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Study of an Artist-Manifest as a Rebel: Sonic Youth

by Frank Redmond

(Honors Philosophy 250)

The Assignment: Choose a philosophical theory from the textbook (Alex Neill, Aaron Ridley. *The Philosophy of Art*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 1995) and apply the theory in an analysis of a piece of art. At least three books (not articles or Internet sources) need to be used for research.

i. PROLOGUE

Arguably, from the early 1950's till this day, labeled popular music has pervaded the Western mind. Virtually all persons receptive to the modern and post-modern Western ages have been affected by its overarching presence - it would be foolish to jettison the notion that popular music has been influential. With all agreed and aesthetic judgment aside, the fervent sibling of popular music has unconditionally been provocation and rebelliousness. Whether it is in the vein of Bob Marley's political lyrics or the drug-induced experimentation of the Beatles post- Revolver or the performance antics of the Sex Pistols, popular music time and time again has shown that it holds a powerful grasp upon the mind of the listener and/or audiences at large. At times, it incites the audience to question the answers and to challenge. History exhibits such a dichotomy.

As a fairly recent phenomenon, rock and roll (a.k.a. 'pop' music) has not had an adequate opportunity to be philosophically analyzed. From my experience with philosophical texts and other critiques of music and/or art, 'pop' music is given little attention from the "great minds". It is seemingly, "too mainstream", pejorative, or colloquial to be considered "great art", whatever that means. As an attempt to give 'pop' music a fair deal and some much needed acclaim, I have chosen the modern rock group, Sonic Youth (1981?-present), whom in my opinion deserves adulation for being both aesthetically pleasing and challenging (as will be explicated later). It is the rebellious and challenging nature of their music that this essay wishes to focus upon. And what does it mean to be an artist-manifest-as-a-rebel?

ii. THESIS

The mission of the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel is to incite a new understanding via provocation. This essay wishes to construct an argument that art is at its pinnacle when it is provocative and confronts convention of the present within the construct of an individualized mission. Furthermore the essay's aspiration is to use the provocative nature of Sonic Youth's music in order to explicate an intimate comprehension of the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel.

I. AESTHETIC CRITIQUE OF "IN THE KINGDOM #19" AND
"SHADOW OF A DOUBT" FROM 1986's EVOL

Prior to progression and philosophical analysis, a concrete example of Sonic Youth's music must preferably be offered. Hopefully these two tracks will give the reader a faint realization of the musical talent and interests of the group. The brief descriptions will attempt to engage the reader into the music and its meaning. Although this is merely a sliver of the catalog, these two tracks on the most basic level sum up the mission of Sonic Youth.

Track #4 of Sonic Youth's breakthrough album EVOL (backwards for LOVE), "In the Kingdom #19", is possibly the group's most severely avant-garde piece. Through the integration of dreary poetry and sheer noise, Sonic Youth tells the tale of a man who confronts "death on the highway". The track begins with a harsh blink as the guitars screech against each other. From this point onwards, the music has a distinct relationship with the voice of the poet, which seems to be speaking from heaven or hell. For instance, when the voice over speaks of "smoke and flames", a car squeals in the background and then the music settles. As the man is avoiding his inevitable death the music slows and becomes more dissonant (if

this is possible). Eventually, the victim of the car accident "is inching towards truth" and perishes. As his death passes, the noise slows down with first the bass disappearing then the guitars and finally all that is left is voices over a basic drumbeat. The most intriguing part of this piece is how Sonic Youth incorporated renegade poetry with dissonance and uncompromising music. Through the synthesis of discord and prose, Sonic Youth constructs a fascinatingly believable story about isolated death on the highway.

In a change of heart and musical tempo, "Shadow of a Doubt" (Track #2) is a different breed of composition. Here, one can hear the direct link between "atmospherics, poetry, feedback, and backbeat ... played with a staccato plucking of reverb-drenched guitars, a single ringing and off-beat low note on piano, and ambient tom-tom drums, 'Shadow of a Doubt' settles into a grooving, expansive soundscape before exploding into a middle bridge" (Janavitz). Possibly the most impressive part of the song is its successful blend of influences. Wearing their influences like a badge, Sonic Youth adds their own twist upon the formula and create something most people have never heard before. Startlingly, the band embraces the femininity of the piece, something their peers refused to advocate. The embrace of femininity in this piece helps to demonstrate the versatility of Sonic Youth, but also helps to assign their rebellious label. By creating against the grain of their peers and exploiting the feminine, Sonic Youth stands out as a voice to be reckoned, an artistic force with a mission.

One could extrapolate a connection of the lyrics and rebellion, however, for our purposes, the backing music is of utmost importance. It was mainly the music that insisted on rebellion from prior works and not the lyrical artistry. The lyrics are simply a means to help create melody and to expand upon the musical artistry of the band - add a persona. They help to give further meaning to the piece (as seen in the previous paragraph the lyrics combined with the music can entice further provocation and can be seen as a positive attribute. Lyrics, in many cases, are the means of the provocation). Over and above, the lyrics hold a certain intrinsic value, but once again, the music is what in our illustration is to be perceived as rebellious and "new" in relation to past works.

