

**“The Most Misunderstood Human Endeavor”:
L. Ron Hubbard, Scientology, and Fine Arts**

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ABSTRACT: An important, but understudied, part of the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard refers to aesthetics and the arts. In the first part, the article explores Hubbard’s aesthetics and its connections with the larger system of Dianetics and Scientology. Hubbard’s ideas about art history, art and communication, color, perspective, and artistic techniques are also discussed. In the second part, the article reviews the works of several artists, some of them internationally famous, who took Scientology’s Art Courses and remained, or are today, active in Scientology, and asks the question whether and how Hubbard’s aesthetics inspired their productions.

KEYWORDS: Scientology, Church of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, Celebrity Centres, Scientology and the Arts.

I. Hubbard’s Gnostic Worldview and Aesthetics

Scientology’s Gnostic Worldview

Dianetics and Scientology represent two distinct phases of L. Ron Hubbard’s (1911–1986) thought. Dianetics deals with the mind, and studies how it receives and stores images. Scientology focuses on the entity who looks at the images stored in the mind. Mind for Scientology has three main parts. The analytical mind observes and remembers data, stores their pictures as mental images, and uses them to take decisions and promote survival. The reactive mind records mental images at times of incidents containing unconsciousness and pain, and stores these images as “engrams.” They are awakened and reactivated when similar circumstances occur, creating all sort of problems. The somatic mind,

directed by the analytical or reactive mind, translates their inputs and messages on the physical level (Hubbard 1950, 39). Dianetics aims at freeing humans from engrams, thus helping them achieving the status of “clear.”

Dianetics, however, leaves open the question of who, exactly, is the subject continuously observing the images stored in the mind. To answer this question, Hubbard introduced Scientology and moved from psychology to metaphysics. At the core of Scientology’s worldview there is a gnostic narrative. At the beginning, there were the “thetans,” pure spirits who created MEST (matter, energy, space, and time), largely for their own pleasure. Unfortunately, incarnating and reincarnating in human bodies, the thetans came to forget that they had created the world, and to believe that they were the effect rather than the cause of physical universe. Their level of “theta,” i.e. of the creative energy peculiar to life that acts upon the physical universe and is directed towards survival (the name comes from the Greek letter *theta*, used by the Greeks to represent thought), gradually decreased and, as they kept incarnating as humans, the part of mind known as the reactive mind took over.

The more the thetan believes to be the effect, rather than the cause, of the physical universe, the more the reactive mind exerts its negative effects and the person is in a state of “aberration.” This affects the Tone Scale, showing the emotional tones a person can experience, and the levels of ARC (Affinity – Reality – Communication). Affinity is the positive emotional relationship we establish with others. Reality is the agreement we reach with others about how things are. Communication is the most important part of the triangle: through communication, we socially construct reality and, once reality is consensually shared, we can generate affinity (Christensen 1999, 2009; Melton 2000; Lewis 2009; Urban 2011; Lewis and Hellesøy 2017).

Hubbard was familiar with the artistic milieu as a successful writer of fiction. However, he struggled for years on how to integrate an aesthetic and a theory of the arts into his system. In 1951, Hubbard wrote that “there is yet to appear a good definition for aesthetics and art” (Hubbard 1976a, 129). In the same year, he dealt with the argument in *Science of Survival*, one of his most important theoretical books. He returned often to the arts, particularly in 17 articles included in technical bulletins from 1965 to 1984, which form the backbone of the 1991 book *Art*, published by Scientology after his death (Hubbard 1991).

Aesthetics in *Science of Survival* (1951)

In *Science of Survival*, Hubbard explains that “many more mind levels apparently exist above the analytical level” (Hubbard 1951, 234). Probably “immediately above” (Hubbard 1951, 234) the analytical mind, something called the aesthetic mind exists. Aesthetics and the aesthetic mind, Hubbard admits, “are both highly nebulous” subjects. In general, the aesthetic mind is the mind that “deals with the nebulous field of art and creation” (Hubbard 1951, 234). And “the aesthetics have very much to do with the tone scale” (Hubbard 1951, 236). By introducing the aesthetic mind, Hubbard somewhat changed his usual model based on the interplay of the analytical and reactive minds.

One might expect that the aesthetic mind would be incapable of functioning until most engrams have been eliminated and the state of clear has been reached. Strangely, Hubbard claims that it is not so:

It is a strange thing that the shut-down of the analytical mind and the aberration of the reactive mind may still leave in fairly good working order the aesthetic mind (Hubbard 1951, 234).

“The aesthetic mind is not much influenced by the position on the tone scale,” although “it evidently has to employ the analytical, reactive, and somatic minds in the creation of art and art forms” (Hubbard 1951, 234).

Not that aberration is irrelevant for the artist. In fact, “the amount of aberration of the individual greatly inhibits the ability of the aesthetic mind to execute” (Hubbard 1951, 234). What amount of theta the artist initially owns is also important. “A person with a great deal of theta as an initial endowment may be potentially a powerful musician,” or visual artist, by reason of his aesthetic mind. However, the aesthetic mind cannot “execute” and produce art directly. It should operate through the analytical and reactive minds, “through both the analytical power of the individual and the aberrations of the individual” (Hubbard 1951, 234–35).

Being “a person of great theta” (Hubbard 1951, 235), as artists often are, is also a mixed blessing. Hubbard explains that

a person of great theta endowment picks up more numerous and heavier locks and secondaries than persons of smaller endowment (Hubbard 1951, 235).

Locks and secondaries are mental image pictures through which we are reminded of engrams. They would not exist without the engrams, but they may be very disturbing. Persons with a great amount of theta, including artists who use all this energy to produce art forms, “seek to control enormous quantities of MEST and other organisms” (Hubbard 1951, 235). The environment reacts to this attempt to control with what Hubbard calls counter-efforts and counter-attacks, through which engrams are used against the individual.

Even before Scientology offered a scientific explanation of these phenomena, they were obvious enough to be noticed but, Hubbard claims, they were often misinterpreted. Many claimed that it was normal, if not “absolutely necessary,” for an artist to be a “neurotic”:

Lacking the ability to do anything about neurosis, like Aesop’s fox who had no tail and tried to persuade the other foxes to cut theirs off, frustrated mental pundits glorified what they could not prevent or cure (Hubbard 1951, 235).

The dysfunctional artist was hailed as a counter-cultural hero. Being “crazy” (Hubbard 1951, 235) was regarded as a blessing for the artist.

Not so, Hubbard argues. Going down the tone scale is not good for anybody and is not good for artists either. The artist,

as he descends down the tone scale, becomes less and less able to execute creative impulses and at last becomes unable to contact his creative impulses (Hubbard 1951, 235).

It is a dangerous misconception, according to Hubbard, to believe that “when an artist becomes less neurotic, he becomes less able” (Hubbard 1951, 238). Regrettably, our world has programmed the artists by widely inculcating these false ideas. The consequence is that many artists “seek to act in their private and public lives in an intensely aberrated fashion to prove that they are artists.” Hubbard gives the example of “some young girl in the field of the arts living like a prostitute in order to convince herself and her friends that she is truly artistic” (Hubbard 1951, 238).

