "I," in the real sense of the term, involves an *awakening*, an awakening that is conditioned by the unsettling and justification of the Other, an other that unsettles through its elusiveness from the attempted thematization of the *cogito* (Levinas 1979, 86). This wakefulness and the unsettling mood are some of Levinas' contributions that further improved the accuracy of describing the embodied subjectivity or the "I."¹ Although Husserl explored a similar theme in his later works, Levinas grounds the ethical significance of such findings instead of the genetic dimension.

Secondly, a landmark divergence between Levinas and Husserl concerns their respective understandings of the structure of time and subjectivity. In the lecture, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, Husserl (1991, 382) arrives at an impasse regarding the temporal flow, remarking: "In the actuality-experience we have the primal source-point and a continuity of moments of reverberation. For all of this, we have no names." Alluding to this remark, Levinas (2006, 188) responds and theorizes that the objects in question are not unnameable but beyond names because they are non-thematizable. This clear divergence demonstrates how, whereas Husserl's phenomenology was centered on the synchronic structure of consciousness and immanent temporality, Levinas sought to articulate a diachronic conception of time and transcendence beyond the confines of the conscious I. In *Time and the Other*, Levinas (1987, 39) confides that the central thesis he explains in his lectures is that time "is the very relationship of the subject with the Other." This relational conception of time becomes a distinct contribution of Levinas, diverging clearly from temporal theories from Bergson to Sartre. This idea leads him to conceive of time as going beyond the grasping of the I.²

It must be noted that Levinas employs the term "diachronic" in a unique manner, departing from its conventional usage in linguistics (Severson 2013, 188). Levinas first introduced those terms in his essays "Enigma and Phenomenon" and "Intentionality and Sensation," which eventually became foundational to his discussions in *Otherwise than Being* (Severson 2013, 188). He uses the term diachrony to denote a speech that unfolds in distinct, irreducible, and unalterable temporalities. In other words, diachronic does not pertain to the unity of an object or speech across various times (O'Connor and Wood 2003, 68). This paradigmatic shift in the notion of time becomes the foundation for a distinct Levinasian subjectivity that is not self-contained as opposed to Husserlian consciousness that recognizes the others, but only as it constitutes it through its own understanding. In this manner, Levinas alludes to a nonsynchronizable diachrony with the Uncontainable or the richness of phenomena that transcends the attempt of conscious conceptualization.

The third significant divergence is rooted in the second one. If the diachronic relation of time is recognized, the event is considered not just a cognitive and representational relationship between a subject and object but, more importantly, an ethical relationship with alterity or the being that is "more" than the "I" (Levinas 1998, 109). The diachrony is crucial to the rupturing of the ego towards a passing to a subjectivity with a moral responsibility to and for others. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas (2006, 11) describes diachrony as infinite or non-totalizable. This infinite eventually provokes responsibility for the other. This point in phenomenology becomes the foundation for the ethics of Levinas.

Levinasian Ethics

During the time of the Greeks, what we now refer to as ethics or philosophizing about the good is often referenced to the life and ideas of Socrates as a precursor. Socrates, as known primarily through the writings of Plato, prodded his interlocutors to learn that "they must *first* know the good in order to *then* do it" (Levinas 1985, 6). Richard Cohen, in his translator's introduction, contextualized Levinas' unique brand of ethics as the inversion of this Socratic idea in his introduction to *Ethics and Infinity*. The term ethics, for Levinas, is never understood as a rupture from metaphysics or epistemology but as a radical reconfiguration of our understanding of reality and overlooked relationality. Ethics is beyond essence.

In re-examining the fundamental tenets of Husserl, Levinas (1998, 134) observed that "Husserl never adopted the thesis that vision, cognition, knowledge, and theory are but a residue of action. He always maintained the contrary opinion: every positing of being by consciousness, every thesis, whether it proceeds from the will or from feeling, contains a theoretical modality, a *doxa*, as Husserl calls it." This observation of Levinas provides the starting point for a radicalization of the action/inaction paradigm, with thoughts and actions as always intertwined. Thus, ethics is rooted in the real state of things, as sequentially unraveled in the phenomenological method. With this in mind, Levinasian phenomenology points to the ethical responsibility that the particular subjective ego or the "I" bears through its undeniable relationality, *prior* to cognition. In this sub-section, I selected ethical concepts that are considered relevant to the focus of this study, i.e., drawing the connection between art and ethics, albeit discussed at this point in general terms.

