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PEARL JAM AND PHILOSOPHY

Edited by
Stefano Marino & Andrea Schembari

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Pearl Jam and Philosophy

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No Code Aesthetics

Alberto L. Siani

Introduction¹

No Code, Pearl Jam's fourth album (1996), is usually not considered to be among the band's most successful ones, both in artistic and in commercial terms. Despite this, or maybe, as I will argue, just for this reason, *No Code* offers some stimulating philosophical starting points, both in its general concept and in the songs it contains. My interpretation of the album focuses exactly on its apparent inconsistency and lack of organic unity, and on the general atmosphere of dissolution, contingency, and heterogeneity pervading it. I read these features not as a sign of a temporary artistic loss on the side of the band, but on the contrary, in terms of a paradoxical project, suspended between the bold rejection of codes and the risk of this very rejection becoming a new code. In doing so, I establish a connection between the intention structuring the album and one of the most famous and controversial concepts in philosophical aesthetics, namely the so-called "end of art" thesis. Given the nature and aims of this contribution, I will of course not attempt to offer a full-fledged, original discussion of this thesis. Instead, I will argue that *No Code* can be read as an illuminating, concrete instance of the thesis, and that, vice versa, employing the end of art thesis as an interpretive framework can have a therapeutic effect, helping us to deal with the feeling of bewilderment the album can generate in us, probably more so than other works by Pearl Jam.

My argument will be structured as follows. First, I will sketch the meaning and content of the end of art thesis (Section 2). Second, I will offer a reading of *No Code*, which, considering together the title, the lyrics, and the musical

¹ I wish to thank Çiğdem Oğuz and Burak Özkök for their insightful readings and precious comments.

execution, attempts to interpret the peculiarities of the album in a philosophical perspective (Sections 3.1/3.3). Finally, I will reconnect this reading of the album to the end of art thesis and pursue a mutual clarification of these two and the development of the main threads and implications of what I will call a “no code aesthetics” (Sections 4.1/4.2).

The end of art: Starting remarks

With its many senses, the thesis of the end of art, or the rejection thereof, characterizes a substantial part of the discourse on modernity starting with Hegel and up to our days.² Let me clarify straightaway that the thesis does not designate the end of art’s existence or reason to exist, but rather the past character of art’s highest function. Simplifying a bit, this highest function was, for example, that of classical Greek or medieval Christian art. In those contexts, art was not so much the object of aesthetic appreciation, a cultural or leisure activity, a museum or auditorium item, but rather a powerful medium of expression and transmission of metaphysical, religious, ethical, and political contents. Artworks or artistic events were therefore forms of collective identification and participation in the life of a community, for which they played a central, indispensable role. Their *raison d’être* shaped their formal attributes and the receivers’ expectations accordingly: what we see today as the beautiful harmony of classical or Christian artworks is the reflection of a harmonic view of the universe (or *kosmos*)³ as a tidy, unified system of elements, each having its precise, preordained position and function. Individual life and collective organizations alike were called to correspond to this universal harmony, and artworks acted as powerful instances and media of this correspondence, rather than as free products of individual creativity aimed at other individuals’ aesthetic experience and pleasure.

The end of art thesis designates the idea that art, in modern times, is no longer able to fulfill this highest role. This general idea can be, and has been, specified

² For a first overview see Alberto L. Siani, “End of Art,” *International Lexicon of Aesthetics*, Autumn 2018.

³ The word meant “order” or “adornment” in ancient Greek, and was also employed to refer, more specifically, to “the universe considered as a system with an order and pattern” (from the Cambridge Dictionary). The contemporary English words “cosmology” and “cosmetics” have this same etymology.

in different ways. Accordingly, art is no longer an adequate vehicle for the truth, nor for the presentation of the divine, nor for the embedment of moral and political principles and values; or art has become irrelevant in a largely disenchanting, prosaic, technological world; or artworks can no longer be beautiful or even distinguishable from common objects; or they are no longer autonomous insofar as they require a non-artistic perspective for their interpretation. For the sake of simplicity, one can identify three main dimensions of the thesis of art's past character. The first dimension is the metaphysical-epistemological one: art, despite it progressively becoming dematerialized and conceptual, is because of its structural materiality no longer able to adequately embody and communicate the truth, i.e., divine, or spiritual, or fully conceptual contents. Thus, art always implies a reference to a less immediate, more discursive (or even philosophical) framework. The second is a practical dimension: art is no longer an autonomous, adequate vehicle for the configuration, presentation, and communication of the highest religious, ethical, and political contents and values innervating modern ethical life. Finally, there is the aesthetic dimension: art has become the more and more fragmented, arbitrary product of the individual artist, thus giving up its claim to universal meaning and relevance, but at the same time becoming a freer, secularized depiction of the human world.