Such artists need auditing by Scientology in order to cure their misperception. Scientology, Hubbard promises, may “take a currently successful but heavily aberrated artist and (...) bring him up the tone scale.” The result will not only be that the artist will be happier as a human being. He or she will also become a better artist. Hubbard predicts a final outcome, after the auditing, where

his ability to execute what he conceives and the clarity with which he conceives it both increase very markedly. His aesthetic ideas do not become conservative or humdrum but become often wider and more complex (Hubbard 1951, 235).

This will be strictly connected with the tone scale. As the artist “rises up the tone scale, he adopts greater scope and robustness in his work” (Hubbard 1951, 236).

There may be a problem, Hubbard notes. Audiences may actually like arts that demonstrates “considerable aberration.” For instance, before the auditing, an artist might have been successful with “paintings [that] might have been strange and creepy, or music hauntingly morbid.” When the artist rises up the tone scale, however, the originality of the artistic expression is not altered. There is only a positive “increase in force of execution and deftness of communication.” Perhaps audiences liked a somewhat morbid music. But “the morbidity in his music, if it did not depend on how sad he was personally with life, does not disappear.” It is, however, expressed in healthier forms, and in fact in a variety of new and different languages, as “versatility increases” (Hubbard 1951, 236).

This is not to say that, as psychiatrists sometimes maintain, it is possible to judge the mental status of an artist by simply observing his or her art. “This, Hubbard objects, is somewhat on the order of a snail giving his [sic] opinion of the Parthenon by crawling through its reliefs” (Hubbard 1951, 236). A good artist can write in different styles and under different masks.

A good poet can cheerfully write a poem gruesome enough to make strong men cringe, or he can write verses happy enough to make the weeping laugh. Any able composer can write music either covert enough to make the sadist wriggle with delight or open enough to rejoice the greatest souls (Hubbard 1951, 236).

Grief or happiness as expressed in a work of art do not necessarily reveal the state of mind of the artist. Rather than examining only the artists’ works, Scientology deals with their personal problems through the auditing.

Hubbard’s vision of the arts, as proposed in *Science of Survival*, is also crucial for Scientology’s social program. Far from being merely peripheral, art is the key for the creation of a better world. “The artist, Hubbard writes, has an enormous role in the enhancement of today’s and the creation of tomorrow’s reality.” Scientology has a high consideration of science, but art operates “in advance of science” and “the elevation of a culture can be measured directly by the numbers of its people working in the field of aesthetics” (Hubbard 1951, 237). “A culture

is only as great as its dreams, and its dreams are dreamed by artists” (Hubbard 1951, 239).

Since the artist “deals in future realities, he always seeks improvements or changes in the existing reality. This makes the artist, inevitably and invariably, a rebel against the status quo.” It is a “peaceful revolution” (Hubbard 1951, 237), and a free society needs not worry. Totalitarian states, on the other hand, are the enemies of the artists, while pretending to be their friends. A typical totalitarian state, Hubbard explains, “talks endlessly and raucously about its subsidization of the artist.” But in fact,

it subsidizes only those artists who are willing to work for the state exactly as the state dictates. It regiments the artist and prescribes what he will do and what he will write and what he will think (Hubbard 1951, 237).

The suppression of genuine art, however, lowers the tone scale of society in general, with dramatic consequences:

A society which in any way inhibits, suppresses, or regiments its artists, is a society not only low on the tone scale but most certainly doomed (Hubbard 1951, 237).

Democratic governments, in principle, should not have these problems, but they run, according to Hubbard, a different risk. They “are prone to overlook the role of the artist in the society.” In the United States, he exemplifies, as soon as artistic success is achieved, excessive taxes discourage the artist from further production. Thus,

democracy, avidly taxing its powerfully creative individuals into non-production, snatches from the artist any such fruits of victory and exacts an enormous penalty for the creation of any work of art.

Hubbard proposes a tax reform aiming at freeing,

completely, the artist. from all taxes and similar oppressions, and thus attract into the arts the most ambitious and able and invite them to pursue unchecked the creation of all the beauty and glory on which any culture depends if it would have material wealth (Hubbard 1951, 237–238).

The reasons for this proposed reform are not merely economical, and are connected to Hubbard’s key idea that the prosperity of a society depends from the amount of circulating theta. Without enough theta, the reactive mind would dominate culture itself. “The artist injects the theta into the culture, and without that theta the culture becomes reactive” (Hubbard 1951, 238).

During history, Hubbard adds, art has not always been in its present unsatisfactory state. For example, “in the early days of Rome, art was fairly good.” Christianity revolted against the Romans, and had one good reason for its revolt, “Roman disregard for human life.” However, those who revolt always run the risk of being dominated by the reactive mind. It thus happened, Hubbard believed, that Christianity fell into a “reactive computation” and came to regard everything Roman as negative. He even claims that “for fifteen hundred years it was an evil thing to take a bath, because the Romans had bathed” (Hubbard 1951, 238).

Happily, “the Catholic Church recovered early and began to appreciate the artist.” However, the old anti-Roman and, therefore, anti-artistic prejudice resurfaced with Protestantism and eventually came to the United States. “Puritanism and Calvinism,” according to Hubbard,

revolted against pleasure, against beauty, against cleanliness, and against many other desirable things which are in themselves the glory of man (Hubbard 1951, 238).

The next step was a revolt against the revolt. In modern times, artists revolted against the Protestant and Puritan revolt against the classics and the arts. The problem was that, again, the reactive mind took over, and artists revolted against everything Protestant, if not everything Christian, including morality. Being a good artist came to be

commonly identified with being loose-moraled, wicked, idle and drunken, and the artist, to be recognized, tried to live up to this role. This feeling persists to this day and low-tone people often embrace the arts solely as an excuse to be promiscuous, unconventional and loose in moral.

“Artistic” women are often simply lost women, or so Hubbard claims, denouncing the “Great-Art-Can-Only-Be-Done-By-Moral-Lepers School” (Hubbard 1951, 238–39).

When artists come to seek help in Scientology, they are often full of “entheta,” i.e. theta that has been “enturbulated” and corrupted. There is even more entheta among art critics. The quantity of “entheta which has accumulated around the subject of aesthetics” is truly disturbing. A clear sign that entheta is at work, Hubbard insists, is that reasonable arguments are substituted by appeals to authority and that the science of art criticism is under-developed. “It is an axiom of Dianetics that the less is accurately known about a field of the humanities the more authoritarian will be that field.” In fact, “no more authoritarian field exists”

than art criticism, “since none of the principles of aesthetics have been accurately formulated” so far. The result is confusion and authoritarianism:

Any field which has critics galore, wherein a thousand different schools of divergent opinion can exist, where opinion is listened to with open mouths in lieu of reason by which any man can reach a conclusion, is an authoritarian field (Hubbard 1951, 239).

The whole field of the arts is “enturbulated” (Hubbard 1951, 239), and this has a direct and negative impact on society as a whole:

When the level of existence of the artist becomes impure, so becomes impure the art itself, to the deterioration of the society. It is a dying society indeed into which can penetrate totalitarianism (Hubbard 1951, 239).

In addition to the individual aesthetic mind, there is a collective “group aesthetic mind,” which is crucial for the well-being of any healthy society. Totalitarianism becomes a real possibility when in a society the group aesthetic mind becomes “almost wholly unable to operate” (Hubbard 1951, 239–40).