The Ethical Call and the "Here I am" Response

Levinas's ethics always occur on a concrete and particular plane. It is not an abstract theory nor an idea that is merely formulated. This concrete event, which happens in an everyday setting, occupies a central role in Levinas' ethical view. However, the event is always rooted in a primordial ethical relation that persists in social interactions. Michael Morgan (2007, 61), a famous philosophy and Jewish studies professor, surmises that Levinas describes the fundamental ethical event and refines its formulation further throughout his multiple writings. In *Totality and Infinity*, the ethical relation is often described as a "moral summons of the other" and an "epiphany of the face" (Levinas 1979, 196). The revelation of the alterity demands that

the "I" be considered in their actions. This forceful language accurately captures the moral obligation the "I" bears, though paradoxically speaking, it does not come from an exertion of force but a summons or plea through extreme fragility or vulnerability (Levinas 1979, 256). A possible impression that may be made in relation to encountering these descriptions is the relationship between the ethical statements and the religious language they mirror. William Large (2015, 18) clarifies this aspect insofar as, for Levinas, the statements are ethical at the very beginning and only subsequently acquire a religious significance. Thus, these descriptions do not require an acceptance of the religious tenets of Judaism. In *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, the encounter with alterity is characterized as an "an obsession," (Levinas 2006, 84), a "hostage [situation]" (Levinas 2006, 151) "a paining exhausting themselves like a hemorrhage," (Levinas 2006, 72) among other things. This shift of descriptions and Levinas' choice of words drew ire for the exaggeration. For instance, Richard Kearney (2003, 71), a philosophy professor and public intellectual, remarks that Levinas' hyperbolic language borders on "masochism and paranoia," and I agree with this observation. However, I consider Levinas' choice of words as relevant and effective in describing the ethical experience presented in an aesthetic manner to vividly capture the urgency, power, and sensibility involved in the ethical subject matter. In the numerous descriptions, I focus on the moral summons of the Other to the sensibility of the "I" and the corresponding response "here I am" (*me voici*).

Levinas uses the face as a metonymy or using the name of an attribute or a thing associated with the object in question to represent or substitute for the whole. In the case of the face, it substitutes for the whole alterity of the Other. Levinas (1979, 50–51) justifies this figurative language since the encounter and relation with the other is characterized by the "conversation" that transcends the gazing "I" because the alterity of the Other cannot be contained in the adequation or thematization of cognition. In other words, the concept of the face provides an accurate mental image that portrays the paradoxical irreducible exteriority, concretely encountered by the "I", but the encounter is limited because the face remains elusive to total comprehension. Following this imagery, I recognize the face, but I know that I can never fully know the said face.³ Besides this aspect, another asymmetry is experienced in the I-Other relation, i.e., the assignation of moral responsibility. The "I" is responsible for the Other, but the other is not necessarily required to reciprocate a similar obligation. A being-for-other is then morally obligated to be available and willing to care for the other ethically without a reward in mind. Furthermore, the "here I am" also accentuates the restlessness and consistency of the demand, an ethical imperative that remains always in effect. This ethical view clearly highlights a radical passivity of the "I" to the Other and the extreme demands of ethics that depart from the usual formulations of normative ethics.

Adding to this description of the ethical relation as a face-to-face relation with an Other, I draw attention to the three aspects evident in the specific choice. First, the face shows the paradox of vision and plasticity. The face of the Other is described as capable of breaking through its own plastic image (Levinas 1979, 155). It is a simultaneous nudity or exposition and secrecy. The I beholds the face that reveals itself while also being aware that there is more than what the "I" can possibly see. Second, the usage of "conversation" and "verbal statements" pertains to the importance of "voice" with language transcending the usual ideation of the signification schema. In

Otherwise than Being, Levinas (2006, 5) deepens how the ethical relation is essentially language and proceeds to distinguish the "Saying" and the "Said." On the one hand, the Saying encompasses the condition of the possibility of the Said insofar as the Saying is the proximity of "I" to the other, marked as the "very signifyingness of signification." In simpler terms, the Saying is the relation with what is more than the "I" that is primordial or originating from an immemorial past, as described in terms of language. On the other hand, the Said is the limitation of the Saying to allow its possible utterance. In concrete terms, the Said refers to the language in its referential function, i.e., linguistic system and semantics functioning in the communication scheme.

Thus, the correlation between the Saying and the Said is that the latter betrays the former (Levinas 2006, 6). Henry McDonald (2010, 454) provides a concise clarification of the dynamics in question, writing: "In attempting to convey the Saying within the Said, language inevitably, necessarily, betrays itself (which does not mean the betrayal should not be committed), for the Saying leaves in the Said only what Levinas calls the trace of itself, a trace that does not, however, compromise the exteriority of the Saying to the Said." In relating these concepts to the "conversation" with the face, the interaction between the "I" and the "Other" is clarified—the totalization of the Other results from the forgetfulness of such distinctions. When the Said is prioritized over the Other, especially when it reaches the point that the Saying's existence is disregarded, the "I" becomes egoistic. However, when the ego is disrupted and senses how the Saying resists the limitations of the Said, the trace of the Other may be alluded to.

As a summary for this section, the dynamics of the totalizing ego are rooted in the oversights that overestimate the perceiving subject's role. In the Levinasian phenomenological account, the aspects that go beyond the "I" are highlighted: irreducible originality that is impossible to be encased in the ipseity of the consciousness, the recognition of diachronic time, and the ethical relation with the other. In Levinasian ethics, the illustration of the moral realm as a call and response embodies the extreme ethical obligation of the subject who sees the face of the Other.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS RELATED TO THE LEVINASIAN ONTOLOGY OF ART

In the previous section, I have illustrated the distinct phenomenology of Levinas that proves and describes the discovery of the primordial ethical relation of the I to the Other. The previous discussions centered on general relationality, whereas in this section, I highlight the philosophical concepts concerning the Levinasian view of the unique ontology of artworks and their relation to the "I."