It is important to stress that the idea of an end of art also implies the idea of a new beginning: new possibilities and new functions open up for art with the end of art. Accordingly, here I will insist on two "constructive," emancipatory aspects of the thesis. First, the end of art also implies the liberation of the individual subject with his particularity and contingency, no longer required to harmonically fit in a given, substantial ethical whole. Art no longer expresses a unified worldview to which the individual can adhere through its fruition. The foundation and orientation of the public sphere requires more complex and reflective practices than the ones any artwork can provide. This, however, does not mean that art has become irrelevant: rather, art itself now calls for a more mediated, discursive approach for its interpretation. This further implies the centrality of the right of the individual subject to freely interpret, question, or even ignore the messages proposed by any given artwork. Second, and conversely, art, having been released from its absolute divine-expressing or truth-bearing task, can now be fully human, and freely express all the possible particular and contingent facets of humanity without being bound to specific forms and contents. Art's boundless expressive freedom is a result of the weakening of its highest claims, and reflects the plural character of the modern public sphere.

This brief characterization of the end of art thesis may sound too abstract to be applied to a philosophical investigation of Pearl Jam's *No Code*. It will be the task of section three to offer a correspondingly focused reading of the album, and then of section four to flesh out more concretely how the philosophical thesis and the album can help illuminate each other. Already here, however, I want to point out that the end of art thesis seems to hint toward a "no code aesthetics."

Ambiguities of *No Code*

Immanence, instability, and the possibility of nihilism

Let me move on to a focused discussion of some main traits of *No Code*. My aim will be to link the title with the album's concept and execution in the songs, highlighting thereby its central, paradoxical intention. "No code" is a polysemic expression, even more so in the elliptic context of a music album's title. It is, first of all, a programmatic existential declaration, marking the lack or rejection of preordained rules and boundaries for the declaring individual, in this case Pearl Jam. Accordingly, every individual existence and action is unique, contingent, and incommensurable with others. In the same way, it is an artistic reclamation of freedom and independence from genres and expectations. This reclamation is then linked to a rejection of mainstream commercial discographic labels and practices.⁴ But "no code" also points to a survival strategy: changing skin and shape and becoming unrecognizable in order to avoid being overwhelmed by the collapse of a certain kind of music and culture, most notably of the original grunge movement.⁵ At the same time, finally, "no code" is also used as a synonymous for the medical "do not resuscitate" code,⁶ which in this context can be read as an invitation to let the past (of the band, and of that specific music and culture) go, but also as an ironic blow to hardline purist fans. The openness and ambiguity of the message sent by the title is, of course, one of the components of the fascination exercised by the album itself. The ambiguity, however, seems to

⁴ Here belongs of course the famous 1994 Ticketmaster fight, on which see Eric Boehlert, "Pearl Jam: Taking on Ticketmaster," *Rolling Stone*, December 28, 1995.

⁵ Also from the point of view of the context of its elaboration and release, hence, *No Code* can be read as a perhaps unique opportunity of freedom, experimentation, and autonomy in the band's path.

⁶ Eddie Vedder himself hinted to this possibility: see Bart Blasengame, "Trampled Moss and Sitars: Pearl Jam's Tricky, Transformational *No Code*," *AvClub.com*, August 26, 2016.

run even deeper, as all the dimensions of the title's meaning can be read as trail signs toward new codes: the rejection of all codes can, as a matter of fact, be read as a code. This deeper ambiguity is the main interpretive key of the reading I suggest.⁷

The multidimensionality of the “no code” statement can be tracked all across the album's lyrics. A general implication is the rejection of all dimensions of sense and purpose transcending the very present moment. “Who You Are” tackles the issue of the part the individual subject plays in the great scheme of things, collapsing the nature and purpose of existence into what the individual immediately is. Our part is simply who we are, undercutting any reference to a further level of signification transcending this immediate identification. If individual existence and identity are conceived in this way, then also the possibility of transcending the immediate self through knowledge is ironically dismissed and brought back to naturalistic patterns and immanence in “In My Tree,” where knowledge is likened to a growing tree. Not only am I identified with my present existence, but my very knowledge—traditionally, a distinctive human trait—cannot project me above it: in fact, knowledge is seen as just another process of nature, and the subject of that knowledge as just another object in nature, resulting in an exhilarating lightness.

