

Example of essay on life, art and the everyday

[Art & Culture](#), [Artists](#)



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Introduction/Thesis

The idea of ‘ everyday’ is intriguing because no two people see this as a common phenomenon; they see it differently. It can be a time anytime of the day, be it morning, afternoon, evening, or even night, or it could be routines or habitual activities that are repeated by individuals. Whatever the act, the ‘ everyday’ phenomenon is hard to define as everyone perceives this differently. When perceived from an artistic point of view, the concept of ‘ everyday’ finds a whole new meaning; it harbors on alienation, interaction, space and place, as well as materiality and dirt. Artists Francis Alys and Thomas Hirschhorn represent these ideas through their art; applying everyday objects into their artwork to create new meaning and form that reflect vivid political statements as well as reminiscence those that were overlooked and forgotten. Francis Alys is a Belgium artist whose work and practices are associated with observations and interactions made in everyday life. A frequent traveler, Alys loves to measure society by reflecting on its values and contradictions, which he translates into his art (arttattler.com, 2014). His work includes those of videos, paintings, drawings and performances. One particular work of his, ‘ Railings,’ shows him connecting

with activities common to people on the street, as he drags a stick through the fence railings of Fitzroy Square. In illustrating common people walking on the street for example, Alys demonstrates how an artist is able to make the minutest of observation that most forget to notice in their 'everyday.' Just about everything one does, see, hear, or speak, can be translated as impressions one contribute everyday in their life in this world. The interaction between people and objects allows them to 'break' the jinx between them, and elevate them to another level altogether.

Francis Alys uses the figure of tourists as an allegorical support to examine the processes of globalization and their implications, says Marcus (2012). The eyes of an artist absorb even the minutest of details that seem oblivious to others around them. In doing so, Alys is able to bring out the ever-present energy surrounding us, which most people seem to disregard, and by physically interacting with Alys' Railings, one is brought in close proximity of the spaces and places surrounding them that it makes them feel as though they are a part of it. The sound that's produced from the clanking of the railings also further reiterates the feeling of belonging, as the sound reinstates one's connection with the environment; whether it by their footsteps, their humming, or just by coming into physical contact with their surroundings. By promoting such photos as the 'railing' for example, Alys exhibits the conceptual idea of everyday through the relationship one develops through normal daily routines. Alys acts like a tourist in his walk-based works, using walk as a means of connecting between displacement and freedom. 'Railings,' is one such work. In 'Railing,' Alys can be seen walking with a stick in hand beating a rhythm, signifying a liberalized

exercise of aimless discovery.

In *The Sleepers*, a slideshow that shows homeless people in Mexico lying on the streets together with images of sleeping dogs is a stark reminder of the breakdown of one of the modern city's fundamental distinction between the private and the public. As Alys says, "for the homeless the street becomes their living-room, while for artists, the scene presents a fascinating picture of social, historical, economical, and cultural distinctions that are dissolved in a kind of organic hybridity, and where the past and the present, the rich and the poor meet in a political dispute of aesthetic appearance" (Schollhammer, 2008).

In an interview to Anna Dezeuze, Alys said that as an artist, he was always on damage control because the documentary series he produces can be interpreted as being "paternalistic, naive, sentimental or judgemental," especially when they are quoted outside their meaningful context (Dezeuze, 2009).

Thomas Hirschhorn has the reputation of showing everyday life in the harshest and most alarming manner, and his installation; the *Unfinished Walls*, where he uses 'poor materials' to generate a feeling of obstruction, denial and helplessness, is indeed remarkable (Cork, 2004). Hirschhorn is a Swiss artist whose works focus on collages. He was influenced by junk, pop and installation. He became famous in the Nineties for his provocative oversized collages of cardboard, plywood and plastic (Burns, 2004). He is well known for working with everyday objects and materials such as cardboard, tape, plastic, and white cube spaces, which he transforms into a form of art that analogizes politics and consumerism. Hirschhorn's affinity

toward life, dream, change, action, and hope, can be seen through his everyday works, where he uses tools and materials found commonly in households. Hirschhorn is well known for his installations. His installation, Ingeborg Bachmann Altar, done in 2006, is a masterpiece. With candles, flowers, handwritten notes and other objects to commemorate the memory of a person, resembles a memorial that was made for a person who died at that spot. The spot is largely a busy passage in the centre of a town. The installation was in fact done to commemorate the death of a writer who was killed on that spot thirty-three years ago. The candles, flowers, handwritten notes and other decorative pieces is a stark reminder of the devotion and adoration her fans have for her even today (Lapp, 2007). A look at the installation shows that the place has been busy with activities and the plastered walls with displays of love and quotations from her poems seem to reverberate with the mood.