Hubbard concludes his discussion of aesthetics in *Science of Survival* noting that “there may be many levels of mind above the aesthetic mind” but we do know a lot about them. Therefore,

no attempt to classify any level of mind alertness above the level of the aesthetic mind will be made beyond stating that these mind levels more and more seem to approach an omniscient status (Hubbard 1951, 240).

He mentions, however, among the possible superior levels “a free theta mind, if such things exist” (Hubbard 1951, 25). This notion will become central for the subsequent development in Scientology of the notion of the “operating thetan,” a state where the thetan finally recovers his native abilities.

“What is Art?” (1965)

On 30 August 1965, Hubbard issued a technical bulletin that was crucially important for his theory of art (Hubbard 1976b, 83–85; Hubbard 1980, 1–4). He took again as his starting point that “art is the least codified of human endeavors and the most misunderstood.” The question about art “is one of the least answered of human questions.” He also reiterated the general principle of Dianetics according to which “that field containing the most authorities contains

the least codified knowledge.” Since “art abounds with authorities” (Hubbard 1976b, 83), obviously very little real knowledge exists.

Hubbard explained that it was now fifteen years that it had started considering how to “codify” the knowledge about art and discussing this theme with Donald H. Rogers, one of the members of Dianetics’ original circle, in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He announced that “this [the ‘codification’ of aesthetic theory] has now been done” (Hubbard 1976b, 83).

At first, art “seemed to stand outside the field of Dianetics and Scientology.” Hubbard, however, was not persuaded by this conclusion and eventually “made a breakthrough.” He realized that art and communication are closely connected. In fact, “ART is a word which summarizes THE QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION” (Hubbard 1976b, 83, capitals in the original). Scientology had already elaborated certain “laws” about communication. Now, they should be applied to the arts.

In 1965, Hubbard was ready to propose three axioms. The first was that “too much originality throws the audience into unfamiliarity and therefore disagreement.” Communication, in fact, includes “duplication.” If the audience is totally unable to replicate the experience, it would not understand nor appreciate the work of art. The second axiom taught that “TECHNIQUE should not rise above the level of workability for the purpose of communication.” The third maintained that “PERFECTION cannot be attained at the expense of communication” (Hubbard 1976b, 83, capitals in the original).

Hubbard believed that his approach to aesthetics was new with respect to both classic and contemporary theories of art. The latter emphasize “originality,” to the point that audiences are often surprised but, Hubbard maintained, not persuaded. The former sought perfection through technique. But, according to Hubbard, “seeking perfection is a wrong target in art.” The right target is communication. “One should primarily seek communication with it [art] and then perfect it as far as reasonable.” Too much perfection transports the artist into a realm inaccessible to the audience. “If perfection greater than that which can be attained for communication is sought, one will not communicate.” This does not mean that technical perfection is unimportant. The artist should seek the highest level of technical perfection compatible with effective communication. “Perfection is defined as the quality obtainable which still permits the delivery of

the communication” (Hubbard 1976b, 84). Often, the artist should be prepared to lower the level of perfection to allow communication to flow.

The same applies to technique. In the realm of art, communication is the first aim and a good technical rendition of the message is the second. But this second aim is always subordinate to the first. Technique should be as perfect as possible, but never so perfect as to compromise communication. “The communication is the primary target. The technical quality of it is the secondary consideration” (Hubbard 1976b, 84). If the technique endangers the transmission of the message, the artist should change the technique rather than the message.

It is, of course, also true that below a certain level of technique there is no art. But this, Hubbard insists, is precisely the difference between a professional artist and an amateur, a distinction he will return to in later years:

A professional in the arts is one who obtains communication with the art form at the minimum sacrifice of technical quality (...).

No communication is no art. To not do the communication for lack of technical perfection is the primary error. It is also an error not to push up the technical aspects of the result as high as possible (Hubbard 1976b, 84).

“Art for art’s sake”, Hubbard argues, always failed because it was “attempted perfection without communicating” (Hubbard 1976b, 84). We become artists when we learn how to communicate. Except in very rare cases, this does not come naturally, nor is achieved overnight. Normally, one becomes an artist gradually, reflecting on past failures to communicate. These are, in fact, engrams, and artists should be “rehabilitated” through Dianetics just as anybody else, yet considering that they have specific engrams of their own. In fact, “due to the nature of the Reactive Mind, full rehabilitation [of the artists] is achieved only through releasing and clearing” (Hubbard 1976b, 85).

It is not enough to communicate to ourselves. Artists should learn how to communicate to a wider audience: “A concept of the beholder and some understanding of his or her acceptance level is necessary to the formulation of a successful art form or presentation.” To determine how this result can be achieved, Hubbard returns to the premise that communication is based on familiarity. The beholder receives and understands the message if it is not too far away from what he or she regards as familiar. “All Art depends for its success upon the former experience and associations of the beholder” (Hubbard 1976b, 85).

Since beholders vary, there are no general rules. However, an artist should not easily conclude that communication fails because the audience is primitive, or its taste is not educated enough, or the message is too advanced and revolutionary. More often, the poor relationship with an audience is not caused by the audience itself, but by the artist's own engrams, based on previous failures. These engrams should be taken care of. "Scientology then is a must for any artist if he would succeed without heartbreak" (Hubbard 1976b, 85).

There are artists exhibiting "a lack of desire to communicate." This is how, Hubbard explains, old schools or forms of art decline and disappear. Some believe that they decline because, within a school or style, the artists of a later generation simply imitate those of the former and lack their masters' technical skills and genius. But the real problem is about communication, not "technology." Old forms decline because they become obsessed with technique and forget that the aim of art is communication. "All old forms become beset by technical musts and must nots and so cease to communicate" (Hubbard 1976b, 85).

There is also a "primary suppression," when a work of art is physically damaged or destroyed. On the other hand, "failing continuously to permit a non-destructive communication on the grounds of its lack of art is also suppressive" (Hubbard 1976b, 85). In-between these different forms of suppression lies art. Genuine art is the capacity to create works with the best technique and the maximum degree of perfection that are possible without harming communication.

Hubbard and Mathieu: "Art, More About" (1973)

When the thetan understands himself as the cause rather than the effect of the physical reality, *he* (the thetan is always referred to by Hubbard as male, although women are incarnated thetans too) perceives the world in a new way. If he masters the appropriate techniques, he is also able to produce art with a very high communication potential. On what role technique exactly plays, Hubbard mentioned in a bulletin of July 29, 1973 his discussions with "the late Hubert Mathieu" (Hubbard 1976c, 197). Although some who later wrote about Hubbard were unable to identify him or speculated he was a fictional character, in fact Mathieu (1897–1954) was a distinguished South Dakota illustrator and artist (Miller 1995), who worked for magazines Hubbard was familiar with.

Based *inter alia* on the ideas of Mathieu, Hubbard concluded that in the arts communication (the end) is more important than technique (the means), but technique is not unimportant. Artists who are well-trained can communicate in different styles, including the non-figurative, and the audience understands intuitively that they are real artists. Perceiving the world and representing it from the superior viewpoint of the thetan is not enough.