Time itself, this core constituent of our self-feeling, self-consciousness, and personal identity, becomes volatile and elusive, as temporal references and personal identities get mixed up and neutralized in a crossing of verses from different songs, from “Red Mosquito” (“If I had known then what I know now”)⁸ to “I'm Open” (“If he only knew now what he knew then”).⁹ All of this eventually leads to an implosion of the self, this only apparently steady groundwork and substance of individual existence. The self as such is no longer the secure, self-evident groundwork for existence and action, but, in a reversion of the Cartesian argument, it is made of the stuff of dreams, on which, however, the subject seems to have an odd decisional power, being able to dream up his new self (“I'm Open”). Dream is no longer the omnipresent illusion threatening the stability of identity, knowledge, and action, but the very source of the self, which consequently shrinks to an inanimate, infinitesimal, unnoticeable serial object, like an anonymous book among many on a shelf (“Sometimes”).

⁷ Again, Eddie Vedder suggested that the reason the album is called *No Code* is that it is full of codes, which fans have obviously tried to uncover. See: <http://nocodepage.tripod.com/Pearljamcodebreak.html> (accessed April 3, 2021).

⁸ Pearl Jam, “Red Mosquito,” in *No Code* (1996).

⁹ Pearl Jam, “I'm Open,” in *No Code* (1996).

The power of dreams and illusions remains, however, limited, hence the suspension of the self has dark, disturbing implications. Without transcendence, purposiveness, and an identifiable self, the only remaining horizon is that of finitude and the always-lurking possibility of annihilation, a theme pervading the album from “Red Mosquito,” written by a severely food-poisoned Eddie Vedder, for whom the mosquito becomes a threatening devil visiting him, to “Lukin,” inspired by the danger of an obsessive armed stalker. Dreamt or not, the individual self put forward here is just as much vulnerable and finite as the real one it aims to replace, and the presence of death remains inescapable. Even love, often conceived as an eternal bond transcending finitude and death, gets bitterly and sarcastically scaled down to a socially inflated, yet largely insignificant achievement: all our bonds are made out of obligation, and love is just a matter of luck for the few (“Hail, Hail”). Like love, the confidence and the long established rituals of an old friendship are also predictably, structurally marked by an existential before material strain of transitoriness and instability in “Off He Goes.” Eventually, the strain creeps from the inside to the outside, pervading the whole world and humankind like a universal pattern of absent-minded fakeness and fabrication (“Mankind”).

Openness, care, and new life

However, the pervasiveness of finitude and precariousness does not only lead to pessimistic or even nihilistic conclusions. Even the suffocating enclosure of illusion and universal meaninglessness can, once acknowledged and deciphered, open an inner door restituting sense to the universe and the self. Paraphrasing the Kantian correspondence of starry sky above and moral law within, the blankness inside and the blankness of the ceiling of a closed room (a permanent cell?) can lead one to a statement of openness (“I’m Open”). Despite, or maybe because of, the irreparable (“no tradebacks”) discovery of universal illusion and the feeling of loss of all sense, being authentically open (without the obligations, patterns, and fakes seen in the previous paragraph) is still possible for humans. Hence, the precarious openness of finitude contains the flipside to the universal meaninglessness and nothingness, i.e., an equally important element of emancipation, releasement, and hope, giving voice among others to songs such as “Present Tense” and “Around the Bend.” “Present Tense” is an anthem to immanence and self-determination, a *memento mori* and a *carpe diem* in the same breath. The tree, here, is not the metamorphic shape of the self, but its

source of wisdom and inspiration for dealing with constitutive and inescapable finitude, teaching us to catch the sun's rays, i.e., to "get something out" of the perilous, demanding life's trip ("Present Tense"). The lesson we can learn is expressed through a radical dichotomy of orientation, with a pretty clear-cut choice between past regrets and present tense. When every other approach is deemed to fail, we just need to realize that we can forgive ourselves and that we do not need a justification for our decision to embrace full immanence.

