

**FIFTY
THESES
ON
[ESCAPE]**

a

parable

would it make sense for the man to carry it on his back now that he's reached the other side?

An Excerpt from *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*
by George J. Leonard

While the artists have to resort to the canvas and brush or mechanical instruments...Zen has no need of things external... - Daisetz Suzuki

In the Majjhima Nikaya (Mahatanhasankhaya-Sutta) the Buddha gives his bhikkus, monks, the famous parable of the raft, likening his doctrine to it.

"Suppose that a man...find[ing] in his way a great broad water," gathers some "reeds and twigs and leaves" and binds them into a raft. "Labouring with hands and feet," he attains safety on the other shore. Certainly the man will be grateful to the useful raft, but would it make sense for the man to carry it on his back now that he's reached the other side? The bhikkus respond scornfully: destroy the thing. The Buddha prudently suggests that the raft might be left by the water where others may find it and use it. Then he calls his own teachings no more than such a raft: just for crossing over, not for carrying on your back once you've reached the other side.

fifty

theses

on

[ESCAPE]

1. "Once, the task of the artist was to make good art; now it is to avoid making art of any kind." - Allan Kaprow
 2. "The work of art of the future will be the construction of a passionate life." - Raoul Vaneigem
 3. "Holly Stolz: I totally fucking agree. The best artists today are engaged in finding a way out of the art world. Escaping . . . with flair . . . is the art of our time.
- A.R.: Escape artists!" - Richard Roth
4. "By slacking off from the obligation to produce and consume, slackers interrupt the infiltration of social space by commodity culture. Piecing together styles of living, forms of community and personal identities, out of both the material and ideological waste of the postwar United States, the slacker's practice of ostentatiously doing very little illustrates the possibilities of resistance left to a culture in which the logic of the commodity relentlessly colonizes social space." - Patrick Durkee
 5. "The artist without works pursues the assertion of an ideology rather than the building of a career, an ideology that would not rest on objects but on deeds, or rather, un-deeds. The artist without works seeks the beauty of the not doing, not wanting, not leaving something behind. He chooses the radicalism of the refusal: I am not there, I'd rather not to." - Dora García

6. "Artists, former artists, and non-artists working in a 1:1 scale undermine the legitimacy of creating artificial models or mock-ups of reality in spaces reserved for art. They work in real life: they open antique shops and their own museums, find employment in offices, become consultants and therapists, propose solutions to economic issues, conduct experiments in science labs, and so on. Art in a 1:1 scale is difficult to recognise, since the CONCEPTUAL EDIFICES, which allow one to capture, name, and submit it to an evaluation by an art historian or critic, become supplanted. These practices are sometimes characterised by a high COEFFICIENT OF ART, paired with a low COEFFICIENT OF VISIBILITY. The 1:1 scale also allows for a celebration of the real effects of such practices, even if they cannot be conflated with socially utilitarian art. " - Glossary, Making Use: Life in Postartistic Times

7. "[the Japanese tea ceremony]...is precisely an art of life, an art of eating and drinking and talking and loving nature and other human beings, it encapsulates the basic point of this book: that between life and art no decision is necessary, that we can live our art, that life and art are intimately connected and at their best moments identical." - Crispin Sartwell

8. "All the time, though, my sensibility pointed toward and yearned for an imaginative Elsewhere. I became increasingly dissatisfied with the narrowness of art as a formulation of the imagination. This will sound preposterous to many people, I'm aware, given that art offers and represents extraordinary behavioral freedoms, but in "making art" I found an ultimately enslaving formulation. How so? In art, you can do, yes, anything you want so long as you're willing to have it end up as art. That isn't real imaginative freedom, in my view. Inquisitiveness of mind will carry you past art, and apparently I love inquisitiveness of mind more than I love art." — David Robbins

9. "In one way or another, all the collectives in this project confront a common operative paradox: though informed by art-related skills, their work suffers from — or, should we say, enjoys — impaired visibility as art. Yet this impaired visibility may well be inversely proportional to the work's political efficacy: since it is not partitioned off as 'art,' that is, as 'just art,' it remains free to deploy all its symbolic force in lending enhanced visibility and legibility to social processes of all kinds. It is a form of stealth art, infiltrating spheres of world-making beyond the scope of work operating unambiguously under the banner of art." - Stephen Wright