II. PLACING THE REBEL

A. A MEANING OF "NO"

The rebel is one who states "NO" to a present condition. Within the "no" the phrases such as - "'this has been going on too long, 'up to this point yes, but beyond it no', and 'you are going too far'" (Camus13) - are discovered. Yet, this "no" is not a negation, but an affirmation of a rebellious idea. On the other hand, what does saying "yes" imply? Answering "yes" insinuates that one is content with their current circumstance, therefore change is unwarranted, or one is unwilling to change a respective circumstance. Furthermore, the "yes" can stem from unfamiliarity with the side of "no". The absolute nature of the words "Yes" and "No" leave no room for an intermediary - you're either in or out, it is 'all' or 'nothing'. No gray area exists. Yet, feeling cannot be erased from the choice between the two absolutes. (This feeling is further explored later in the essay).

Considerably, the choice of "no" cannot be allocated outside of a personal belief system. Questionably, how powerful is the "no" in relation to one's beliefs? Very often, impatience is a powerful genesis. For instance, a practicing, devout Jew, due to their belief system, should not kill without proper reason - no exceptions. His moral code dictates such. However, this particular Jew dislikes his neighbor, has become exceptionably impatient with him, and is convinced that his murder will create a greater good; so much so, he decides to rebel and murder him. In this case, the Jew is making a choice to transcend his morality and belief system to submit a proper "no". He most likely, if he has a sane head, had to wrestle with his belief system before making the choice to say "no". Albeit this cannot be allocated from the effect the action has on one's conscious and the consciousness of others. Rebellion is, nevertheless, a challenge due to its absolute nature and responsibly. Once one proclaims "no", there is no turning back to the former predicament. This issues in an important realization. The "no" should be permanent fixture of the rebel's mindset. If there is a return to the formerly unsatisfactory condition, the rebel is acting out of "bad faith" and negates his or her rebellion. Either way, the person contemplating acting in an insurrectionist matter is torn between two cognate choices. Feeling is what tears one to a lateral.

B. A REBEL

Camus foreshadows, "Man is the only creature who refuses to be what he is" (11). Yet, rebellion "type" changes and shifts over time as culture, history, and moral codifications transform. The present codifies the type of rebel one should be. For instance, a rebel protesting cell phone abuse would have groundless accusations prior to the invention of the cell phone. Transformation very often begins with sedition. "Rebellion ... breaks the seal and allows the whole being to come into play. It liberates stagnant waters and turns them into raging currents" (Camus 17). The feeling rebellion invokes in the participant has remained constant. Whether it is Judas betrayal of Jesus with a kiss or a young boy running away from his parents, the same feeling is involved. It stems from the "no". In fact, no act of rebellion is free from tribulation or spite from within the individual. This tribulation is related to unwillingness, defiance, resistance, unruliness, and so on. If it were otherwise, the act would not be rebellious, but merely unconscious and ordinary - a facet of the belief system. As established, feeling is needed to spawn rebellion. But what is the rebel's attitude after the genesis of "no"; after the rebel has crossed the line? This attitude can only be carefully described as provocative.

Camus fails in his critique of the rebel because he does not give his rebel a general attitude. Throughout his book, The Rebel, Camus is more or less specifically battling prevailing post-war nihilism where the "rebel" is an ideal character trying to restore post-war hope. However, for our aspirations, we should develop a more general definition - one that facilitates all time periods. This is why the rebel must be provocative after the initial proclamation of "no". So what does it mean to be provocative? To provoke is "to stir or incite to action" (Grolier 1054). Among words analogous to "provocation" are excitement, stimulation, and arousal. The "feeling" that one gets from rebellion is not found in the "no" but in the period of time afterwards, in the attitude of the participant. Meaning, provocation is the thesis of the attitude, the genesis of the emotion - not the emotion itself. The emotion incited by provocation is subject to the individual and therefore cannot be earmarked as one distinct feeling. More often than not, it is a feeling related to dissatisfaction or incompleteness - a will to transformally complete.

Rebellion is a commonality within the strand of the human population. However common, rebellion is very often negligent meaning not proportionately measurable. Only a small proportion of the human community possesses the ability to elect rebellion to its height of ability - to influence an audience. For instance, a motorist is driving at 65MPH in a 55MPH speed zone, the latter of which is generally the speed limit on national highways. Is this person guilty, and moreover, a "rebel"? It is questionable for it is not exactly uncommon; their rebellion is far from being the proto-type of "provocative". However, if that same motorist is driving at 210MPH, their rebellion has gone beyond the realm of common sense because it is both an imminent danger to others and to oneself. Here the rebel is forgetting the power and responsibility he or she holds in the wake of their provocative act. In both examples, the motorist knows and is fully awake to their sedition and yet they say "no" to the established authority. The driver could possibly get pulled over with reasonable cause at any time. But are they being "provocative" by settling at the poles of the terminology? Similarly, Aristotle makes note of the power of the median in effectiveness. Aristotle:

"There are three kinds of disposition, then, two of them vices, involving excess and deficiency respectively, and one a virtue, viz. the mean, and all are in a sense opposed to all; for the extreme states are contrary both to the intermediate state and to each other, and the intermediate to the extremes; as the equal is greater relatively to the less, less relatively to the greater, so the middle states are excessive relatively to the deficiencies, deficient to the excesses, both in passions and in actions." (Aristotle 8).

The golden mean is extremely hard to achieve, however, as Aristotle demonstrates, there is an intemperate difference between deficiencies and excesses both to the participant as well as the viewer. Through using Aristotle's theory and trying to find the "golden mean", one can come closer to achieving the state of "true", or accurate, provocation. Carefully, I would describe provocation as the choice which leads to the state of feeling one exudes when the participant is consciously transforming belief systems, in

any form, and exhibiting this emotion within the boundaries of the "logical" extremes determined by the greater society.