This heartfelt call for immanence may look like a cover for self-indulgence and boundless egoism, which is, however, balanced by a sense of fragility and openness, and the need to take care of it. We see this, for example, in the sweet, moving care for the vulnerability of new life and the profound desire to protect it inspiring "Around the Bend," where the still-lying father sings a lullaby for the moving baby and his future walk of life. In the presence of the fragility of this new life, self-forgiveness is no longer enough and the caring father needs an impossible forgiving and validating word and light to come from the innocent, silent new-born.

Even the elliptic, sharply metallic refrain of "Smile" contains a message of openness and hope of reconnection and happiness, as the title itself makes evident. Thus, the acknowledgment of finitude and precariousness goes hand in hand with the rejection of codes and the affirmation of the free, incommensurable, irreducible character of individual existence.¹⁰ This affirmation, in turn, opens the door both to the possibility of egoism, permanent dread, and nihilism, and to that of care, love, and hope. In this sense, we can already witness a similarity between the intention of the album and that of the end of art thesis: both of them, in concomitance with an "end" and a "no," announce a new "beginning" and a "yes."¹¹

Is "no code" a code?

The lyrics of *No Code* thus stay true to the album's overall intention, in that they confirm the infinite possibilities of a life lived beyond prefixed codes. The same can be said of the musical choices giving body and expression to that intention. As already mentioned, both the admirers and the (more numerous) critics of *No*

¹⁰ This is, of course, a theme pervading Pearl Jam's production also beyond *No Code*: just think of "I am Mine" from the album *Riot Act* (2002).

¹¹ In the last section I will further qualify and develop this analogy.

Code have pointed out its heterogeneous, disharmonic musical composition. This is indubitably true even at a superficial listening. We go from the soft, detached intro tunes of “Sometimes” to the loud, aggressive smashing of “Hail, Hail” and “Habit,” from the more classic rock of “Red Mosquito” to the alternative percussions and exotic sitar of “Who You Are,” from the dazed “I’m Open” to the Neil Young-esque “Smile,” up to the pensive, moving ballad tunes in “Off He Goes” and “Around the Bend,” the furious, howling “Lukin,” the drumming exhilaration of “In My Tree,” the slow yet powerful “Present Tense,” and the easy-going, singable “Mankind.” No doubt, the album constitutes a break from previous Pearl Jam material, a break that made several fans and critics turn up their noses.

All, or at least several facets, of what it means to be human are well displayed through the words as well as through a kaleidoscopic variety of musical choices. While this shows a profound sensibility and maturity on the side of the band, from a philosophical point of view it may seem a rather non-exciting, or even trivial conclusion. It gets more exciting, however, when we realize that this sensible and appealing conclusion is in fact problematic, as it risks contradicting the very programmatic intention motivating it. Briefly, the “no code” statement risks becoming a code itself, and the programmatic declaration of the liberated, incommensurable nature of individual existence risks becoming a codified, normalized platitude, if not just yet another imprisoning ‘habit’ pretending to be our friend (“Habit”). Would this reversal nullify the “no code” statement, or would it be its utmost, consequential application? In other words: does the “no code” motto call for its own consequential application, at the risk of creating a new code, and hence of contradicting itself, or does it call for a self-violation, and hence, again, for a self-contradiction and nullification? We seem to have come to a sort of variation of the classical, well-known “liar’s paradox”: any attempt to assign a truth value to the sentence “I am lying” seems to result in contradiction. Analogously, if “no code” becomes a new code, we have a contradiction; if we want to avoid this result and hence violate the “no code” statement, we will need to put forward a code, resulting again in contradiction. Similar paradoxes have been extensively debated in the history of logic.¹² Here, however, we should keep in mind that *No Code* is an artwork, not a logical investigation. Therefore, we need to consider the very artistic means in which

¹² For a first overview, see Jc Beall, Michael Glanzberg, and David Ripley, ‘Liar Paradox’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed.

that statement, and the contradiction it apparently leads to, are embedded. To this aim, the next section will connect the reading of the album offered here to the issue of the end of art introduced in the first section.

Codes for after the end of art

In search of a non-harmonic paradigm

I argue that, while *No Code*'s overall impression of chaos and disharmony persists also on a deeper level of listening, it is possible to trace a pattern and an intention behind the apparent chaos. This is in fact already evident from the album cover, consisting of an apparently random collage of photographs, which, when opening the cover, act like tiles of a geometrical mosaic. While one may dismiss *No Code* on the ground of a lack of harmony and consistence, I suggest that such lack reflects the intention (whether conscious or unconscious, it does not matter here) to create a nonharmonic paradigm. This paradigm, in turn, is motivated by the difficulty raised at the end of the previous section: it is an aesthetic response to an apparently unsolvable existential (and logical) antinomy.