10. "...as a reaction to the restrictions of academic writing...In practice, the world of contemporary art has proved to be the most flexible environment for diverse projects, being a free zone of experimentation within the society at large...[it] offers possibilities to put forward ideas without the preconditions of academic work ...the market...or activism...the projects are labeled art only for strategic reasons – the strategy works as long as the concepts of art do not come to dominate the discourse. The same applies to the individuals working in the group: you call yourself artist, just because it is institutionally convenient, [emphasis mine] because the very concept of ARTIST is obscure." - IC-98

11. "...[to the ancient Greeks] philosophy was above all an apprenticeship in wisdom; a mode of life rather than a discourse." - Luc Ferry

12. "Living itself is the supreme art; it requires fineness of touch; skill and thoroughness of workmanship; susceptible response and delicate adjustment to a situation apart from reflective analysis; instinctive perception of the proper harmonies of act and act, of man and man [sic]." - John Dewey

13. "They know that, as contradictory as it is, any nonart action undertaken in the context of the art world may become art by association." - Allan Kaprow

14. "Between...the avoidance of art and the impossibility of avoiding non-art lay an experimental ground where artists might forget their professional identity and art might lose itself in the paradox of being whatever else, besides art, it is like, whether sociology, therapy, or shopping." - Jeff Kelly

15. "Thus conceived, art is eminently practical; it is about refreshing and enhancing everyday lived experience, not escaping to the pristine sublimity of theoretical abstraction or disinterested beauty." - David Granger

The arts, at least up to the present, have been poor lessons, except possibly to artists and their tiny publics.

16. "...As we have already noted, feminism has managed to reproduce its own version of the work ethic, whether in the process of defending waged work as the alternative to feminine domesticity in both liberal feminism and traditional Marxism, or through efforts to gain recognition for modes of unwaged labor as socially necessary labor. Feminism, including much of 1970s Marxist feminism, has tended to focus more on the critique of work's organization and distribution than on questioning its values...As the refusal-of-work perspective suggests, the problem with the organization of social reproduction extends beyond the problems of this work's invisibility, devaluation, and gendering." - Kathi Weeks

17. "The arts, at least up to the present, have been poor lessons, except possibly to artists and their tiny publics. Only these vested interests have ever made any high claims for the arts. The rest of us couldn't care less." - Allan Kaprow

18. "Common things, a flower, a gleam of moonlight, the song of a bird, not things rare and remote, are means with which the deeper levels of life are touched so that they spring up as desire and thought. This process is art." - John Dewey

19. "...The artists he brings together all reject the productivist approach to art, and do not feel compelled to churn out works simply to reaffirm their status as creators. They prefer life to the dead hand of museums and libraries, and are generally more concerned with being (or not being) than doing. Life is their art as much as art is their life – perhaps even more so." - Andrew Gallix

20. "... Shusterman contends that Dewey's use of 'aesthetic experience' can help us to remember that qualitatively enriched experience, and not national/class privilege or the collecting of precious objects, is what makes art an incomparable source of personal and cultural renewal...The more we learn, and then teach others, how to fashion life itself into art, as Dewey says, the less we will feel the need to treat art as 'the beauty parlor of civilization.' "- David Granger

21. "So they go on and on making art – adding to the constantly growing category of objects obeying that description. What is more unusual, and far more interesting, is when artists don't do art; or, at any rate, when they don't claim that whatever it is they are doing is, in fact, art. When they recycle their artistic skills, perceptions and habitus back into the general symbolic economy of the real." - Stephen Wright

22. "We will consequently have to veer 180 degrees the traditional approach to aesthetics by focusing not on the aesthetic effects of social practices such as art, fashion, or design, but on the social effects of aesthetic practices performed throughout a wide array of social institutions such as the family, the school, religion, the State, prison. The nature of specific aesthetic practices within each of these institutions is precisely the question that prosaics will have to answer. The purpose is, thus, to study aesthetics not as the effect of art and beauty, but as constitutive of social effects." - Katya Mandoki

23. "[Slacking] does not consist in doing nothing, but in doing a great deal not recognized in the dogmatic formularies of the ruling class." Robert Louis Stevenson

24. "...the idea is not to become artists or appreciators of art, but to realize we already are artists and appreciators of art. When we are listening to popular music on the radio on the way home from work, we are listening to art that is more typical of and more organically connected to our culture than anything in a museum. When we enjoy a well designed and written advertisement, when we watch a baseball game on television, when we raise our children with devoted care, when we work in absorption in our gardens, we are authentically experiencing art." - Crispin Sartwell

25. "Artists of the world, drop out! You have nothing to lose but your professions!" - Allan Kaprow

26. "Philosophy...was more than thought; it was life-practice where theory derived its real meaning and value only in terms of the life in which it functioned, in the concrete pursuit of better living." - Richard Shusterman