Hubbard illustrates this point with an anecdote, which may be real or fictional. In order to understand why certain ultra-modern works of art were successful, and others were not, he decided to write a story in an abstruse “acid prose” (Hubbard 1976c, 197) typical of cutting-edge novelists such as Gertrude Stein (1874–1946) or James Joyce (1882–1941)—and not typical at all of his usual fiction. Hubbard sent the story to the editor of a magazine that had published some of his short stories and, much to his surprise, was complimented for the quality of his new style and even invited to lunch to celebrate. Hubbard claims that he discussed the incident with Mathieu, who simply told him, “Well, you proved my point. There’s no mystery to it. Basically you’re a trained writer! It shows through” (Hubbard 1976c, 197).

This is the core of the 1973 technical bulletin “Art, More About.” Three works of modern art may appear very similar. In the intention of their authors, they also try to convey the same message. Yet, only one is successful. Why? According to Hubbard (and Mathieu), the successful artist is the one who decided to use an ultra-modern style, perhaps abstract or surrealist, but would have been capable of producing a persuasive painting in a more traditional style as well. The audience instinctively recognized that this artist was not a charlatan. He (or she) didn’t choose abstract art because he would not have been able to produce decent figurative works. No matter what style he used, his technique showed.

The key for successful art, Hubbard concluded, is “TECHNICAL EXPERTISE ITSELF ADEQUATE TO PRODUCE AN EMOTIONAL IMPACT” (Hubbard 1976c, 198, capitals in the original). Interestingly, to illustrate this point, Hubbard gives the example of the stage magician:

If he is a good magician he is a smooth showman. He isn’t showing them how he does his tricks. He is showing them a flawless flowing performance. This alone is providing the carrier wave that takes the substance of his actions to his audience. Though a far cry from fine art, perhaps, yet there is art in the way he does things. If he is good, the audience is seeing first of all, before anything else, the TECHNICAL EXPERTISE of his performance.

They are also watching him do things they know they can't do (Hubbard 1976c, 198, capitals in the original).

The example is interesting because among the artists trained in contemporary Scientology's art courses there are stage magicians, such as Stan Gerson. I interviewed him in 2018, and he told me how he tries to apply Hubbard's rules on art as communication to stage magic. Almost anticipating these future developments, Hubbard defended in 1973 the legitimacy of stage magic as a form of art (Hubbard 1976c, 198). Stage magicians also deliver a message through an "adequate" technical expertise.

But "how masterly an expertise [should be]? Not very masterly. Merely adequate" (Hubbard 1976c, 199). Hubbard warned again that "a lot of artists are overstraining to obtain a quality far above that necessary to produce an emotional impact" (Hubbard 1976c, 200). Once the technique has been acquired, the artist should feel safe enough to focus on communicating the message and experiment with whatever style he or she would regard as appropriate. The audience, educated or not, would recognize true art at any rate.

Interacting with the Audience: "Art and Communication" (1977) and "Fine Arts Versus Illustrations" (1979)

In two technical bulletins dated 26 September 1977 and 15 April 1979, Hubbard moved one step further in his theory of art as communication, by proposing a distinction between fine art and illustration. Hubbard may have resented that Mathieu, of whom he thought highly, was always dismissed by critics as a mere "illustrator" (Miller 1995, 63). On the other hand, Hubbard did not think equally highly of critics:

Usually nothing is required of an 'authority' except to say what is right, wrong, good, bad, acceptable or unacceptable. Too often the sole qualification of the authority (as in poor teaching of some subjects) is a memorized list of objects and their creators and dates with some hazy idea of what the work was (Hubbard 1979, 320).

A key principle of Hubbard's thought is that errors arise when words are not defined. Fine arts and mere "illustration," and good and bad arts, are distinguished based on mere "'individual taste,' contemporary standards and, unfortunately, even envy or jealousy" (Hubbard 1979, 320). "Contemporary" standards are largely arbitrary, and Hubbard calls this "invalidative" or

“destructive” criticism, not to be confused with “constructive” criticism, which identifies the problems in the artist’s communication and suggest “practical means of doing it better” (Hubbard 1979, 320).

In fact, Hubbard believes that the difference between art and illustration can be clearly defined, but only if we take into consideration *both* the artist and the audience. “True art always elicits a contribution from those who view or hear or experience it. By contribution is meant ‘adding to it’” (Hubbard 1979, 319), while in illustration no contribution is solicited from the audience. The distinction may seem obscure, and Hubbard tries to explain it through an example:

An illustration is ‘literal’ in that it tells everything there is to know. Let us say the illustration is a picture of a tiger approaching a chained girl. It does not really matter how well the painting is executed, it remains an illustration and it IS literal. But now let us take a small portion out of the scene and enlarge it. Let us take, say, the head of the tiger with its baleful eye and snarl. Suddenly we no longer have an illustration. It is no longer ‘literal.’ And the reason lies in the fact that the viewer can fit this expression into his own concepts, ideas or experience: he can supply the why of the snarl, he can compare the head to someone he knows. In short he can CONTRIBUTE to the head. The skill with which the head is executed determines the degree of response. Because the viewer can contribute to the picture, it is art (Hubbard 1979, 319, capitals in the original).

As he reiterated in 1979,

The division between fine arts and illustrations is that fine arts permit the viewer to contribute his own interpretations or originations to the scene whereas illustrations are ‘too literal’ and give him the whole works (Hubbard 1980b, 331).

The distinction derives from both Hubbard’s definition of art as communication and his theory of emotions. In true art, there is a two-way communication, which includes “the return flow from the person viewing a work” (Hubbard 1979, 319), where in illustration there is no such return flow. The artist tries to evoke emotions, but this can only be achieved if communication flows both ways:

To evoke an emotion in fine arts, the spectator must be invited to contribute part of the meaning. In a poster, the viewer is most often intended to be clobbered. In illustration, the viewer is intended to be informed. A work of fine art can elicit quite different emotional contributions from one member of an audience to the next as he is left free to some degree to contribute meaning and emotion at his choice. In fine arts, the viewer must supply something to make it complete. Fine arts evoke some chord in the viewer’s nature or past (Hubbard 1980b, 331).

Hubbard believes that his distinction may also solve an intractable problem among art historians, whether photography is a form of art. The problem, he claims, has gone unsolved because historians limited themselves to consider “how much the photographer has contributed to the ‘reality’ or ‘literalness’ in front of his camera, how he has interpreted it.” Here again, Hubbard takes into consideration not only the photographer, but also the audience. “The point is whether or not [a] photograph elicits a contribution from its viewer. If it does, it is art” (Hubbard 1979, 319).

Amateurs vs Professionals: “Art in Its Basics” (1979) and “A Professional” (1979)

1979 was a productive year for Hubbard’s theory of aesthetics. Having distinguished between fine arts and illustration, he introduced a parallel, but not overlapping, distinction between amateur and professional artists in two technical bulletins dated 4 March and 10 June:

Anybody can turn out amateur junk. Who looks at it? Who would look at it even if they were paid? The distance between amateur junk and an effective product is accomplished by knowing and following the basic rules and using them expertly. When you add to this dexterous handling of materials and equipment and then add some experience you have a professional (Hubbard 1980a, 326).