Another of his well-known work; Too Too - Much Much, can be seen in a Belgium museum and it deals with the pollution, consumerism, and other ideas. The idea of how an artist can sometimes 'overdo' an artwork while striving for perfection forms the other part. By using materials and everyday objects such as coca cola cans, Hirschhorn is able to generate interest among his audience to the harsh reality of overconsumption and mass production. In this installation, Hirschhorn transforms white cubical spaces into what looks like a flooded garbage dump with the help of 14 truckloads of cans. The audience has to walk through the overflowing rubbish to experience his thoughts, and engage with the environment on a personal level. Hirschhorn uses the beverage cans, which would otherwise have been

thrown away by consumers, to construct the social issue that faces human beings every day. It is as if the audience is walking through their own man-made garbage (contemporaryartdaily. com, 2014) that they failed to dispose of properly, and forced to face its consequences. This is basically what happens today; people in their hurry, forget or ignore the simple things they need to do, and instead, leave behind a trail of waste that affects not just them, but those who use that trail. Just like every day, there are many small things that people overlook, and those things are important features of what makes every day the ' everyday' (Schum, 2011).

Among the many spaces that Hirschhorn has set up to build structures and forms made by the coca cola cans include bridges, Christmas trees, apparels and decorations. The huge pile of coca-cola cans used by Hirschhorn is evidence to show how much modern man is under the control of consumerism. The giant cans that lay around the room also reflected the growing inclination toward consumerism. In an unusual turn, Hirschhorn exhibited one of his masterpieces at the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York. Gregory Volk, who went to see the exhibition, was shocked by what confronted a woman visitor. " This exhibition" she said, is horrible. It is evil and sick and should not be allowed. There are heads of dead people next to pretty abstract drawings. This isn't art; but a stupid provocation that must be shut down immediately!" For Hirschhorn's fans, this must have made them happy, not because the visitor was attacking the artists for such an exhibit, but for creating such an influence on his audience. The raucous exhibition was a complex and hard-hitting response to rampant consumerism abutting terrorism, fierce intercultural conflict and a war run increasingly amok!"

(Volk, 2006)

In keeping with his style of honoring writers, like that of Ingeborg Bachmann Altar, is another piece on the late French writer and cultural 'outlaw' Georges Bataille. In a housing colony occupied largely by Turkish immigrants, Hirschhorn engaged in his artistry, where he used "a snack bar, a bookshop, an outdoor sculpture made of some tree trunks, and a small room filled with books, maps and press clippings" in memory of Georges Bataille. The 'Bataille Monument' as it is called, is made in "Hirschhorn's trademark proletarian ad-lib style" (Plagens, 2002). Hirschhorn's art includes shantytown carpentry crudely reinforced with packing tape and decorated with graffiti.

In a letter written to Abraham Cruzvillegas, published in the Bomb Magazine in Fall 2010, Hirschhorn, on asked whether disaster; famine, flooding, earthquake, forced migration, genocide, and holocaust, were a source of energy, creation, or love, he replied that yes, disaster is a part of the world, and only if one agrees with it, can they have the power to change something. Agreement does not mean approval of everything but to love; to love the world beyond 'respect,' 'empathy,' 'tolerance,' 'compassion,' and 'kitsch.' Love, after all is about passion, desire, ecstasy, infinitude, and cruelty. An artist has to confront disaster in his or her own way, and because they love the world, and disasters are part of it, they must learn to love disasters too. It is this love for disasters and everything in the world that gives artists the energy and the will to create art (Cruzvillega, 2010).

Hirschhorn created the Crystal of Resistance to give a form that would create a condition that made his audience think; think of something new. As artists

have an eye for details, it is his way of wanting people to see and think for themselves. The mission of art, in his words, is to give a form that can create the condition for people to think of something that has never existed. This form should create truth, a truth that resists facts, opinions and commentaries (bak. admin. ch, 2011).

French scholar, Michel de Certeau had a way with strategy and tactics. He used the two terms quite contradictorily to some of the martial historical uses of these ideas. While in military parlance strategy is about identifying campaigns to win wars and tactics are techniques to be used to win them, De Certeau used tactics to write about people in their everyday lives in his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). This reflects De Certeau's affiliation toward societal issues (Goff, 2014). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that historian Michel de Certeau has a lot in common with Alys and Hirschhorn. De Certeau, like Hirschhorn, is obsessed with the forgotten past, and like Alys, uses models and concepts to test them in towns and cities like a scientist. This characteristic of Certeau can be juxtaposed to the works and thoughts of artists Francis Alys and Thomas Hirschhorn. Certeau believed that "specificity and strangeness of the past can only appear through the scientific representation of history" (Weymans, 2004).

In *Walking in the City*, Certeau sees a vision of an urban landscape as one that interacts with "waste, difference, and disorder, and consequently 'enunciated' a more authentic version of the place" (Badenhausen, 2007). Alys and Hirschhorn worked on similar themes in their works through pictures, paintings and installations. Michel de Certeau considers the modes of social behavior of individuals and groups to describe how they can

tactically reclaim their autonomy from the world of consumerism. This stance is clearly reflected in the works of Alys and Hirschhorn.

Conclusion

There is a clear demarcation in the way artists see the world from how common people on the road see it. For artists, everyday is an event to be loved, as they believe that loving the world is symbolic to loving all that happens within it. In studying Alys and Hirschhorn, and their works, it is clear that they use their art to educate their audience in understanding what happens around them. While Alys expresses his ideas by engaging his audience on a physical and personal level, Hirschhorn tries to create forms that make his audience think. De Certeau presents the right balance between Alys and Hirschhorn, and his works are synonymous to what Alys and Hirschhorn did with their arts.

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