The unpredictable, even bewildering mood, tune, and style shifts in *No Code* can be read as a consistent rejection of codes and rules not only in life in general, but also in art in particular. This "unmusical" musical choice is of particular importance as it also reminds us that art as a human practice has the capacity, and one might even say the "call," to operate this rejection, unlike most other practices in human life, which are for good or bad regulated by stringent networks of codes, conventions, rules, and so on. In this sense, *No Code* aesthetically acts as a nonharmonic, emancipatory paradigm, and as a bold statement of independence. This independence statement stops short of nothing and no one, not even when faced with the dangerous stalker from "Lukin." Finally, independence is also reclaimed as an attitude of personal consistency and capacity to keep moving despite the growing misery (or "bullshit") all around ("Off He Goes").

But how exactly is art able to perform a statement of independence without falling prey to a new codification? Or, we may also ask, which kind of art is able to do so? I want to suggest that the successful aesthetic strategy advanced in *No Code* can be read as an instance of art after the end of art. Certain forms of art do of course respond to a need for codification, not only in aesthetic, but also in

cognitive, ethical, political, and religious terms: again, let us think of classical Greek or medieval Christian art. A Greek tragedy or statue, a Medieval cathedral or altarpiece were expressions of a relatively unified worldview, structured around beliefs, norms, customs, traditions, and so on, which constituted the content, the formal principle, and the *raison d'être* of the artwork.¹³ The artwork was, in short, a medium of transmission of normative contents, of collective and cultural identification, and of ethical and religious orientation.

This is clearly not the case for a work such as *No Code*, not only for obvious content and style differences, but also because of a structural difference in the role art is called to interpret, and hence in the very formal principle regulating artistic messages. *No Code* does not (and cannot) transmit binding principles, it neither requires nor calls for identification for its fruition, and it does not provide ethical or religious orientation. While this may be true of most modern artworks, at least in Western culture, a work such as *No Code* embeds this proposition in its very conception and execution, more so than Pearl Jam's previous works. The sense of bewilderment and disorientation it provokes in the listener is, accordingly, not the result of a moment of artistic confusion or random experimentation, but, on the contrary, the consequential result of its inner principle of organization, namely the "no code" proposition. To be sure, one could argue that in this way the codification of the proposition is just moved to a different level, but in no way is it dispelled. However, I would like to resist this objection by pointing out in more detail the strategy displayed in the album and its connection with the end of art thesis.

For a no code aesthetics

Clearly, as we saw, there is a paradoxical dimension to the whole *No Code* project. Of course, there is also a paradoxical dimension to the idea of art after the end of art. While the two topics should be treated in their specificity, one common trait is that in both cases we witness the attempt to transmit a message, without being caught in the web of codifications traditionally associated with that message. This attempt results in a structural dialectic, which, in my reading, should be taken as the very core of such artistic enterprises. First of all, as already mentioned, there is a dialectic of "no" and "yes," of "end" and "beginning." As a matter of fact, one can easily consider *No Code* as both a termination and a

¹³ Once again, this is obviously a general depiction, which does not apply to each and every artwork.

beginning point in the band's career. This not only in a "biographical" sense, but also as far as Pearl Jam's poetics is concerned: the renouncement of their previous style became in itself a new aesthetic statement.

Second, consistently with the end of art thesis, *No Code* displays a strong dialectical tension between unity and dispersion: there is of course a leading, unifying idea, which is however refracted in a plurality of very different, apparently unrelated fragments, i.e., the single songs. Admittedly, unity of multiplicity or multiplicity in unity is a classic characterization of beauty and artworks. Traditionally, however, this characterization points toward an idea of harmony: a beautiful artwork is the result of the harmonic, unified composition of its several constituents, reflecting and embedding an equally harmonic and unified worldview.¹⁴ This is not the case for *No Code*, where the different constituents, namely the songs, can hardly be said to concur to build a beautiful harmony: in fact, the album, considered as the sum total of the songs, rather creates an effect of utter heterogeneity and disharmony. Neither can it be said that the unifying idea of the album, i.e., the "no code" proposition, is fully represented or interpreted by any of its single songs. The album rather acts as a disharmonic mosaic and draws our attention to the tension between the single songs, as well as between the songs and the whole concept.