Notwithstanding, rebellion is often equated with being dangerous, rather than being provocative - this is an error. Instead, provocation produces danger; danger is merely a byproduct of the mission. In this sense, it is perilous to trade the two definitions for the latter is born from the former. Usually, the ignorant and heavily confused/disorientated masses confuse the two terms and synthesize them as one. They ask, "How dangerous is this rebel?". And this not acceptable because their intentions are to assimilate the two words together. One must not forget that without provocation, danger would not exist. Provocation needs not to entice danger but can.

Importantly, in a shift of locus, selfishness can be a hindrance to the rebel as well. "Selfish" meaning being "concerned chiefly or only with oneself" (Grolier 1176). Through imposition, and not egoism, the rebel works for the sake of their mission and/or ideals. They must uphold their mission in relation to the human community. This is where the difference between a rebel and a menace is established. The rebel wishes to influence with a purpose in mind, and share with those who are like-minded, whereas the menace wishes to impose, and more often than not, without an agenda or an ideal.

The rebel is not egotistical, whereas the menace cares solely for their ends. The menace is strictly individualistic and places their "personal agenda" and comforts (whatever they may be) before their ideals. Instead, "the rebel - once he has excepted his motive and at the moment of his greatest impetus - preserves nothing in that he risks everything. He demands respect for himself ... but only so far as he identifies himself with the natural community" (Camus 16).

Once again, rebellion and insurrection is not a matter of conquering, but instead, a matter of imposition and influence. To clarify, when one is a rebel, one prefers sacrifice, and possibly death, rather than the negation of ideals because one considers these ideals more important than their selfish being (15-6). This is the dilemma Jesus of Nazareth faced in the Garden of Gethsamene - are my objectives worth suffering and ultimately dying for? It is recounted in the New Testament:

"Then Jesus came to a place called Gethsemane ... He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will.' ... Withdrawing a second time, he prayed again, 'My Father if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!' ... [He] withdrew again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing again. Then He returned to his disciples and said to them, "...Behold, the hour is at hand when the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners" (Matthew 26: 36,39,42,44-5).

In this famous story, the battle between Jesus's ideals and his humanly selfish behavior is dramatically fashioned. Jesus is "enticed" to forego his mission of creating a "heavenly" utopia on earth (albeit these are religious terms) and return his "cup", his reputed theological destiny assigned by God. Instead, Jesus acts "rebellious" and accepts his mission thereby affirming his ideals¹. In this manner, the Jesus is acting out of respect for humankind. With pride, the rebel must hold the responsibility of their ideas upon their back wanting humanity to see them with the hope that people will exercise or contemplate their ideas.

As alluded, the rebel must have a mission. Like a missionary, the rebel must be the proponent of their provocation. The means to the end are defined within the mission of the insurrectionist. What is a mission? Simply, a mission occurs when a person or persons decide to propagate their ideals through action. Action is key to understanding a mission. In relation to the rebel, an additional description is

¹Whether or not Jesus understood his mission himself is irrelevant. The example of the rebel (e.g. Jesus of Nazareth) is powerful due to its colloquial influence and therefore was an accurate choice for this essay. The theological and historical questions of Jesus' life and mission are troublesome, but for our purposes we will assume Jesus had knowledge of his mission from God in order to dismiss all theological and historical watchdogs.

supplemented. In a sense, the rebel must pursue to be a propagandist - a person(s) using insistent persuasion to influence and impose ideals. Moreover, the rebel must follow through in their mission least their mission will be negated because of a lack of activity. This is the plight Jesus faced in the garden. Even more problematic, however, may be a deficiency of "good" faith and responsibility in relativity to the mission.

If one acts in "bad" faith toward their mission "a man annihilates what he posits within one and the same act; he leads us to believe in order not to be believed; he affirms to deny and denies to affirm; he creates a positive object but it has no being other than its nothingness" (Sartre 87). Why must one not develop "bad" faith? Basically, "bad" faith constitutes a lie to oneself in relation to the lying in general (87). Dangerously, "bad" faith "seeks by means of 'not-being-what-one-is' to escape from the itself ... Bad faith seeks to flee the in-self by means of the inner disintegration of my being" (Sartre 116).

Questionably, how can the rebel follow through on a mission where he or she is in bad faith, lying to oneself, and in effect lying to others? The end result of the mission would be disastrous, a reflection of the "bad" faith in the rebel - a visual lie to the masses and oneself. In order to create a positive object to be taken sincerely (both to yourself and others), one must be in "good" faith which "wishes to flee the 'not-believing-what-one-believes' by finding refuge in being²" (Sartre 115). One must adhere to tenants of the respective belief as outlined by the self. In our case, the mission becomes equitable through "good" faith.

Furthermore, the rebel must hold a discrete responsibility over their mission. The mission is a creation on the rebel's behalf. It is their distinct responsibility to give the duty its tenants and structure. Analogous to the Sartrean notion that man chooses oneself, the rebel chooses their mission, and therefore, no one is held accountable but the rebel for the mission's interests and future. However, what about responsibility to the world? In a sense, a mission is a universal suggestion. A mission by definition has to contain visible and perceivable components - it cannot be merely a thought. In this regard, the rebel holds a responsibility to others in esteem of their intentions. This entails that the rebel is: 1. not lying to others (i.e. acting in good faith), 2. positing an absolute "no" (i.e. affirming your intentions and rebellion), and 3. always working towards the goal. Responsibility to the mission is crucial in order to prevent a negation.