The distinction may seem obvious, but it isn’t, and Hubbard uses considerable Scientology jargon to explain it. The professional is the artist who knows “the rules,” but not all rules are created equal. In order not to go “out of communication,” the “senior data” should be identified:

A=A=A is the way most people handle data, some of these A’s however, really have a thousand times the importance of other data (Hubbard 1980a, 326).

There are two tools an artist should use to become a professional, the “ideal scene” and the “memory library.” Both concepts are important for Scientology. In 1970, Hubbard established as a basic rule that “a person must have an ideal scene with which to compare the existing scene” (Hubbard 1974a, 21). An “ideal scene” is how something should be to achieve its purpose. Scientologists are taught to compare the “existing scene” with the “ideal scene” to identify and remedy “situations,” i.e. serious departures of the existing scene from the ideal scene (Hubbard 1974c). Examples range from the mundane to the historical. The

“ideal scene” of a shoe shop is the sale of shoes capable of satisfying its customers in certain hours of the days and days of the week. If the shoes do not make the customers happy and willing to return, a “situation” is created in the shape of a significant departure from the ideal scene (Hubbard 1974c, 40–41).

But it was also the case that the situation in France before 1789, or in Russia before 1917, was perceived as a significant departure from the ideal scene. Only, the ideal scene for a nation is much more difficult to grasp, and therefore the French and Russian revolutions, in Hubbard’s opinion, largely failed:

Violent revolution comes about when the actual Ideal Scene has not been properly stated and when it excludes significant parts of the group. It’s no good having a revolution if the end product will be a FURTHER departure from the Ideal Scene (Hubbard 1974c, 39).

Interestingly, in his 1970 discussion of the ideal scene, Hubbard took art and aesthetics into account, while emphasizing that the artistic is not the *only* element of an ideal scene:

There are many factors which add up to an ideal scene. If the majority of these forward the purpose of the activity, it can be said to be a sane ideal. If an ideal which does not forward the activity in any way is the ideal being stressed then a fixed idea is present and had better be inspected. This could be said to be a very harsh utilitarian view of things. But it is not. The artistic plays its role in any ideal. (...) An ideal studio for an artist could be very beautiful or very ugly so long as it served him to produce his art. If it was very beautiful yet hindered his artistic activities it would be a very crazy ideal scene. A handsome factory that produced would be a high ideal. But its nearness to raw materials, transport and worker housing are the more important factors in an ideal of a factory (Hubbard 1974b, 24).

When discussing the professional artist in 1979, Hubbard built on these principles and insisted that a professional,

when he views things, he looks for what’s good in them and neglects the poor, low-grade things. The reason he does this is so he has an ideal scene. Without an ideal scene, he just operates off technical data and produces, artwise, a low quality product and isn’t a professional. Without an ideal scene, he can never get a preconception of the shot. In viewing things that approach an ideal scene, the true professional works out how they did it and when presented with similar tasks of production, can bring off things which approach an ideal scene in his own work (Hubbard 1980c, 346).

While the amateur “looks at everything as to whether he ‘likes them’ or ‘not likes them,’” the professional “accumulates ideal scenes” and builds “a memory library to compare his own products to” (Hubbard 1980c, 346). A “memory library” should not be confused with the “memory bank,” which in Scientology

corresponds to the reactive mind. While the memory bank is a collection of engrams, a memory library is a collection of ideal scenes.

For an example, here is how a Scientology photographer, quoting the above passage by Hubbard, explains how to use the memory library for taking pictures of his children:

Point here is that I find it quite useful to browse similar pictures on Flickr from great photographers, look at things I really like, and then work out how it is that they did them. Then, I strive to create similar effects myself—or, when presented with cute situations, I have a sort of ‘memory library’ to compare to. An example was a friend who I saw took some amazing photos of his daughter on the beach. He had some neat photos taken down low where the sand blurred out as the beach faded into the distance. So, I tried getting a similar effect with mine, last time we hit the beach when we were in Florida (“Tad (Scientology Parent)” 2011).

A diligent “Scientology parent” knows that, to produce artistic photographs of his children, he first needs to collect ideal scenes into an adequate memory library.

Art Techniques (1980–1984)

Almost to the end of his life (1986), Hubbard continued to investigate the relationship between artistic creation and technique. He realized that too much insistence on technique could lead to the conclusion that art was perspiration only, with a limited role for inspiration. He cautioned that artistic creation, just as any other creation, should be a joy for the artist:

Force yourself to smile and you’ll soon stop frowning. Force yourself to laugh and you’ll soon find something to laugh about. Wax enthusiastic and you’ll very soon feel so. A being causes his own feelings. The greatest joy there is in life is creating. Splurge on it! (Hubbard 1984b, 416).

In one of his latest utterances on art, dated 10 March 1984, Hubbard also reminded artists that, although messages not communicated through appropriate technique would never reach the audience, the message itself remained essential:

Successful works of art have a message. It may be implicit or implied, emotional, conceptual or literal, inferred or stated. But a message nonetheless. This applies to any form of art (...).

Many elements and much expertise go into the creating of successful works of art. Dominant amongst them is message, for this integrates the whole and brings comprehension and appreciation to those for whom it is intended. Understanding is the

base of affinity, reality and communication. A message is fundamental to understanding” (Hubbard 1984g, 555).

The dialectic relationship between message and technique, on the other hand, becomes part of the technique itself through the notion of “montage,” defined by Hubbard as a four-stage sequence, “a formula that helps one to achieve clear aesthetic communication of art” (Hubbard 1984a, 6):

1. Figure out what your message is.
2. Decide to communicate the message.
3. Put things or arrangements in that contribute to the message.
4. Take out or exclude things or arrangements which don’t contribute to it (Hubbard 1984a, 5).

A montage is “a series of shots with one message” (Hubbard 1984a, 5). Shots should not be confused with scenes or pictures. A picture is a scene communicating a message, while

A shot is anything and it has no message in its own right and doesn’t talk unless connected to other shots (...).

Individual shots in a montage have little meaning in themselves individually but when cut together deliver a single message. By confusing (...) a montage shot and a scene, one gets very little audience reaction and after all, that’s the name of the game (Hubbard 1984a, 5).

Montage consists of “integration” of different, and compatible, shots, and without integration “you don’t have art” (Hubbard 1984a, 6). The language comes from cinema, but integration is the technical key of all arts.

Integration is learned, sometimes painfully, although for certain happy few the skills can also be “native” (Hubbard 1984c, 534). To learn, artists should become able to look at their own works in two very particular ways. The first is defined by Hubbard as the capacity

to view any piece of work in a new unit of time each time one views it. One has to be able to sweep aside all past considerations concerning any piece of work which has been changed or is under handling and see it or hear it in a brand-new unit of time as though he had never heard of it before. By doing this, he actually sees or hears exactly what is in front of him, not his past considerations concerning it (Hubbard 1984c, 534).

This may seem complicated, but Hubbard claims it is the secret explaining why many artists fail. When they look at their works, they do not see them as they

really are *now* but still perceive their precedent versions they were not happy about, which have been corrected in the meantime:

Some painters, for instance, will redo and redo and redo a painting up to an inch thick of paint when, possibly, several of those redos were quite acceptable. But he continued to try to correct the first impressions which were no longer there. By not viewing his painting in a new unit of time as though he had never seen it before, he cannot actually get a correct impression of what is in front of him (Hubbard 1984c, 534).