Plasticity and Irresponsibility in "Reality and Its Shadow"

In 1948, "Reality and Its Shadow," a scholarly essay, was published in the French literary and philosophical journal *Les Temps Moderne*. This essay became controversial, given the stark divergence of the Levinasian view of art from his contemporary intellectual thinkers. Despite being one of the most criticized works of

Levinas and an early formulation of his view on art, focusing on this work is still important, as evidenced by Levinas' own words. In an interview with Edith Wyschogrod (2006, 293), Levinas mentions that he stands by his description of the idolatrous moment of art as described in "Reality and Its Shadow." Thus, in this section, I will begin with the main claim of the work, then proceed to elaborate on the crucial concepts Levinas laid out in the said work.

The title of the controversial essay provides Levinas's central claim concerning art. Levinas considers art fundamentally creating a doubling effect. This effect leads to a simultaneity of reality and its shadow, the ontological status of art. Levinas describes art as images distinct from signs and symbols. If signs are pure transparency insofar as they still point to reality, images are resemblances, making a picturesque effect or caricature of the being. In this manner, images are considered "symbols in reverse" because their presence is reinforced through the absence of the objects they resemble (Levinas, 1989a, 136).

This clarification in ontology debunks the usual assumption regarding the distinction between truth and non-truth. Contrary to usual views of opposing the two, Levinas (1989a, 136) remarks: "Non-truth is not an obscure residue of being, but is its sensible character itself, by which there is resemblance and images in the world." In this manner, the debate concerning whether the ontological status of nature or art is superior becomes moot. Both dimensions exist simultaneously but are distinct in their dynamics.

In point of that fact, Levinas (1989a, 131) clarifies further that art as images also lead to disengagement. Inasmuch as images are opaque and picturesque, they become self-enclosed. The justification of this claim lies in the moment of art's completion. An artist eventually discerns that the work of art is complete since a saturation point is reached. At that moment, art refuses to accept anything more than what it already has. This self-enclosed and accurately termed disengaged art can lead its participants (the audience, readers, etc.) to passivity. Similar to magic, an image enchants the participants in the way active participants of art are absorbed in the aesthetic experience (Levinas, 1989a, 133). The participants' consciousness becomes paralyzed. Levinas admits that there are varying degrees for these images. At the height of such perfection of self-enclosure, the term idol is introduced.

The most perfect images manifest as idols. These idols embody plasticity insofar as they lead to a duration of time that is quasi-eternal. Connected to the previous point of self-enclosure, the duration of time in art is unique, termed the "meanwhile." The "meanwhile" is described as instants that endure infinitely (Levinas, 1989a, 138). This quasi-eternal removes the urgency the "I" should sensibly feel. Thus, plasticity leads to the evasion of responsibility. Art, in its obscurity and opaqueness, brings lightness and grace to the participant. Levinas (2019, 36), elsewhere, provides an example that clearly illustrates this point: "What is immoral in the Mona Lisa, to the contrary, would be its perfection in a world of suffering and evil, and in the drama which is played around us in the eventfulness of being and appearance."

In summary, the risk of art, especially those that create idols, can paralyze the consciousness of the I, experience the duration of the "meanwhile," and become deceptively lightened from their supposed ethical responsibility to the other. The next

section covers the other possibilities of art, especially those artworks that aspire to inspire freedom, as exposed in Levinas' "The Transcendence of Words."

Bifurcations, Erasures, and Sound in "The Transcendence of Words"

"The Transcendence of Words" was first published in *Les Temps Modernes* 44 in 1949 and was reprinted in a special volume of *L'Ire des Vents* 3-4 (1981). It has been reissued in *Hors sujet* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1987). This work of Levinas presents an early interpretation of Michel Leiris' contribution to our understanding of art, identity, and language. This text can be roughly divided into four main parts: (1) a short description of surrealism's aspirations, (2) a comment on Michel Leiris' surrealist roots, (3) Michel Leiris' concepts of bifurcations and erasures, and (4) Levinas' description of language beyond thought content. This review essay implies an untrodden path to reaching the goals of surrealism, which can be found in this text. Hence, a short digression to properly frame surrealism is needed.

Surrealism is often tied to the origins of Dadaism. Dadaism is a movement that abandoned traditional art to disrupt conventions that led to ideological tendencies. This movement began a highly reactionary campaign: anti-literary, anti-social, and anarchical. Those characteristics eventually led to Dadaism's demise because of its extreme nihilistic tendencies. "Yet even as Dada was denouncing cultural pollution and spectacular rot on every side," observes Raoul Vaneigem, "surrealism was already on the scene with its big plans for clean-up and regeneration" (Dupuis 1999, 10). A similar aspiration can be seen in surrealism without the nihilistic attitude.