C. THE ARTIST-MANIFEST-AS-A-REBEL

Jerrold Levinson's definition of art - "A work of art is a thing intended for 'regard-as-a-work-of-art,' regardless of the ways works of art existing prior to it have been correctly regarded" (226) - illuminates the theory that a work of art must have a relationship to its time and previous history. To allocate a piece of art from this context is to eliminate all measurement of progress and evolution. It would be virtually impossible to demonstrate how artistic pursuits have changed and what or who were the catalysts of the change without a historical background. From the proto-arts to today's art, a lineage has developed which helps the historian and casual art viewer alike place certain pieces. It is only logical to assemble art history along this chain. However, often an artist arrives who shakes the foundations of the artworld; they make the perpetually forming and unfolding chain stutter in its tracks and reassess where it should proceed into the future. Some artists, known as revolutionaries, create their own chains. Others take the past and transform. How do we describe this person in totality? This person is the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel.

What is the definition of an artist-manifest-as-a-rebel? Simply, the artist must exist prior to the rebel. Therefore the artist must make the choice to say "no" and become a rebel. So why use manifest? Manifest is correlated with the word manifesto - "a public declaration of principles or intentions" (Grolier 794) - which embodies the piece of art the rebel creates. It is a manifesto, or expression, of their ideologies. So when I speak of the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel, it is person who has demonstrated an intention to create or have created a manifesto.

Hypothetically, we are transported back in time to 50,000 BCE. Currently, in the Twenty-First Century, we have no evidence of "art" from this time period. However, this opens the opportunity to

² Sartre defines Being in this relationship: "the nihilation of Being-in-itself; consciousness conceived as a lack of Being, a desire for Being, a relation to Being" (800).

illustrate an important principle. In this fictional account³ I wish to embellish how the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel works in relation to the historicity of art and thereby challenges its conceptions.

A caveman returns to his dwelling after a long day of hunting. He looks up at the wall of the dwelling and makes an observation, "Why do we only paint and depict in black and white? Out on the daily hunt, I see a world full of vivacious color - the brilliant green of grass, the caramel dripping color of the oak tree's bark, the crimson red of a beast's flowing blood. Nature demonstrates such passion for its creations, yet man can only depict in black and white. No, no, no ... this is not right! Man's creations must demonstrate the same colorful passion. I will go and make color depictions!". Onward, the caveman goes for the "all". He in rebellion against his people's previous work paints a picture of a buffalo being splayed with a spear. Although not technically sound, his picture gets completed to his satisfaction and regards it as a work of art. Later in the night, the rest of the hunters return home with their catch of the day. Sitting at the fire, the painter says nothing. He only points to his creation and sees the reaction of his fellows. They immediately drop the buffalo leg from their mouths and run up to catch a closer look. They have never seen such a farce and outcry against their previous paintings! Nevertheless, after the sun rises and falls many times, the piece begins to enrapture their intellect. Their emotions settle as the stratosphere of time cools the dwelling. And they all understand - this is ingenious.

The hunters never thought that one of them would be capable of such an idea and took them all by surprise. However, this idea sprung from a particular dissatisfaction - the feeling that black and white pictures have been painted for too long. A change was needed; a new understanding of the world needed to be presented. This painting was the work of an artist-manifest-as-a-rebel.

Is the creative the same as rebellion? In the previous story, one could cite that the hunter was exceedingly "creative" and, therefore, painted in color. Aside the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel must be creative; creativity is an essential component of all art. However, the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel intends to create in a provocative manner meaning not with the old, but the new. The rebel paints in color because it is new and is regarded as different than previous pieces. If the hunter wanted to be only exceedingly creative, this is possible within the old construct. They would have used black and white to make the piece[s]. Instead, the hunter was the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel because he said "no" to former practices, ideologies, etc. and created a new practice, ideology, etc. It is faulty to incite all art as rebellious, but all art is creative.

However, before continuing, one must identify the difference between evolution and revolution in relation to artistic pursuits. "If art is continually looking at the rear, how can we change it or advance?" (Levinson 232). This is the cry of the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel. Contrary to the opinion of the defiled masses, revolution need not occur to change artistic pursuits and understanding. Evolution is just as important as revolution; change is more likely to occur via evolution rather than revolution anyway. In support, Levinson proposes there are three main categories of art - "new", "original", and "revolutionary" (The first two categories lend themselves to the "evolution" of art).

"A 'new' artwork is simply one nonidentical to any previously existing artwork. An 'original' artwork is a new one significantly different in structural or aesthetic properties from any previously existing artworks ... But by a revolutionary artwork I mean one for which any of the past ways of approaching art seems inadequate, inappropriate, pointless, or impossible; a revolutionary artwork appears to be ultimately calling for a kind of regard which is totally unprecedented" (Levinson 232).

³ Of the author's creation

However, what braids the three categories together is found within the intentions of the artist. The creators of these pieces wish to regard their creations as art. The revolutionary artist may wish to be dealt with in new and unprecedented ways but only under the umbrella of artisan. Their goal may be to confuse, frustrate, or even leave questions open, but their intention is to be an artist. A strategy to deal with the unprecedented is to expand the notion of what is regarded-as-a-work-of-art. In this way, the revolutionary artist is to be regarded "in some other way in contrast to and against the background of [history]" (Levinson 233). In this manner, new explorations are encompassed by the historical and thereby a new path is visibly revealed. Others can now follow the revolutionary path that has been plotted.