Hubbard claims that professional artists are actually aware of this problem, and try to overcome it by looking at their works in a mirror or through a reducing glass rather than directly. This relates to the second skill any artist need: the ability of seeing each work from the point of view of the intended audience, which may be very much different from the professional point of view of the artist. Obviously, the second skill presupposes the first, since the audience would look at the work of art in its present version, and would be unaware of any previous version still present in the artist's mind. Summing up,

what really separates the flubbers and amateurs from the professional are these two skills. One has to be able to view or hear anything he is working on at any time in a brand-new unit of time. And one has to be able to see or hear his production from the viewpoint of the eventual audience. In other words, the really excellent professional can be fluid in time, not stuck in the past and can be facile in space location. There is no reason why one should be stuck on the time track or fixated in just his own location in space. Actually, just knowing that these skills can exist is often enough the key to acquiring them (Hubbard 1984c, 536).

Armed with these two skills, the artist will be able to build the work of art as integration and composition. Composition and integration are not synonymous, but are strictly related. Hubbard claimed that composition had not been clearly defined before him, and this lack of a definition became the source of much confusion. For him, composition is the sum of “any or all of the actions necessary to integrate and give meanings to a message” (Hubbard 1984f, 543). These “actions” are obviously different in different forms of art. For example, for a painter the elements of composition will be “the actual objects to be shown, color, color harmony and color depth, depth perspective, geometric design and the use of mood lines, and calligraphy” (Hubbard 1984f, 542). Some of these elements are discussed by Hubbard in more details than others.

As for “the actual objects to be shown,” Hubbard believes that each work of art should have a “center of interest.” Two or more centers in general do not create integration but confusion: putting them together is theoretically possible, but

very difficult. Here, Hubbard is close to those religious critics of modern art, such as Hans Sedlmayr (1896–1984), who lamented the “loss of the center,” making contemporary works more difficult to understand (Sedlmayr 1948).

For Hubbard, the center of the work, and the main ancillary objects, should be clearly identified and identifiable (Hubbard 1984f, 543–44). More subtly, they should also determine the dominant and secondary geometric shapes in the composition. Here, Hubbard also introduces the notion of “mood lines,” i.e. abstract line forms that influence the audience’s emotional response (Hubbard 1984f, 544). Vertical lines communicate drama and inspiration, horizontal lines, happiness and calm, and so on. There are several systems of mood lines described in manuals for artists. In the posthumously collected edition of Hubbard’s bulletins on art (Hubbard 1991, 76–77). Scientology used the system of mood lines developed by visionary landscape architect John Ormsbee Simonds (1913–2005). Simonds’ theory of form was influenced by Zen Buddhism and by Anthroposophical theories he was exposed to through his mentor at Harvard, Marcel Breuer (1902–1981), formerly of the Bauhaus (Cramer 2005).

Another common tool Hubbard recommended to artists, the color wheel (Hubbard 1984e, 539–540), was promoted in his times through references to market surveys, but in fact had been first used in a different context by Robert Fludd (1574–1637) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) (Godwin 2017). Like many Theosophists (and market researchers), Hubbard believed that colors correspond to specific emotional states.

Hubbard suggested the systematic use of the wheel for exploring color harmony and color association. The principles he mentioned were fairly standard, and referred to the positions of the colors on the wheel: (a) “direct harmony,” or use as complementary of the color directly opposite the key color; (b) “related colors,” or use of colors immediately adjacent to the key color; (c) “split complementary,” or use of the colors directly adjacent to the complementary color identified through direct harmony; and (d) “triadic harmony,” or use of the colors two spaces to either side of the complementary color. Hubbard, however, advised that “when you use triadics and splits, they have to be in small areas” (Hubbard 1984e, 539).

In addition to harmony and association, Hubbard mentioned color depth, defined as

the apparency [sic] of depth (relative distance from the viewer) characteristic of different colors and depending on the background against which they appear (Hubbard 1984e, 540).

“Warm colors appear to advance while cool hues recede from the observer” (Hubbard 1984d, 537). Color depth is in turn relates to “depth perspective,” constructed through a variety of techniques, of which Hubbard claimed in 1984 to have offered “the first codification” (Hubbard 1984d, 538). His classification distinguishes between (1) depth by aerial perspective (“distant areas go hazy; near areas go sharp”); (2) depth by color; (3) depth by linear perspective; (4) depth by light; (5) depth by shadow, or by “light as shadow”; (6) depth by solidity, as “solidity of shapes is different than shadow actions. The solidity itself is special. A thing can be drawn to be solid. Then one can add perspective”; (7) depth by focus (“things when quite near are sharp. Things that are far are a bit blurry”); and (8) depth by lateral movement (Hubbard 1984d, 537–538).

Finally, Hubbard examined the cases when a text should be integrated into a work of art. It is important, he notes, that calligraphy, or the style of type or lettering, integrates with the rest of the work:

From the viewpoint of integration, flowing color patterns or lines have no integration whatsoever with a sharp, modernistic style of typeface. The type doesn’t align with the art form, so the two don’t integrate. They don’t seem to belong together, so they don’t seem to be art. To integrate with flowing color patterns, the calligraphy or lettering would have to fit with lines that give the impression of “in motion” or “flowing” or something similar. Different color patterns or geometric lines would require different types of calligraphy. In other words, in an ad or other design the calligraphy or type style should align and integrate with the art form used. And the type style itself should agree with the colors (Hubbard 1984f, 545).

Ultimately, integration remains the key of the whole discussion of art techniques by Hubbard.

II. Scientology and the Artists: Some Examples

Among modern new religious movements, Scientology is unique for its conscious effort of transmitting its worldview to the artists, at the same time teaching them how to be more apt at communicating their art to their audiences, through its courses and seminaries taught in its Celebrity Centres. Yet, Scientology’s influence on artists is understudied. One of the reasons lies in the attacks and discrimination some artists have received because of their association

with Scientology, particularly in Germany. There, abstract painter and textile artist Bia Wunderer is one of the artists who had exhibitions cancelled because she was “exposed” as a Scientologist (here, as elsewhere in this paragraph, I rely on personal interviews rather than on written sources). This made some artists understandably reluctant to discuss their relationship with Scientology. However, in Germany, of all places, artists were involved in Scientology since its beginnings. When he died in 2015, painter and sculptor Waki Zöllner (1935–2015), who had joined Scientology in 1968, was the German with more years of Scientology training.

The most famous international artist who took Scientology courses for several years, starting in 1972, was the Austrian-born Gottfried Helnwein (b. 1948). He became increasingly involved in Scientology’s activities, with all his family, and was attacked by anti-cult critics, who promoted even a book against him (Reichelt 1997). This generated in turn court cases and Helnwein’s increasing reluctance to discuss his religious beliefs.

In 1975, Helnwein told Stuttgart’s Scientology magazine *College* that “Scientology has caused a consciousness explosion in me” (Helnwein 1975). In 1989, in an interview in Scientology’s *Celebrity*, Helnwein elaborated that Scientology offers to artists invaluable tools to survive in a world often hostile to them, but also gave him a “new viewpoint” and an understanding how “people would react to my art” (Helnwein 1989a, 10–11).