Surrealism departs from the usual conventions of art and goes beyond the cultural dimension. It inherits spontaneity akin to Dadaism and inverts the creative process. André Breton, an influential figure in the surrealist movement, describes it as "psychic automatism" in its pure form, a process aimed at expressing the true workings of thought—whether through speech, writing, or any other medium—driven by thought alone, without the constraints of reason or adherence to aesthetic or moral considerations (Breton and Lane 1972, 26). Regarding surrealist poetry, Iris Murdoch (1999, 71) emphasizes its freeing nature in delving into the unconscious, characterizing poetry as a "voyage into dream[s]," wherein language functions solely as a medium for spontaneous expression, a tool for probing the depths of the mind and thus extending the boundaries of reality. Following Rimbaud's footsteps, surrealists believe that the liberation of consciousness would have political and social implications.

Now, it is possible to juxtapose this with Levinas' specific perception of surrealism. Aesthetic and metaphysical freedom coincides with each other based on surrealism. The emancipation of the individual consciousness through artistic endeavors is translated into political actions that transform the systematic oppression of people. The liberation mentioned earlier is surmised to be hidden in the unconscious mind. Michel Leiris departs from the usual surrealist tendencies. Levinas (1989b, 145) opines that Leiris, in contrast to other surrealists, is not enchanted with the powers of the Unconscious and instead "finds reasons for his dreams in the conscious world." This characteristic explains why Levinas considers Leiris more of a chemist than an alchemist. Leiris is more concerned with the conscious world rather than enchanted speculations about the wonders of the unconscious.

His explorations led to uncovering the important role of bifurcations and erasures in artistic creation. "Bifurcations - since sensations, words and memories continually turn a train of thought from the path it seemed to be taking towards some unexpected direction; erasures - since the univocal meaning of each element is continually corrected and altered" (Levinas 1989b, 146). These erasures and bifurcations create an ambiguity that makes a more fluid constellation of ideas possible. Those two concepts are foundational to Levinas' elaboration of the transcendence of language. Bifurcations and erasures explain why there are presences of ideas in another idea. The simultaneity in art makes it a complex subject matter that is challenging to comprehend. When compared to images, these erasures allow the conception of certain artworks to remain incomplete (Levinas 1989b, 147). This incompleteness embodies the overflowing content that the form cannot fully contain.

In the latter parts of "The Transcendence of Words," Levinas goes beyond Leiris' aesthetic theory and describes the "word" in art. According to Levinas (1989b, 147), Western civilization was obsessed with vision and the clarity of meaning in art. It considers only the idea, its self-sufficiency, and immanence. Thus, the obscurity, the simultaneity of meaning, and the sound of art as scandalous clanging are often overlooked. Sound is the dimension that cannot be converted into vision. Sound is the symbol *par excellence*. "In sound, the perceptible quality overflows so that form can no longer contain its content" (Levinas 1989b, 148). This reality reveals that surrealist aspirations may be achievable through a different path, i.e., the word that ruptures. The word has an anarchic character that ruptures and disrupts the order of the totalizing or thematizing "I," i.e., the egoistic interpreter. In this way, Levinas shows the possibility that art can also be connected to ethical responsibility insofar as the "I" can be scandalized by art to go beyond its logic of domination and sameness. Given the two possibilities, the interview with Levinas entitled, *On Obliteration*, provides clear linkages between them and introduces new philosophical concepts that further show the relationship between art and ethics.

Obliteration and the Ethical Dimension of Art in "On Obliteration"

On March 17th, 1988, Françoise Armengaud interviewed Emmanuel Levinas concerning the artwork of Sacha Sosno. He admitted that he deliberately steered the conversation to help Levinas clarify his view regarding the connection between art and ethics. Since Levinas had already published several of his groundbreaking philosophical texts during that time, the limitations he admitted in *Reality and Its Shadow* can be properly explored because his elaboration on an intentionality that is other-wise has been laid out already.⁴ Despite the conciseness of the interview, the responses are dense and may require further analysis. In this section, I limit the discussion to Levinas' concept of obliteration and the possibility of art as a protest against evil and an evasion of responsibility.

The French word *obliteration*, when tracing its etymology, refers to the act of painting over and erasing. This word is also associated with other actions such as blotting out, crossing out, concealing, hiding, deleting, and overwriting (Benke, foreword to Levinas 2019, 11). Sacha Sosno, a famous sculptor and painter, practiced obliteration in his artworks. When asked for Levinas' opinion on the matter, Levinas

(2019, 31) recognizes the ethical dimension in the art of obliteration. He describes it as follows: "[Obliteration] would be an art which exposes the ease and lighthearted casualness of the beautiful and recalls the wear and tear of being, the 'repairs' which art covers over, and the visible or hidden erasures in art's persistency to be, to appear and to show itself." In this manner, one sees that the act of art resembling reality, consequently leading to image, is retained. However, another action is introduced which allows a "concealment" that allows art to retain its connection to the ethical dimension. In the moment of obliteration, Levinas describes the hiddenness that allows the participants to see that there is more to see. In this manner, contrary to the enchantment of art via images, obliteration leads to an inversion of the "magical operation" of art (Levinas 2019, 36). In this inversion, obliteration, in the ontological drama, draws out art's potential concerning the invitation to speak—a stark contrast with images that lead to silence. Presuming art as images and some art as obliterated, Levinas (2019) claims that art can serve as a protest against evil and also has the risk of leading the participant to become indifferent to the sufferings of humanity. This double-sided effect of art is examined further in the next section.