27. "We have assumed a way of looking at art that permits no gulf between the simple arts of life and the so-called fine arts. It sees all as man's [sic] more or less successful efforts to create things that increase the comforts, the efficiencies, and the pleasures of living...This view cherishes not even the ethically tinged distinction between good art and bad art." - Melvin Haggerty

28. "At some point, I had the feeling that I couldn't explain what I was doing, with conviction, to a stranger. The subjective nature of making "work" in a field where basically anything goes: critical or non-critical, aesthetic or conceptual, material or dematerialized – as long as you want to call it "art". I felt suffocated by potentials and missed having a method for evaluating options. Possibly I was also suffering from some kind of imposter complex, where I felt like anyone at any time would notice that everything we were doing made no sense. These deep-seated anxieties probably reflect the fact that art is no longer very relevant." - Nik Kosmas

29. "More significantly, Walter Pater's contention that experience – not "the fruit of experience" – was an end in itself, led to a redefinition of art as the very experience of life. A desire to turn one's existence into poetry...would lie at the heart of all the major twentieth-century avant-gardes. "My art is that of living", Marcel Duchamp famously declared, "Each second, each breath is a work which is inscribed nowhere, which is neither visual nor cerebral; it's a sort of constant euphoria." - Andrew Gallix

artists without artworks

30. "An artist who decided not to create art, a poet who decided not to write poetry, all in an effort to prove that creation of works is counter-intuitive to the true artist, who must live the art and not leave evidence or relics as proof of genius." - DJ Pangburn

31. "But again, why is "art" privileged as the object of such experience? I really don't know what the word means anymore. Aesthetics, however, seems to me more important than ever. "Aesthetics after art," you might call it." - Susan Buck-Morris

32. "How does one measure the level of the coefficient of art in an installation which collects fog and supplies water to inhabitants of a desert in Chile? How much art is there in the collaboration of a Turkish beekeeper with a beehive during the production of psychoactive honey? But another question is really perplexing: Is there more art within or outside the walls of the museum?" - Glossary, Making Use: Life in Postartistic Times

33. "...They seem to be seeking to escape performative and ontological capture as art altogether. It is certainly possible to describe them as having a double ontology; but it seems more closely in keeping with their self-understanding to argue that this is not an ontological issue at all, but rather a question of the extent to which they are informed by a certain coefficient of art. Informed by artistic self-understanding, not framed as art." - Stephen Wright

Aesthetics after art

34. "Art practices themselves have abandoned the notion of artwork and the idea of art that accompanied it. Twentieth-century art has thus unceasingly been haunted by minority- becomings, those of "artists without artworks," to borrow a phrase coined by Jean-Yves Jouannais, who have radically chosen non-creation and have assumed the status of artist, the living for one's self, outside of all artistic production." - Fabienne Brugère

35. "Fuck professionalism (this coming from a curator). And fuck these easy, dorky categories. Is it art? Is it activism? Those questions are dangerous and misleading. How about questions like: Who is this for? What does it do? In what manner does it operate in a social structure? I mean if we contextualize the manner and receiving culture of a given practice, the questions become simpler and more fun to ask." - Nato Thompson

36. "...the pertinent question is no longer "what infinite variety of materials, strategies, concerns might we include in the context of art?" It isn't "what might we map onto the coordinates of art?" These were the questions of modernism. The more contemporary question - tomorrow's question - is "who are we when we pursue a larger field of production, some of which is art?" - David Robbins

37. "This is not because I don't like the arts, or that I'm not interested in the arts of other people. But as far as I was personally concerned, the un-arding process was primary and, therefore, I would not find useful any integration of social and cultural theory into art-making." — Allan Kaprow

38. "If the experience you invent happens to further or maintain an existing context of interpretation or field of endeavor - "art," "literature," "theater" - fine, but you've too much work to get done to wait around to find out." - David Robbins

39. "...postartistic times signal an era in which a high COEFFICIENT OF ART is present in many areas of life; when an artist's work does not always materialize in the form of an art piece; while the art itself is carried out in a 1:1 SCALE, instead of generating models for situations and things." - Glossary, Making Use: Life in Postartistic Times

40. "Art is a way of life" is a simple statement of short and familiar words. It expresses a way of looking at life that is very old in the history of thought. If it now seems strange it is because we have permitted art to become divorced from the ordinary activities in which men [sic] engage and its cultivation to drift into the hand of specialists from whom the mass of mankind is separated as by a chasm. In recent times this chasm has become very broad and very deep. To men [sic] absorbed in the work of the world artists appear to be a cult and their work and conversation seem esoteric and almost mystical. To artists ordinary folks appear ignorant and unappreciative, and very often their thinly veiled contempt for plebeian tastes has led them to caustic expression. This dissociation is artificial; it is injurious to art and impoverishes life." - Melvin Haggerty