American novelist William Burroughs (1914–1997) took several Scientology courses between 1959 and 1968. Later, he rejected Scientology as an organization, while maintaining an appreciation for its techniques. In 1990, he wrote an essay about Helnwein, calling him “a master of surprised recognition,” which he defined as the art “to show the viewer what he knows but does not know that he knows” (Burroughs 1990, 3) In this sense, “surprised recognition” may also describe the moment when a thetan “remembers” his true nature.

Helnwein’s unique style and approach to reality, a “photorealism” where paintings often look as photographs (but aren’t), derive from multiple sources. Ultimately, however, we can perhaps see in Helnwein’s works an attempt to depict the world as a thetan sees it, finally realizing he is its creator. Seen as it really is, the world is not always pleasant, and includes suppression and totalitarianism. Some of Helnwein’s most famous paintings include suffering children. Helnwein exposes there the society’s unacknowledged cruelty. But

there is also hope. The artist is aware of Hubbard's ideas about children as spiritual beings occupying young bodies. Armed with the technology, children can survive and defeat suppression.

Criticizing psychiatry's abuses is a cause dear to Scientologists. In 1979, leading Austrian psychiatrist Heinrich Gross (1915–2005), who participated in the Nazi program for the euthanasia of mentally handicapped children, defended himself by stating that children were killed in a somewhat humane way, with poison. Helnwein reacted with a watercolor, *Lives Unworthy of Being Lived*, depicting a child "humanely" poisoned by Gross (The State Russian Museum 1998; Schröder and Lahner 2013).

Helnwein also looked provocatively at Nazism and the Holocaust as an evil the German and Austrian society still refused to confront. In his famous *Epiphany I* (1996), the child may or may not be a young Adolf Hitler (1889–1945), but the Three Kings are clearly Nazi officers. Helnwein wants the audience, as Hubbard suggested, to contribute part of the meaning and to understand by itself.

Born in 1948, Helnwein reports how he escaped from Vienna's suffocating conformism through comics, something the Austrian educational establishment did not approve of at that time. He maintains a fascination for Disney's Donald Duck and the creator of several Donald stories, Carl Barks (1901–2000), who became his friend. Both Mickey Mouse and Donald are featured in Helnwein's work. Barks, Helnwein wrote, created a

decent world where one could get flattened by steam-rollers and perforated by bullets without serious harm. A world in which the people still looked proper (...). And it was here that I met the man who would forever change my life – a man who (...) is the only person today that has something worthwhile saying – Donald Duck (Helnwein 1989b, 16).

Perhaps, again, Barks' Duckburg became a metaphor for Helnwein of the "clear" world created by a technology capable of restoring the thetans to their proper role. In 2013, Helnwein was honored by a great retrospective at Vienna's Albertina, which attracted 250,000 visitors, a far cry from when the artist was discriminated as a Scientologist.

While Helnwein became reserved on his relationship with Scientology, other artists declared it openly. Scientology through its Celebrity Centres also created a community of artists, knowing and meeting each other across different countries, continents, and styles. Several Scientologist artists decided to live either in Los

Angeles or in Clearwater, Florida, near the main centers of the Church of Scientology.

Scientologist artists do not share a single style, as is true for artists who are Theosophists or Catholics. For example, German-born Carl-W. Röhrig (b. 1953), currently residing in Switzerland, calls his art “fantastic realism” and is also influenced by fantasy literature, surrealism, and popular esotericism (von Barkawitz 1999), as evidenced by his successful deck of tarot cards (Röhrig and Marzano-Fritz 1997). There are, however, common themes among Scientology artists, as evidenced in interviews I conducted with a number of them (the subsequent quotes, unless otherwise indicated, are from those interviews).

Röhrig is among the few Scientologist artists who included explicit references to Scientology doctrines in some of his paintings, including *The Bridge* (2009), i.e. the journey to become free from the effects of the reactive mind. Röhrig and other artists who are Scientologists, including the American Pomm Hepner and Randy South (aka Carl Randolph), also contributed murals to churches of Scientology around the world. California Scientologist artist Barry Shereshevsky devoted several paintings to the ARC triangle. California sculptor D. Yoshikawa Wright moved “from Western to more Eastern thought,” rediscovering his roots, and finally found in Scientology something that, he says, “merges East and West.” About his *Sculptural Waterfalls*, he comments that the stone represents the thetan, the water the physical universe as motion, and their relationship the rhythm, the dance of life. Another Scientologist sculptor (and painter), the Italian Eugenio Galli, experiments with rhythm and motion through different abstract compositions all connected with the idea of “transcendence,” i.e. transcending our present, limited status.

Artists who went through Scientology’s *Art Course* all insisted on art as communication. Winnipeg-born New York abstract artist Beatrice Findlay told me that “art is communication, why the heck would you do it otherwise?” She also insisted that Hubbard “never said abstract art communicated less” and had a deep appreciation of music, a form of abstract communication par excellence. Hubbard’s ideas about composition are translated by Findlay into peculiar abstract lines and color (Carasso 2003). At least the name of another Canadian abstract artist who was once a Scientologist, Richard Borthwick Gorman (1935–2010), should be mentioned here, since recently anti-Scientologists, in a bizarre development, claimed that his 1968 new covers for some of Hubbard’s books

carried subliminal messages and were an attempt at brainwashing those who would look at the covers (Shaw and Raine 2017).

Other Scientologist artists apply the same principles to a more traditional approach to landscape. They include the Italian Franco Farina, the Canadian Ross Munro, and the American Erin Hanson, whose depictions of national parks and other iconic American landscapes in a style she calls “Open Impressionism” won critical acclaim (Hanson 2014; Hanson 2016).

Pomm Hepner is both a professional artist and a senior technical supervisor at Scientology’s church in Pasadena, as well as a leader in Artists for Human Rights, an advocacy organization started by Scientologists. As Scientology taught her “on the spiritual world,” she evolved, she says, from “pretty things” to “vibrations,” from “a moment that exists to a moment I create... I can bring beauty to the world and no longer need to depend on the world bringing beauty to me.” By adopting the point of view of the thetan, she tried to “reverse” the relationship between the artist and the physical universe. A similar experience emerges in the artistic and literary career of Scientologist Renée Duke (1927–2011). Although she had painted before, she became a professional painter only later in life, after she had encountered Scientology (Duke 2012).

There is a difference between how Scientologist artists were discriminated against in Europe and some mild hostility their beliefs received occasionally in the U.S. However, they all stated in my interviews that modern society is often disturbed by artists and tries to suppress them, singling out psychiatry as a main culprit, a recurring theme in Scientology. *The Trick Cyclist* by Randolph South depicts well-known psychiatrists and “was created to draw attention to the evil practice of psychiatry.” Most Scientologist artists share an appreciation of Helnwein, although they may be very far away from both his art and his persona. Some address the theme of suffering children with obvious Helnweinian undertones. The youngest child of L. Ron Hubbard, Arthur Conway Hubbard (b. 1958), himself became a painter and studied under Helnwein, although he also produced works in a different style. In some of his paintings, he used his own blood.

Pollution as a form of global suppression and Scientology’s mission to put an end to it are a main theme for Röhrig. Landscapes and cultures in developing countries are also in danger of being suppressed. This is a key subject in the work of Swiss Scientologist artist Claude Sandoz, who spends part of his time in the

Caribbean, in Saint Lucia. Exhibitions of Sandoz’s works, which blends Caribbean and European themes and styles, took place in several Swiss museums (see Stutzer and Walser Beglinger 1994).