THE MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF LEVINAS' THEORY ON ART MORAL TO WHAT OTHER?

Doukhan (2012, 101) comments that art plays a significant role in the journey to transcendence, supposing it maintains its exilic character, i.e., towards the human other. However, I do not close the possibility that art may bear a trace pointing to the realm/s of other others. For instance, the religious notion of Other, particularly that of God, can also be considered, as well as the inclusion of nonhuman animals.⁵ In this paper, I consider the ambiguity of art as possibly pointing toward itself as an other and a myriad of other Others the "I" is responsible for. This move is asserted considering that the engagers of artworks can be reminded of the ethical relation towards the other that existed prior to metaphysics and epistemology. The radical alterity of the art bears a trace of a face that can cause unique and multiple effects on the perceiving "I," which I will limit to two general directions: (1) analogic sameness of art and irresponsibility, and (2) hearing the sound of the ethical plea and being incited towards an infinite responsibility. This multi-effect is possible because of the bifurcations and erasures that, more than doubling, create an ambiguous face—face in the limited sense of the word. Given this ambiguity, the degree of being other-wise of the "I" does not guarantee that the effect of engaging in a work of art will lead to responsibility. I tentatively posit that this correlation only increases the likelihood of such an effect and *vice versa*.

Analogic Sameness of Art and Irresponsibility

In reflecting on the ontological drama both in the creation and encounter with the artworks, there are multiple sites wherein the vulnerability of art is seen. Levinasian philosophy highlights how art primarily stems from a resembling of reality, leading to an image. Such an image can embody the "meanwhile"—a unique duration of time

characterized by a quasi-eternity. This experience of time explains why the participants of art, including the artist, are often rendered to a form of stasis. In other words, they are inclined to do nothing in the face of art. Beauty pushes the "I" to simply behold and enjoy. Levinas (1989a, 141) powerfully evokes this when he considers how artistic enjoyment is sometimes shameful, similar to feasting during a plague.

Relating this temporal dimension in an artwork to the previous example of MIM, the connection between art and ethics is clearly seen. Ojano (2024, 3) comprehensively analyzes the scenes of MIM and concludes: "Yap's MIM exploits the figure of the maid to visualize time as rigid, onedimensional, and even paranoid." The temporality evoked in the artwork creates an illusion that exploits the imagery out of the context from which the events being depicted stem. Thus, sameness and irresponsibility are possibly promoted in the self-enclosed image, especially when it is already to a degree of an idol.

However, Levinas also alludes to philosophical criticism that respects the ambiguity of art, stemming from the interstices of reality and doubled image. In other words, there is still a possibility of inferring ethical matters even from a misleading image. Following the insights of Ambeth Ocampo on MIM, I consider how a prudent approach to each artwork can lead to a fruitful interpretation. The thoughts of Levinas highlight the importance of philosophical criticism.

Through philosophical criticism or the act of interpretation, the myth exemplified by artwork embodies both untruth and philosophical truth (Levinas 1989a, 142). Despite the good potential of interpretation, this task can also be a site for vulnerability, wherein the participant can succumb to making the alterity only appear as analogous to their sameness. An example is an artist claiming that their intention is the only valid interpretation of their artwork. For several centuries, most studies on literary criticism hinged on the authorial meaning imparted on the text. However, several movements challenged that predominant position, with the death of the author as one of the prominent views that inaugurated the significant shift of the considered legitimate meaning of the text. In the well-celebrated essay "Death of the Author," Roland Barthes traced the close association of the "author" figure and the "voice" present in the text. In his exploration, literary criticisms and linguistics depart from the complete association of the textual meaning with the author or the person responsible for the creation of the text. Ed White (2012, 116), in clarifying this contribution, comments that:

Barthes thus presents the focus on the author figure as both historical anomaly—the concept was not always important—and as a self-perpetuating belief—confirmed by the way we write and think about literature in scholarship or popular culture. But the next section of the manifesto talks about how the figure of the author has begun to break down in recent decades.

Barthes' notion captures the authorial authority's breakdown, leading to readers' pivotal role in the interpretation process and the considered legitimate meaning of the text. This seemingly simple question of interpretation has significant ramifications in the ethical realm.⁶ The other extreme is also possible: the participants of art think that

their interpretation is valid and does not require any justification. Levinas provides vivid imagery of what philosophical criticism of art actually does. He (1989a, 142–143) writes:

The most lucid writer finds himself in the world bewitched by its images. He speaks in enigmas, by allusions, by suggestion, in equivocations, as though he moved in a world of shadows, as though he lacked the force to arouse realities, as though he could not go to them without wavering, as though, bloodless and awkward, he always committed himself further than he had decided to do, as though he spills half the water he is bringing us.