41. "For while we do have a highly sophisticated vocabulary to talk about art objects and about those objects in relationship to a certain genealogy of other objects and actions to which they are related, it is more difficult to talk about these artists and groups that, although they do not seem to completely reject the museum and gallery space and although they sometimes exhibit the results of their work in these spaces, ultimately don't produce art objects in the traditional sense. I think that one of the challenges for the curators who are trying to deal with that situation, with that schism, and with these new forms of production is to develop a critical vocabulary of some sort that is still related to the art-historical legacy, that accounts for those works that ultimately do not quite fit within the parameters of traditional art history. A vocabulary that would itself mediate between the demands of these evolving practices and the information contained in the art-historical discourse." - Carlos Basualdo

42. "Immaculately reasoned arguments and grand systems mean little if they have nothing to contribute to the art of a life well lived." - David Granger

43. "Artists, as I have said, have made their retreat into theories of art, and art theorists into art. There emerges in art a gigantic whirlpool with no way out. The same holds true about art criticism. The most eminent art critics are absent from art journals. And though they continue writing, it is not for the magazines that shape public opinion and it is not about art. Their writing is no longer art criticism." - Jerzy Ludwiński

What if, as an artist, you decide to give up your artistic practice, disappear from the art scene, and leave the field of art altogether?

44. "When the thought of the end becomes so adequate that it compels translation into the means that embody it, or when attention to the means is inspired by recognition of the end they serve, we have the attitude typical of the artist, an attitude that may be displayed in all activities, even though they are not conventionally designated 'arts.'" - John Dewey

45. "This is the paradox of the imperformative: not-doing only has traction against a horizon of reasonable expectation of an ability-to-do and the deed itself. Countless things don't get done, but the imperformative implies that something actually eludes performative capture — that it is done quietly, and not necessarily materially (who knows?) in the shadows. And the shadow of the deed is the idea." - Stephen Wright

46. "...the idea of art cannot easily be gotten rid of (even if one wisely never utter the word). But it is possible to slyly shift the whole un-artistic operation away from where the arts customarily congregate, to become, for instance, an account executive, an ecologist, a stunt rider, a politician, a beach bum. In these different capacities...[art] would operate indirectly as a stored code that, instead of programming a specific course of behavior, would facilitate an attitude of deliberate playfulness toward all professionalizing activities well beyond art." - Allan Kaprow

47. "For some time now, my work has been circling the question: What if, as an artist, you decide to give up your artistic practice, disappear from the art scene, and leave the field of art altogether? Does this simply mean you have given up, that you have failed? Or would you merely be switching to a new line of work, changing your job? Or could there be, potentially, more to it than this? Could leaving art be, perhaps, a gesture of critique and (artistic) sovereignty? It will, indeed, come as no surprise if we say that today there are far more former artists in the Western world, than there are practicing artists. Given the large number of artists who graduate from our academies and the very few who eventually succeed in a professional career, the »ex-artist« is a very common phenomenon in our social environment — mind you, without being a particularly seductive subject for art critics or art historians." - Alexander Koch

48. "...Post Art—things that aren't artworks so much as they are about the drive to make things that, like art, embed imagination in material and grasp that creativity is a cosmic force. It's an idea I love. (As I've written before, everything that's made, if you look at it in certain ways, already is or can be art.) Things that couldn't be fitted into old categories embody powerfully creative forms, capable of carrying meaning and making change. Post Art doesn't see art as medicine, relief, or religion; Post Art doesn't even see art as separate from living. A chemist or a general may be making Post Art every day at the office." - Jerry Saltz

49. "...if art objects are special merely because they are very effective at creating the conditions for aesthetic experience, then it is possible that any activity could be experienced as aesthetic if conditions and attitudes cooperate to make it so. The question can then be asked, could not the majority of one's life be an aesthetic experience or artful activity?" - Scott Stroud

50. "I am referring to an art without artwork, without authorship (not signed by an artist) and above all without a spectator or audience. It is visible, public, and indeed, it is seen—but not as art. In this way, it cannot be placed between invisible parentheses—to be written off as "just art," that is, as a mere symbolic transgression, the likes of which we have seen so often, whose principal effect is to promote the artist's position within the reputational economy." - Stephen Wright

*Escaping . . . with
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of our time.*



end



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