Notwithstanding, artistic revolutions are a rare occurrence. Instead, evolutions of ideas and techniques in art are more frequent. The substance of the "new" and "original" works of art is key to knowing and defining evolution. Evolution, like revolution, requires the same "no" to be proposed and solved. The solution, or goal of the mission, after the "no" is what evolves the artworld. With looks at the historical, the evolution of ideas is seen in its full manifestation. Evolution in a historical light originates from the artist seeing the conditions of the present and feeling a dissatisfaction. This leads into the cultivation of the provocative piece of art. In relation to previous works and present works the dissatisfaction of the artist via the price must be easily identifiable for it to be provocative. In addition, a provocative price of art is evolutionary for it leaps into the ether of the future. It takes the former iterations of ideas and transforms it into new archetype. Step by step, like the synthesis of a DNA strand, evolutionary processes shift conditions, and through the rebel's work, towards a particular goal.

D. THE DIONYSIAN INFLUENCE

Friedrich Nietzsche, in his book The Birth of Tragedy, outlines a duality in the arts via the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysius. Between these two gods an extreme difference in "origin and aims" exists - Apollo appeals to dreams and Dionysius to intoxication. Within these dreams "we delight in the immediate understanding of figures; all forms speak to us; there is nothing unimportant or superfluous. But even when this dream reality is most intense, we still have, glimmering through it, the sensation that it is mere appearance" (Nietzsche 568). Within this Apollian influence, the emotions stay within a certain realm, within a certain restraint. Intoxication awakens another realm. Nietzsche writes, "These Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness" (569-70). This duality is analogous to the differences between the non-rebellious artist and the rebellious artist in relation to their intentions. Response and emotions can initiate understanding. Through use of Nietzsche's duality, I wish to demonstrate that there is a difference in emotional response in relation to understanding. The artist-manifest-as-a-rebel wishes to cast a new understanding, which can only be achieved by appealing to the Dionysian influence - intoxication⁴. The Apollian appeal to dreams⁵ suggests that a piece brings about no re-evaluation of belief or learnt convention. Even when this appeal is at its most intense, it is still familiar therefore not challenging to preconceptions. The pieces where Apollian influence is strongest is where the artist intended not to challenge the historicity of art and create a piece easily blended within the system of the historical. This does not discredit the talent of the artist. Instead it implies that the artist felt no need to say "no" to the system of history that preceded their regarded piece of work. On the other hand, the intoxication exhibited by Dionysian influence brings about an awakening - one forgets them and this opens the opportunity of re-evaluation in the mind. When the feeling subsides, the understanding one had of the piece and moreover the world previously has changed (at least this is the intention of the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel). This is distinctly tied into the "no" a rebel

⁴ "an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness" (Nietzsche 539)

⁵ "urge to perfect self-sufficiency, to the typical 'individual', to all that simplifies ... clear, unambiguous, typical: freedom under the law" (Nietzsche 539)

propounds. In clarification, the "no", like discussed earlier, has a distinct correlation to displeasure with the current conditions or prevailing attitudes of the present - the unambiguous, the colloquial, the current crest. The conditions of the present are basically the crest of former historical conditions. Found in the crest, is a reason to posit "no". Iterated from this "no" is the idea for the piece of work which is challenging to the crest of the conditional present. Thereby the artist creates from this "no," their piece to be regarded as art. Since the piece is founded on the idea stemmed from the "no", which is not a prevailing condition, or idea of the present, the piece seeks to bring about a different emotion than the "Apollian influenced" piece. The artist-manifested-as-a-rebel's piece wishes to intoxicate the viewer with a new idea thereby bringing about a new understanding of the familiar world. In this regard, the piece intends to exhibit an evolution (and revolution) of ideas whether they related to sociology, psychology, a new realm of space, the definition of art itself, etc. The evolution of preconceptions and prior understanding into new configurations is the main use of the rebel's provocative tool. "Apollian motivated" artists do not utilize the tools of provocation, but merely the historically calculated tools of the past to appease and be within the crest.

What are these tools of provocation utilized for? They are applied to idealize the future. Without the syntheses of new evolution, ideas would be stagnant. In regard to art, without new procedures, concepts, ideas, and media iterating into the future, artistic liaison would be as quiescent as asphalt. If the definition of art is determined by looking-backwards-in-history, then the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel has a particular mission - to recharacterize definitions. This is the main use of the tool of provocation. However, let it be known that the-artist-manifest-as-a-rebel is a rare occurrence in the historicity of art. Most artists "adapt themselves to what the majority of society wants" (Camus 253). Therefore, we shall not glamorize all artists as rebellious, but only the select few who say "NO" and follow through with their mission. If this cannot come true, admit your negation and proceed in life with "good" faith as your guardian.