This passage implies that Levinas understands the wealth of possible valid interpretations and multiple meanings that can be embodied in a work of art. His concepts of erasure and obliteration further reinforce this simultaneity of meaning. With these in mind, I further explore in the next sub-section the traces of goodness in beauty despite the possible immobilizing effect it can create.

The Sound of the Ethical Plea and an Infinite Responsibility

Does art have an ethical face? Since Levinas (1997, 8) mentions art as seeking to give a face to things, it may be presumed that the response to this question is likely affirmative. However, Levinas points only to art "giving a face" only in a limited sense because the ethical face is non-representable, recalling that an image cannot lead to the Other and only leads to itself. Thus, *On Obliteration*, Levinas (2019, 36) clarifies that art can instead strip off the false humanity in things. Instead of a resemblance of a false ethical visage or face, art has the potential to obliterate misleading notions. The paradoxes of visibility-invisibility and presence-absence are demonstrated in the encounter with art, especially incomplete art.⁷ In this way, the ethical moment in encountering incomplete art can indirectly irrupt the "I" from its logic of sameness and lead toward the recognition of the infinite responsibility towards the Other. Art can help the "I" see the radical alterity of the Other through the obliteration of the misleading idols that silence the scandalizing word. Similar to philosophical criticism, obliteration can make art speak. In contradistinction with the "meanwhile" of images, Levinas (2019, 24) mentions a new duration of time called "semelfactivity" that has three distinct characteristics: (1) obstructive, (2) process-oriented, and (3) oriented towards images, not the writing or creative process. Semelfactivity, coined by Vladimir Jankélévitch, refers to a time that took place only once and cannot be repeated or returned to (La Caze 2019, 42). This time is also obstructive or negative insofar as it opposes the "not-yet" and "not-anymore." Time presents an indeterminate negativity—the mysterious aspect of art. The second characteristic emphasizes its fleeting character, which is intrinsic to the process of becoming. It exudes, Levinas (2019, 24) opines, the inconclusiveness and openness of art. This openness comes from an obliteration of the images, destroying the self-enclosures and allowing the ambiguity of alterity to be recognized. With these philosophical concepts in mind, the

Levinasian view of art is properly contextualized in terms of phenomenology and the ramifications of the ethical dimension.

BETWEEN CENSORSHIP AND LICENSE: HOW THE "I" SHOULD RESPOND TO THE ALTERITY OF ART

Overview and Objection

This section covers the particular responsibility of the "I" in responding to the radical alterity of art. Drawing from the findings of the previous sections, I contend that the Levinasian philosophy can serve as a framework for rethinking the guiding principles to navigate the fine line between employing censorship and invoking artistic license. This move to formulate in the context of governing bodies is based on Emmanuel Levinas's (1985, 80) remarks in *Ethics and Infinity*, wherein he claims that politics should always be assessed and evaluated from an ethical standpoint. He supports this point *via* arguing for the nostalgia and propensity of human beings to synthesize and totalize the world. Since the person is grounded in real relations, the human person becomes ruptured from the typical inclination towards totalization. However, as the readers may have inferred from the unique terminology Levinas formulated, objections against the plausibility of this intended project come to mind.

As voiced out by Miller (2016, 526), the Levinasian metaphysical-ethical discourse may appear as an esoteric discourse and does not move one to behave ethically. Another possible objection to the overall project of this paper is the impression that Levinas' philosophy is impractical. This position is predicated on the assumption that, in itself, Levinas' philosophy cannot be a practical ethics because the "other" is impossible to comprehend completely. That ambiguity consequently leads to concrete ways to shape a practical ethical view. In response to this objection, I claim that this impossibility does not deny the fact that one can still describe and sketch out its general features without succumbing to a thematic enclosure or overestimation of representation. Following Joshua James Shaw's (2008, 83) aim in *Emmanuel Levinas on the Primary of Ethics*, I argue that Levinas is reluctant to give out specific normative rules because flexibility is necessary for ethics. In this spirit, this paper only provides guidelines that should be appropriated to specific contexts. In terms of being esoteric, I consider again the remark that the language of Levinas is difficult to understand for unfamiliar readers; still, the formulated terms effectively embody the complex nature of the ethical intersubjective relationship.

The Governing Agent as the "I"

Levinas speaks of the "I" in general terms. Thus, I hermeneutically apply the insights from the previous sections to a governing agent to effectively narrow the focus of this section. Furthermore, the particular "I" or the perceiving subject is assumed to be a moral agent that engages the artworks insofar as their main objective is to interpret, evaluate, and decide either in favor or against the censorship of the artwork in question. A hypothetical example is an individual who is included in The Central

Committee of Film Appraisal and Classification, a governing body formed and approved by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism that oversees distribution licenses of local and international films.

Levinas always highlighted the importance of philosophical criticism in art. Since images can lead to enchantment or a form of stasis for the consciousness, philosophical criticism brings back the irreality of images to real history—a re-grounding of the aesthetic experience to reality. Given that multiple interpretations can be valid, the ambiguity of art and openness to correction and inclusivity should be kept in mind. In the next sections, I provide preliminary ways to discern how censorship can be considered ethical and when to invoke artistic license. Examples will be provided, but readers should consider that the views expressed are not dogmas or the only ways to interpret the cited artworks.