This brings us to a third, deeper level of analysis. While we can (and should) of course enjoy the songs and be aesthetically struck with the rich diversity of their styles and techniques, the album's heterogeneity and tension can lead us to go a step further and question its motives (as I am trying to do with this paper). A more harmonic, unified artistic composition, as we may find in previous Pearl Jam albums, would rather invite us to pure, immediate enjoyment, appreciation of the technique and the lyrics, and so on. In other words, it would invite us to a more unreflected contemplation of and identification with the artistic material. On the contrary, a disharmonic work, provided it is not just the result of poor technique, conception, or execution, challenges us to abandon this immediate, unreflected level of enjoyment, and to ask for the reasons of apparently counterintuitive choices. In other words, it invites us to adopt a more reflective, problematic approach. While this does not necessarily result in a comprehensive philosophical approach, it shows us that such artworks are so to speak

¹⁴ This is what Władysław Tatarkiewicz famously called "the great theory of beauty," in "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31, no. 2. (1972): 165–80.

“incomplete” or “partial,” in that they require something else than an immediate aesthetic response. This structural reference to a higher, or at any rate different, philosophical, or reflective approach is, as we saw, a characteristic of art after the end of art.¹⁵ *No Code* hence displays not only a tension between unity and difference, but also one between engagement and detachment. Accordingly, an “appropriate” listening of the album’s tension between unity and difference calls for a continuous movement between engaged, immersive fruition and detached, reflective interrogation. This restless tension between different registers is the very creative core of the album, the aesthetic strategy employed to address the logical and existential difficulties we saw arising from its very proposition. In short, this is the main point of a no code aesthetics.

To conclude, I want to sketch some implications of a no code aesthetics. First of all, “no code” in the sense of “do not resuscitate” can apply to art itself, if by “art” we mean art before its end. Art as the harmonic code and expression of a more or less unified worldview is gone because it no longer reflects our needs. Attempts to reanimate it can either result in kitsch, as the surrogate of the search for ideal beauty in a context no longer accepting its grounds,¹⁶ or, worse, in a reactionary longing for a community marked by compactness and strong unifying values, in which the right of the subject’s particularity can be seen as a luxury, or even a threat.¹⁷ The very disharmonic, plural, and open nature of art after the end of art, powerfully instanced in *No Code*, calls for a more participative fruition on the side of the receiving subject, hence enhancing his reflective and critical capacities and substantially contributing to the formation of the modern individual. However, while the rejection of codes calls for a questioning of objective forms and contents, it does not mean the triumph of arbitrary, solipsistic subjectivity. We saw this with regard to some of the topics addressed in *No Code*, but this also applies to the issue of the “value” of the artwork itself. In short, it is possible to put a price on the artwork, which means that a value can be negotiated even for such recalcitrant material. This is, to be sure, part of Pearl Jam’s “bet” with the album: “And they’re not so self-righteous as to deny that, yes, success has its privileges. For example, if you can’t put out a glorious, guiltless, mad-blend

¹⁵ This point, already present in Hegel, was theorized by Arthur C. Danto in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

¹⁶ See among others Umberto Eco, “The Structure of Bad Taste,” in *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 180–216.

¹⁷ This is e.g. Heidegger’s case: see Alberto L. Siani, “Antisubjectivism and the End of Art: Heidegger on Hegel,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 60, no. 3 (2020): 335–49.

mess of tunes and weird tangents like *No Code* when you're at the top, what's the point of swimming through all the sewage to get there?"¹⁸ The artwork's value is no longer an "absolute," inestimable one but, just like any other object for sale, becomes the result of a negotiation following different and even clashing logics. In this sense, while one may certainly disapprove of this "objectification" and "monetarization" of the artwork, we should also be able to acknowledge that the latter does not by any means exclude the possibility of the permanence of the aesthetic element in the cultural industry. The aesthetic dimension is recognized as one of the many elements contributing to the nature and value of an artwork, yet not as the necessarily predominant one. This undermines art's and artists' anachronistic, aestheticist, and elitist claims, contributing to an aesthetic democratization (which, admittedly, often turns out to be massification and consumerism) by instituting an open, even anarchistic dialectic, in which different or contradictory needs and dimensions are bound to find always precarious balances and rest positions, thus enhancing art's possibilities.

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¹⁸ David Fricke, "No Code," *Rolling Stone*, September 5, 1996.

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