D. CAMUS' OUTGROWTH

Albert Camus volunteers an interesting correlation to the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel. To Camus, there are two forms of art: the "art for art's sake" and the "art of effort". "Art for art's sake" is a merely a reflection of what the pioneers have accomplished. In essence, the "art for art's sake" is merely the watered down version of the real effort, and some critics dismiss it as mere "imitation" or "play" art. For example, our media is strewn with images of glamorized celebrities who very often are considered mainstay "artists". We watch our televisions with eyes glued to the screen to see what so and so is wearing, what so and so is doing. Even more incredulous is that the popular masses "have the feeling of knowing this or that great artist of our time because they have only learned from the newspapers that he raises canaries or that he never stays married for more than six months" (Camus 255). In this manner, the artist disappears behind the facade of his or her persona created and passed on by the popular culture. The real creators are hidden from the mainstream media while their imitators are the one's who are glorified. The artist creating for art's sake is creating for the "we" of the masses; it is art to feed the masses with comfort. Basically, this art can be considered nothing more than squalid amusement. On the other hand, we find the "art of effort". This form of art explicitly rejects the popularization of the time, in effect, making a painful divorce with society. "The freest art and the most rebellious will ... reward the greatest effort. So long as society and its artist do not accept this long and free effort, so long as they relax in the comfort of amusements or the comfort of conformism, in the games of art for art's sake ... its [real] artists are lost" (Camus 268-9). For this reason, the artist must be provocative and create works of effort, at least in relation to the greater society of the modern and our post-modern age.

III. SONIC YOUTH

A. BIOGRAPHY AND DELINEATION OF THEIR MISSION

Sonic Youth, unlike many of their peers, has made a career out of extremist rebellion, curiosity with the other realms of musical possibility, and non-conformism. Their peers, on the other hand, seemed to believe they were "pushing the envelope"; however, they were innocuous, in the sense that they copied their former peers and were creating "art for art's sake" underneath other intentions. For these simple reasons, Sonic Youth typifies the role of the "rebel" in modern music. They "thought for themselves" and

were more provocative in relation to their innocuous contemporaries. As the synthesizer of avant-garde surrealism with the discord of rock and roll music, they made their "no" explicit to the art world, were provocative in their artistic pursuits, and created new landscapes. They were an obvious choice for critique as outlined:

"Sonic Youth began their career by abandoning any pretense of traditional rock and roll conventions. Borrowing heavily from the free-form noise experimentalism of the Velvet Underground and the Stooges, and melding it with a performance art aesthetic borrowed from the New York post-punk avant-garde, Sonic Youth redefined what noise meant ... Their dissonance, feedback, and alternative tunings created a new sonic landscape, one that redefined what rock guitar could do" (Erlwine 1040).

Only through careful listening and comparison to other similar artists can one determine their worth and credibility. Their ability to transform musical horizons in music has been unparalleled arguably up till today.

This statement is risky, yet true. In hindsight, one can try to argue that Sonic Youth was not provocative enough to be considered rebellious - as rebellious as I allege. They sound vaguely familiar to the "modern" listener and music enthusiast. Sonic Youth's influence upon the music industry has been abstruse. Many of the current "alternative" bands and groups of today were heavily affected by the aesthetic techniques of Sonic Youth thereby "watering down" their role as a synthesizer of new ideas to the modern listener. Whether or not Sonic Youth meant this to be is questionable. Yet, only by transporting oneself back to the mid to early Eighties and having an understanding of the past of rock music can one make an accurate assessment. Hindsight can be dangerous in regard to art; hindsight can interrupt the immediate impression a rebellious work of art had on the contemporaries of the time. In this case, Sonic Youth is extremely different than anything their peers were attempting, yet only those with a knowledge of music and its history will be able to make this assessment due to the dissemination of Sonic Youth's sound over the last two decades.

Therefore, what is the proof of this provocation? From the biographical account of the band in Our Band Could Be Your Life by Michael Azzerod, I wish to introduce the techniques and ideologies which make Sonic Youth rebellious, and moreover, very provocative:

1. In the spirit of John Cage (a major influence on the band), "Sonic Youth stuck drumsticks and screwdrivers under guitar strings" (243) in order to create new sonic atmospheres and noises. Their instrument of choice was the guitar, like many other punk bands, but they were one of the first to meld "non-musical" elements and instruments together.
2. "The main weapon in Sonic Youth's arsenal was alternative guitar tunings, departing from the standard E-A-D-G-B-E to whatever sounded good" (242). Out of necessity and punk mentality, their sound is an equal synthesis of lack of funds to buy decent equipment and the abuse of their equipment to achieve new sonic heights. This is analogous to how Beethoven would pound his pianos to peel forth hidden sounds and melodies. For example, "with weird tunings or something jammed under a particular fret these horrible instruments could sound rather amazing - bang a drumstick on a cheap Japanese Stratocaster copy in the right tuning, crank the amplifier to within an inch of its life, and it will sound like church bells" (247). This meticulous (some would state worthless) discovery only helps to demonstrate their dedication and effort towards their art.
3. Furthermore, Sonic Youth melded the border between noise and melody. Many critics of the band have stated that it is sheer noise and the music's lack of melody and structure forfeits any reason to consider the band's work as music. I beg to differ; Sonic Youth may have utilized noise, but only in the context of melody. They took noise and made it melodious, a task hard to swallow for the classical listener. However, in regard to song structure, one of Sonic Youth's dissatisfactions was that the form of the song in rock music was too calculated. Who said a song had to be such and such length, or exhibit so much of this or that instrument? Sonic Youth decided to question these premises by composing thirty to forty minute epics and utilizing non-musical instruments to enhance their sound. In this regard, their rebellion

was not just for rebellion's sake, but instead was a response to the calculation and prognosis of rock music. They wished to expand the possibilities of what could be headed under the rock music umbrella.