Censorship as an Ethical Act

Censorship, especially concerning works of art, refers to suppressing or regulating expressions based on a perceived potential to be "offensive"—a broad characteristic that can be drawn from a multitude of dimensions, such as political, religious, moral, or ideological. Scholars such as Chiang and Posner (2006) highlight the difficulty in formulating a consistent standard and enforcement of censorship stemming from the context-specificity of offensiveness.

Various types of censorship are also recognized: market-led, self-censorship, religious, and governmental. First, market-led censorship is a possible form of censorship to repress art, which primarily exerts its enforcement before, during, and after the art creation process. This mechanism can be seen in the compromises between the artist and the maximization of commercial appeal. After the creation process, the market may still exert its influence (e.g., forced limiting of screenings). Whereas self-censorship is a typical consequence of the evasion of potential conflicts and modification of artwork—as significantly influenced by the artist's internalization of societal or political expectations, religious censorship is often enforced when a perceived artwork offends people concerning existing religious beliefs, moral codes, communities, or religious figures. Lastly, government or institutionally sanctioned censorship is the most visible type of censorship. This type is manifested through formulated and approved legal frameworks, such as bans or content restrictions on media distribution.

I cannot dwell upon the complexity that arises from all the various types of censorship. Instead, I focus on governmental censorship in this section, given its overt structure and implications on personal, relational, and societal levels. Relating to the findings of Levinas, specific artworks, especially those that are idols—in the Levinasian sense—should be restricted because of their high risk of leading the participant of art to evade ethical responsibility. One of the concrete ethical actions one may take, if granted relevant political power, is to propose a censorship of an artwork. Thus, though drawing from a mainly political context, I advocate for a philosophical-moral justification for the discernment and enforcement of censorship. To further limit the scope of this paper, I propose two dimensions of an idol that need stricter

censorship: the totalizing effect of art and the strong potential to foster irresponsibility through evasion.

The totalizing effect of art can be manifested through the promotion of normative ways of seeing and thinking. The "I" tends to consider everything that is not-I as an analogy or only in relation to itself. Some persuasive artworks can further reinforce that tendency. A case in point is the connection between supremacist ideology and the film *Triumph of the Will*.

Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* chronicles the large-scale Nazi Party Rally at Nuremberg. This film presents a dramatized view of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi movement, complemented by carefully orchestrated scenes and powerful musical scores (Zander 2020, 232). The film received multiple awards because of Riefenstahl's groundbreaking use of innovative filming techniques, such as aerial shots, dynamic camera angles, and effective use of sound editing. Alan Sennett (2014, 60), an expert on political revolutions, concludes from his incisive analysis of that film the undeniable propagandistic nature insofar as a clear set of ideas and values are being propagated through the medium of cinema. Moreover, the deliberate heroic portrayal is never hidden. Thus, despite the aesthetic merits associated with the film, controversy surrounds the said film because of its possible reinforcement of dangerous ideas. One of the most obvious ideas highlighted in the film is the constant struggle that could lead to the rise of the *supreme* nation (Zander 2020, 232). If we apply the Levinasian concepts to this case, applying censorship is recommended as an ethical act. Art that fosters the totalizing mentality reveals a plasticity that makes its participants more egoistic. A concrete form of institutional censorship is YouTube's new policy that provides the ground for removing the said film from its platform. Other contextual restrictions are also viable to limit the possible harm similar types of artworks may foster.

On the aspect of irresponsibility through evasion, a prominent type of artwork that can become an idol is poverty pornography. Poverty pornography is a particular type of media that highlights the suffering and destitution of impoverished individuals in ways intended to garner attention and elicit sympathy and financial aid from audiences. It is often used in social media platforms, media campaigns, advertisements, and documentaries. It portrays poverty in simplified, often exaggerated ways that focus on the visible distress of its subjects and lack of agency. Scholars often critique poverty porn insofar as this type of media risks dehumanizing its subjects, as it leverages their suffering primarily to provoke an emotional response from viewers rather than to foster an understanding of the structural causes of poverty or to empower the depicted communities.⁸

Poverty porn, at first glance, may seem like an artwork that leads the viewers toward a recognition of their moral obligation. Through vulnerability, it appeals to the viewer's pity. However, this perspective is misleading, given that exaggeration can make the "I" acquire a "savior complex" and become egoistic in the moral drama. Clough et al. (2023, 347–364), provide an empirical basis for the negative effects of such genre, especially poverty porn in advertisements. One of their findings implies that if those potentially in need of help are viewed as lacking in agency, hesitation is further heightened on the part of the helper. To illustrate this point, a donor may become hesitant to help an impoverished family after witnessing a poverty porn

advertisement that highlights how a specific family that experiences extreme poverty cannot have significant change in their lives no matter what band-aid solution is given. Thus, poverty porn is immoral, especially since it creates a negative message that promotes inaction and evasion of one's moral responsibility.