Some of those who took Scientology’s *Art Course* are “commercial” artists. The course told them that this is not a shame and hailed success as healthy. They believe that the boundary between commercial and fine art is not clear-cut. Some of them were encouraged to also engage in fine arts. Veteran Scientologist artist Peter Green, who also produced one of the most famous portraits of Hubbard, claims he understood through Scientology that commercial artists are not “coincidentally artists,” but have their own way of communicating and presenting a message. Green manifested this approach in his iconic posters, such as a famous one of Jimi Hendrix (1942–1970). Green also contributed to horror comics magazines published by the Warren company in California, and keeps producing his successful *Politicards*, i.e. trading and playing cards with politicians (see Kelly 2011). He insists that you can “paint to live and remain sane. And in the end, you may live to paint too.” Randy South insisted that, even when working for advertising, artists may “perceive the physical universe” as “not overwhelming spirituality” but “vice versa.” He added that “Hubbard said that life is a game. I want to play the game, and it’s fun.”

The portraits of another Scientologist artist, Robert Schoeller, are sold for commercial purposes, but he believes that “by painting somebody I make him spiritual.” In fact, there have been museum exhibitions of his portraits around the central theme of spirituality. Similar considerations may be made about an Italian portrait artist, Domenico Mileto, and for Jim Warren’s popular lithographs and Disney-related themes. Other Scientologist artists became photographers and cartoonists. Carolyn Kelly (1945–2017) was the daughter of well-known American cartoonist Walt Kelly (1913–1973), the creator of *Pogo*. She was a cartoonist and illustrator in her own right, and was among those who designed her father’s *Pogo* when the strip was shortly revived in the 1990s.

Some (but not all) Scientologist artists took an interest in popular esoteric discourse. Before meeting Scientology, Pomm Hepner, was exposed to Anthroposophy by studying at a Steiner school. Röhrig uses the Tarots as well as the Zodiac. He explains he doesn’t believe in the *content* of astrology or Tarot, as “they are effects and as a Scientologist you try to be cause,” but they provide a widely shared *language* and are “a very good tool to communicate.” Other

Scientologist artists approach in a similar way Eastern spirituality. For instance, Marlene Rose's glass sculptures often feature the Buddha. Rose is one of the artists who decided to live in Clearwater, Florida, near the Flag headquarters of the Church of Scientology. The area offers a favorable environment for artists working with glass and in April 2017 nearby St. Petersburg opened the Imagine Museum devoted to this artistic medium, with Marlene Rose featured in the opening exhibit.

“We were one hundred students doing the same [Scientology] course. Suddenly, the room took the most beautiful characteristics. Everything became magical. I became more me. The room did not change but how I perceived it changed,” reported Susana Díaz-Rivera, a Mexican Scientologist painter. Several artists told how the “static” experience, which in Scientology language means realizing your nature as thetan, completely changed how they perceive the world. Then, “art is about duplicating what you perceive. Perception is communication,” as Yoshikawa Wright told me. Díaz-Rivera struggled to recapture and express this perception of herself as a thetan. She tried both painting and photographing in different locations, including Rome and Los Angeles, and using mirrors. “The spiritual part, she said, emerges through the mirrors.”

Scientology, the artists who attended its courses reported, offers to the artist a number of suggestions, aimed at “putting them back in the driver’s seat” (Peter Green) of their lives, exposing the “myth” of the dysfunctional, starving artist. Scientology also creates and cultivates a community of artists, and does more than offering practical advice. By interiorizing the gnostic narrative of the thetan, artists learn to perceive the physical universe in a different way. Then, they try to share this perception through communication, with a variety of different techniques and styles, inviting the audience to enhance their works with further meanings.

Sixty-two sculptures in the Grand Atrium of the new Flag Building in Clearwater, Florida, inaugurated in 2013, illustrate the fundamental concepts of Scientology. The fact that these concepts had to be explained to the artists, none of them a Scientologist, is significant. Artists who are Scientologists normally are inspired by Scientology in their work, but prefer not to “preach” or illustrate its doctrines explicitly. On the other hand, although not realized by Scientologists,

the Flag complex of sculptures is part and parcel of an art inspired by Hubbard and Scientology.

In 2008, the Los Angeles magazine *Ange* described the circle of young artists who are Scientologists, including painter and novelist Mercedes Helnwein (Gottfried Helnwein’s daughter) and promising abstract artist Vanessa Prager as the “first generation of casual Scientologists,” whose religious affiliation caused less controversy (Brown 2008). Visual arts seem to offer an ideal window to discuss the worldview and multiple influences of Scientology independently of the usual legal and other controversies.

III. Conclusion

Although neglected by critics, aesthetic theory appears to be an important part of Hubbard’s system. The founder of Scientology left to his religion a complete set of theoretical tools about art, artistic techniques, and art history. They contribute to explaining why the impact of Scientology on visual artists has been significant, and why post-Hubbard Scientologists still devote a substantial amount of time to spreading their founder’s ideas about the arts among artists, something that goes well beyond the recruitment of celebrities for public relations purposes.

Ultimately, Hubbard saw the lives of successful individuals as works of art themselves: “Living itself is an art form” (Hubbard 1976c, 199). Writing in 1976, he started, not without humor, by mentioning an art of physical appearance and dressing:

One puts up a mock-up. It doesn’t happen by accident. One has to know how to wash his nylon shirts and girls have to know what mascara runs and that too many candy bars spoil the silhouette, quite in addition to the pancreas. (...)

Even a beard and baggy pants require a certain art if they are to be the expertise adequate to produce an emotional impact (Hubbard 1976c, 199–200).

However, he soon became very much serious:

Some people are themselves a work of art because they have mastered the small practical techniques of living that give them a quality adequate to produce an emotional impact even before anyone knows their name or what they do (Hubbard 1976c, 1999).

Although he didn't mention it explicitly, one can follow Hugh Urban in thinking that Hubbard both cultivated the romantic ideal of living his life, as a thinker and religious founder as well as an artist, as the ultimate work of art, and is perceived by his followers (inter alia) as the physical embodiment of what art is all about (Urban 2017).

Hubbard rarely mentions the word "beauty" in his writings consecrated to the arts. However, it is very much implied there that the supreme beauty Scientology has to offer is the enlightened life of the realized individual, from the clear to the operating thetan, of which Hubbard himself is regarded as the model. That good lives are the highest works of art has been proclaimed by several religions, old and new. The Roman Catholic Church presented this doctrine in a 2006 document on beauty (Pontifical Council for Culture 2006).

There is, however, a significant difference, and one that is crucial for understanding the nature of Scientology. The beauty of a saintly life in the 2006 Vatican document does not derive from a technique, but from a personal relationship with God incarnate as Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic Church reiterated in 2018 in the doctrinal letter *Placuit Deo* that its spirituality is very much different from Gnosticism, where salvation (and beauty) are achieved through knowledge and techniques (Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith 2018). Scientology remains a modern Gnosticism, and Hubbard's offer is that of a religious technology that, when correctly applied, would infallibly produce happiness for the individuals and the world, as well as beauty and effective communication through art.

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