Besides we must delineate the mission of Sonic Youth. A concrete mode to assemble the mission is to look at the early history of the group. In the beginning, Sonic Youth was comprised of three art students with an extreme affection for punk rock, the deranged protégé of the flower music of the late 60s. The lead guitarist's (Thurston Moore) father was a philosophy professor at a major New England institution, the bassist (Kim Gordon) was the daughter of a UCLA sociology professor as well as a graduate of art school, and the other guitarist (Lee Ranaldo) was studying art and filmmaking at the SUNY at Binghamton (234). These influences cannot be allocated from the band itself. Notwithstanding, the festering sounds and ideas of punk rock were just as influential. Punk rock was freedom. Nonetheless, the New York scene, whom Sonic Youth became an underground staple, was angry as well; however, angry at the conventions of the seventies and the propagation of commercialism in American art. They chose to preach DIY, or the Do-it-yourself ethos - the cornerstone of all punk rock ideology - and in effect created the underground network of today. By 1979, most Americans knew of punk rock, but were oblivious to the overall mission. The perception of the movement was perverted to say the least. Albeit, it was a minority of people who were involved in the scene. However, as the decade changed hands to the Eighties the steam of the movement dwindled. With this loss of steam, a new scene evolved from the pieces and the experimentalism began. The beginnings of Sonic Youth are found here. However, in relation to their peers, who tended to stay close to the New York scene's roots, punk rock was not Sonic Youth's only influence. Instead, punk was merely a shadow over their arty pretensions. In fact, it could be argued that Sonic Youth went in the opposite direction of punk rock, not ideologically, but musically. They were educated and intelligent, adventurous and musically iconoclastic; they felt no need to stick to 3-chord progressions and angry lyrics. Most of the other punk receptive bands of the early 80s which were comprised of streetpunks and "unemployed hardcore"⁶ meatheads" enjoyed the heavy nature of the music rather than the ideology behind it. Sonic Youth was immediately a sought after commodity in the independent rock world of the early Eighties because of their embrace of the arty lateral. Their main break came when avant-garde guitar-symphonist Glenn Branca sensing a new wind in the making invited the youthful, yet futuristic, band to record at his studio. On this recording, as recounted by Ranaldo, "It was a lot more wide open to what a song was. A song was a lot more about sound and structure than its was about chords and progression" (Azerrad 236-7). This, as simply and ineloquently explained by Lee Ranaldo, is Sonic Youth's mission in a jar - never calculate what a song's structure or sound will be like. Create your own sound. And do-it-yourself on your own terms and conditions. A career based in pure experimentalism was founded and Sonic Youth has yet to be lead astray.

Furthermore, did Sonic Youth act in "good" faith in regard to their mission? Philosophy professor and musicologist from DePaul University Bill Martin, author of *Avant-Rock*, rationalizes how Sonic Youth has stayed true to their mission over time:

"One of the lovely things about Sonic Youth is that, as much as there were gems in the first ten years of the band's existence, the second decade has been even more interesting - there are not many musicians in rock music about whom this could be said ... Some of what sounds like carelessness comes from the group's willingness to experiment with extreme contingency - not just through jamming, but through use of a large array of different guitars (often cheap electrics that have been ... modified, or to put it more colloquially, heavily messed up), and through extremely dissonant, and often unrepeatable, tunings. Besides their desire to move forward, this is another reason why Sonic Youth rarely (now, in fact, never) revisit old material" (121).

⁶ The fastest and loudest outgrowth of the punk rock movement; usually associated with violence and other anti-societal behaviors

The fact that the band has been performing for 23 years and is still not a household name or favorite of the popular press is a testimony to their mission. Sonic Youth could have easily compromised and created lushish pop music, but instead they stayed true their roots and mission - acted in "good faith". Lovingly, at the 1995 music festival Lollapalooza, Sonic Youth were the headliners. Despite their prominent stature, the younger bands that Sonic Youth had inspired and/or influenced had a greater audience. More than half the crowd left during Sonic Youth's performance because the witless crowd deemed it to uncompromising and "bad".

B. THE INTOXICATION OF NOISE

Questionably, is this new sound Sonic Youth created intoxicating? Foremost, if Sonic Youth wished their pieces to be merely standard and appeal to the dream state, then they would have followed their predecessors' techniques and aesthetics. For Nietzsche, the dream state is likened to the "category of the naive, since [it expresses] a direct, unmediated, non-reflective relationship to nature" (Holub 18). Nature in this sense is the pre-determined, the calculated, the past sound of music. Sonic Youth, with their reaching into the realms of what noise can produce, would be far out of sight of the Apollonian likened to the eternity of the beautiful form (Nietzsche 539). Sonic Youth craved to reinterpret the role and definitions of structure, sound, and, ultimately, music through heavy distortion and the incorporation of the "non-musical"; to question the "beautiful form". Their music requires a reflection upon its contents in relation to past works thereby placing it in the realm of intoxication rather than dreams. To repeat, intoxication is the Dionysian, or likened to the continual creation via transitoriness of creation (539). With the introduction of a Dionysian piece the fabric of the nature transforms meaning the transformation past convention of creation. With intoxication one can "bloom" new beginnings from the former because it shakes the fabric of nature, and with revolutionary pieces, it creates new blossoms. By no means was Sonic Youth "revolutionary" (arguably their predecessors were⁷), but they were heavily evolutionary. They deconstructed an instrument - the guitar - into a machine rather than a tool of creating beautiful music. A machine in the regard that they meticulously tinkered and adjusted the instrument to create new sounds however "ugly" they may seem to be to the casual listener. The group made melodies out of the ether of ugliness and this is what is intoxicating about their work. In relation to the works of music being made in the Eighties, Sonic Youth was a lone composer. Nothing, no band or group, came close to sounding like Sonic Youth. By deduction, this obviously means listening to their music is a different, very different, experience in relation to other artists of the day (and to a certain extent today). This is what Nietzsche means by intoxication - "Artists should see nothing as it is, but fuller, stronger: to that end, their lives must contain a kind of youth and spring, a kind of habitual intoxication" (Nietzsche 421). Sonic Youth is an intoxicating artist - they exhibit the strength to overcome the past and also the youthfulness to create new sensations of music yet to be discovered. Understanding comes via these senses of intoxication. The senses are overloaded with new sensations; they are searching for a connection, but nothing familiar is to be found. By making these new connections from new experiences, the viewer is able to achieve a new understanding. Usually this understanding is a reflection of the unsatisfactoriness the artist seeks to replace or question. In this way, the viewer comes into mental intercourse with the artist's rebellious idea. This intercourse, or intoxication, procreates a new awareness of the world and for this reason alone the intoxication is powerful for the viewer. Although Nietzsche identifies the intoxication with a return to nature, but in the sense that it absolves the mind, a sinking back unto the oneness of nature. However, this is what is needed to develop new understanding, and in relation to Sonic Youth, an openmindedness is needed to digest their music; a clearing of the old rhythms and calculations of rock music is needed to incorporate the new grooves and soundscapes the band presents. This is example accurately depicts what Nietzsche meant by intoxication in order to innervate understanding.