Another aspect that merits mention is the pornography aspect of such a genre. Pornography is known for the portrayal of supposedly intimate aspects, possibly leading to an effective affective appeal to the viewers. In the case of poverty porn, the stimulation of pleasure organs can lead to a washing-off of guilt in terms of complicity and evasion of social responsibility.⁹ This idea aligns with Levinas' description of the possibility that idols can have an immobilizing effect. Specifically, the stasis created is not just the kind of time that is in an idol but also the misleading form of pleasure that makes the "I" inclined to simply behold the beautiful.

Invoking Artistic License as a Recognition of the Ambiguity in Art

In some circumstances, what may seem like an art that merits censorship, or at least some form of regulation, actually deserves an invocation of artistic license to be allowed to be seen in a new light. As proposed by Levinas, some artworks, especially those that demonstrate obliteration and sound, create scandals. The moment of destruction and erasure embodies an annihilation and a paradoxical acquisition of a new value. Art can cause a more felt presence originating from an absence due to erasure and obliteration. Consequently, the said presence can rupture the "I," especially an other-wise "I" towards becoming more responsible. I claim that obliteration corresponds to the thesis of most artworks branded as transgressive art.

The art world can be considered to be constituted similarly to games with codified rules. Transgressive artworks reshape the existing codified rules with novelties and innovations, consequently hailed as trailblazers in the possible directions of the art world (Kenny 2023, 32). However, not all artistic transgressive attempts are considered acceptable or legitimate. Oliver Kenny (2023, 210), a researcher known for visual ethics, comments that the recognition, legitimization, and mobilization of such artworks are made possible by the numerous stakeholders of the art world. Included among the stakeholders are scholars and art critics who specialize in analyzing the important details of specific artworks. Thus, this idea aligns with Levinas' emphasis on philosophical criticism as a route for grounding the irreality of art to the historicity of the "I" that engages the art. Thus, former images may be obliterated and acquire new value as sounds or symbols *par excellence*, which can scandalize the "I" toward recognizing ethical responsibility.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

This paper accomplished three aspects: [1] a focused exegesis of Levinas' ethics and its phenomenological roots, [2] the exposition of the ambiguous ontological status of art and its corresponding ethical implications, and [3] the utilization of the Levinasian paradigm in rethinking the ethical employment of art censorship and appealing the artistic license. This study highlights how the realm of art has the

capacity to inspire infinite responsibility towards the radical alterity of the artwork and the other others that have traces in its face. However, the engagement with an artwork, especially if the ego does not transition to an ethical "I," has a more pronounced risk of reinforcing the self towards sameness and an evasion of responsibility. Furthermore, a distinction between different works of art can reveal whether they are idols or obliterated images. Because of this double-edged ontology of an artwork, artistic freedom is clarified to a certain degree. The mechanisms of censorship and invocation of artistic license play crucial roles in maintaining the artistic freedom that is inseparable from the ethical desire and obligation the "I" carries.

NOTES

1. Varakukalayil explores the implications of Levinas' corporeal subjectivity and suggests a possible ground for resisting racist conceptions. See Varakukalayil (2015, 281–95).

2. "The future is what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us. The other is the future. The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future. It seems to me impossible to speak of time in a subject alone or to speak of a purely personal duration" (Levinas 1987, 77).

3. For a more comprehensive elaboration on the figurative usage of the face, see Perpich (2005, 103–121).

4. In the last parts of *Reality and Its Shadow*, Levinas writes: "But we cannot here broach the 'logic' of the philosophical exegesis of art; that would demand a broadening of the intentionally limited perspective of this study. For one would have to introduce the perspective of the relation with the other without which being could not be told in its reality, that is, in its time." (Levinas 1989a, 143).

5. For literary criticism and God, see Park (2021, 209–32). Regarding the Levinasian paradigm in viewing the relation of art and nonhuman animals, see (Kallio-Tavin 2020, 298–311).

6. Numerous scholars examine the link between author-text relation and the ethical implications of examining the meaning attributed to the text. Their publications primarily hinge on the philosophical foundation of how artworks have meaning concerning their creators. Thus, this proposed Levinasian view offers a different stance insofar as the authorial intention is not the only valid meaning. For further elaboration on the moral dimension of author-text, see Bartel (2019, 1–9) and **Koblizek (2025, 1–19)**.

7. The term "incomplete," for Levinas, refers to an openness to speech. The openness, similar to a wound, stems from the Other that gives rise to the responsibility the "I" carries. Thus, the "word" that mediates and artworks that obliterate are both within the category of incomplete art.

8. To cite a few criticisms, Jensen (2014, 277–283) highlights how poverty porn elicits a drowning out of the need to have critical perspectives on the matter, while Duncan et al. (2024, 105735) claim that poverty porn is deceptive, exploitative, and objectifies its subjects.

9. Seghaier (2018, 231), in reviewing *Capernaum*, sees the portrayal of poverty pornography as a possible way to assuage the feelings of the viewers, especially in their complicity.

10. This account of art receptivity has similarities with the reclamationist stances on art. What has been formerly deemed derogatory or offensive may eventually regain a new meaning through subversive and creative means. See Tirrell (2001, 293–294).

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