Importantly, Nietzsche held a high regard for music: "Compared with music all communication by words is shameless; words dilute and brutalize; words depersonalize; words make the uncommon

⁷ e.g. Ramones, Sex Pistols, Clash, Velvet Underground, etc.

common" (428). Due to the cerebral experience music produces, the senses are on hyper-mode; when a melody hooks a listener, it creates intoxication. For this reason, people attend concerts - they provide a modern Dionysian experience, possibly the best Dionysian example available today. The music being performed at the concert heightens the emotions to an intense apex. In this regard the concert is a sort of release, namely an emotional release. As a rebellious group, Sonic Youth questioned the notion that a concert, in order for it to hold a Dionysian release, needs to incorporate identifiable, and undeniably, easily digested melodies. At times Sonic Youth's music lacks all forms of melody and traditional structure yet this is their mission. Although melody maybe absent, music by its nature is communication with the cerebrum. According to Nietzsche, music is personal and undiluted. Attending a concert or listening to a recording, even if it is sheer noise, is still more sensual and experiential than reading a book or watching television. If Sonic Youth has a lasting impression upon the consciousness of music it will be that melody can be sacrificed and yet the audience can still have a Dionysian experience for listening, no matter the content, is the greatest form of communication in relation to the Dionysian.

In repetition, it would be senseless to rebel against nothing, or rebel for rebellion's sake. Hence, if no effort is exuded through the piece itself, or if the rebellion is merely used to upset, or "piss off", the mainstream, the piece shall not be regarded as rebellious but merely absurd. In these examples, the Aristotelian mean is not accounted for; the Nietzschean urge for the artist to create in excellence is not present. However, I can safely gather that Sonic Youth is not merely rebelling for rebellion's sake or creating without effort. Spending weeks at a time to manifest a sound recording, Sonic Youth has dedicated themselves to their art. When creating, Nietzsche, as well as Camus, urges the artist to create "as man sees a woman and, as it were, makes her a present of everything excellent, so the sensuality of the artist puts into one object everything else that he honors and esteems" (424-25). Therefore, there application for this essay is acceptable.

C. CAMUSIAN ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION

To continue, Camus suggests the question - is art being made for the creative? or for the masses? In a music industry founded upon imitation and profiteering of certain sounds, Sonic Youth has stood their ground - battled against the masses. In the current market place, this is an adequate question for any rebellious artist. Should I or should not I entice the masses? Sonic Youth has never compromised their creativity for instant success, meaning corporate success. "Sonic Youth inhabited a charmed zone where they were successful enough to keep going and yet low profile enough to elude the compromises of success. Although each record sold more than the last, there were no spikes in their sales graph that would have prematurely attracted the attentions of the mainstream music business" (Azzero 272-73). To Camus, Sonic Youth would be a "real artist" - one who rejected the negotiations of the popular masses as well as the sabotage of the mainstream. Throughout their 23 year career the band has constantly pushed for the independence of their sound and thereby, according to Camus, made a divorce with mainstream societal habituations. However, part of making art of effort is the recognition and acceptance of this divorce, something Sonic Youth has accomplished successfully. As Camus states, "This passion which lifts the mind above the commonplaces of a dispersed world ... It does not result in mediocre efforts to escape, however, but in the most obstinate demands" (Camus 262).

The artist-manifest-as-a-rebel is the one who makes that obstinate demand. The mission of the artist-manifest-as-a-rebel is to incite a new understanding via provocation. Art is at its pinnacle when it is provocative and confronts convention of the present within the construct of an individualized mission. In regard to the thesis, I have demonstrated that the rebel's effort and demand for the subjugation of the satisfactory creates overtly provocative, yet "powerful" pieces of art. Powerful, meaning an exertion of maximum influence of the provocation; the pinnacle of persuasion to incite understanding. To end with something to ponder: when a piece of art changes your life, aiming to enhance or change understanding, is not it usually provocative? Is not the life most changing, the most mentally metamorphic, usually against the grain of convention whether out of time or place? I propose we should seek out rebellious art in order to question our conventions and satisfactions; if one fails to solicit questions, faithfulness is too-easily jettisoned.

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