

# Avant-garde and Deconstruction

## An Analysis of Andy Warhol's Dionysian Spirit Dimension

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### ABSTRACT

Andy Warhol, the artist known as the "king of consumption", has reached his peak in popularity and influence in the second half of the 20th century. Through a series of artistic expressions of anti-notation, breaking away meaning and removing value, his works have caused deep impact and subversion of modern aesthetic moral principles. This coincides with Nietzsche's philosophical proposition in "The Birth of Tragedy", because he saw through the "illusion" of art. Based on this, this article intends to cut to the case from three perspectives of the discrimination analysis of Dionysian Spirit art, Warhol's avant-garde and pioneer spirit inheritance of modern art, and his deconstruction and irony presentation of postmodern art, so as to deeply analyze the spirit dimension of Dionysian Spirit in Andy Warhol's art.

*Keywords: Andy Warhol, Dionysus Spirit, avant-garde, deconstruction, fashion*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Andy Warhol, who was active in the art world as the most influential artist in the second half of the 20th century, was an advocate and leader of American Pop Art. His important position in art history comes not only from his stylized mass copying, mass production and serialized image language features, from his own techniques, self-image packaging and promotion of the consumer society, but also from his success in the art market and his cross-border identity. He is a painter and also enters into the art of photography; he makes movies and is the creator of installation art; he writes his autobiography as a writer and is also a publisher; he composes for famous rock bands and also acts as their agent. The charm of this popular idol swept the fashion, social and music fields at that time and he was a well-deserved star artist. Andy Warhol has achieved tremendous achievements and fame in all fields involved, which makes him successfully create a strong brand effect, known as "the king of consumption". Jean Baudrillard, a famous French critical theorist, specifically spoke in an interview with Françoise Gaillard on the topic of Andy Warhol: "The only thing that excites me in my words about art is about Andy Warhol, Pop Art and surrealism. I believe that when art falls into a very important turning movement and before all the changes come, Andy Warhol is the only artist

who can put himself at the forefront. It may just be lucky or the destiny that makes all the features in his works — mediocre exhibition, mechanized poses and images, especially his idol worship — he turns all of this into a mediocre event. It's him, not anyone else! Subsequent others just imitate him, but only he is the greatest simulant person with a matching style!" [1] In Baudrillard's opinion, Andy Warhol is "an artist who brings nothingness to the core of the image". His "machine-style snobbery" forms a "challenge to aesthetic moral principles". He "abandons the subject of art and the subject of artist, and evacuates from creative behavior", thus "standing on the opposite of aesthetics" and is a "simulant genius". [2] In the deepest sense, Baudrillard's high praise for Andy Warhol is actually due to Warhol's penetrating the "illusion" of art. The essence of this penetrating is precisely the most important dimension of the "Dionysian Spirit". Therefore, it is on this level that this article intends to delve into the subtle and internal similarity and affinity between Andy Warhol's artistic spirit and Dionysian consciousness. Then, the concept and importance of the Dionysian Spirit must first be sorted out and clarified.

### II. DISCRIMINATION ANALYSIS OF DIONYSIAN SPIRIT ART

#### A. Discrimination analysis of Dionysian Spirit and Phoebus Spirit

Nietzsche created the important philosophical concept of "Dionysian Spirit" in his masterpiece of artistic philosophy "The Birth of Tragedy", and the

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opposite dialectical concept is called "Phoebus Spirit". The two are also called "Dionysus Spirit" and "Apollo Spirit" respectively, both of which are derived from Greek mythology's two gods.[3] Among them, Apollo, the Phoebus, is one of the gods of the kingdom of heaven. Nietzsche believes that he points to hallucinations, dreams and order, thus corresponding to the spatial plastic arts such as sculpture, epic, myth, etc.; and Dionysus, the god of wine, is the god belonging to the land. He points to "drunk" and "indulgence". Nietzsche thinks this corresponds to the musical art of time. It can also be said that the Phoebus is the god of reason, which implies constraints and norms — he always uses a rational framework to determine various things in the world, objectify it, and thus be incorporated into a rational order. In this way, the human form that is illuminated by the light of reason is a "dream", that is, an illusion. Because the human impulse to the sun-god is reflected in various constructed rational orders, human beings regard such a constructed order as the truth of the world and the only possibility of the world, and all disordered things are constantly being ordered, forming a shell that can survive in it, and then get a sense of belonging in this orderly state. However, the essence of the Dionysian Spirit is very different from it, and it can even be said that it stands on the opposite side of this "rational" glory. He is a patron saint of reproductive power, representing wildness and symbolizing indulgence and fanaticism. What fills his spirit is intuitive light and the breaking out of vitality. Therefore, in Nietzsche's opinion, Dionysian Spirit has overflowed the principle of reason, and manifested as a pure vital rage. Under the Dionysian state, all rational principles will no longer work, and humans will directly face and encounter nature and their own limitations, and in such an encounter will usher in a state of mad hilarity, and in this state will realize a return to the ontology and the whole.

Therefore, in Nietzsche's opinion, the Dionysian Spirit is the highest truth, because it is the essence of life and the essence of art. He presets two types of artists based on the Phoebus Spirit and the Dionysian Spirit respectively. Artists tending towards the Phoebus always appear to be complacent because they obey the existing art and aesthetic principles. Because these rules and orders are formulated and implemented by human beings, they are actually very far away from the real nature; they are not real realities, but false and "illusions" in the world and real life. Nietzsche admires the artist of the Dionysian Spirit. In his view, the real nature is chaotic, dynamic, and impossible to be dominated by any rules and morals made by humans. In other words, real artists should break down barriers, overcome weakness and fear in the soul, and expose their spirit and inspiration to the power and vitality of life. Because the true essence of life is to break rules

and restrictions, not god or morality. The energy of Dionysus is connected with the energy of restless life, and the artists who are called by Dionysus follow and immerse themselves in the great intuition and inner impulse, and then form a strong resistance to the existing practices and laws. In "The Birth of Tragedy", Nietzsche highly praised the height of the Phoebus Spirit achieved by the Greeks through myths, epics, architecture, and sculptures, and at the same time praised the dimension of Dionysian Spirit of the Greeks in breaking through the so-called Phoebus illusion. He believes that the Phoebus principle corresponds to "individualization", that is, it is separated from chaos and illuminated; however, this principle of individualization is the root of creating divisions and boundaries between people and things, and things and things. Conversely, the Dionysian Spirit corresponds to the principle of "de-individualization", which is a principle of liberation; he believes that during the harvest of grapes in ancient Greece, people will light a bonfire on the night of the harvest, indulge in wines and carnival, and "the earth finally shakes hands with her prodigal son". That is to say, the real big life is a whole, and the individual consciousness separates from it to form excitement and pain. Excitement comes from the construction of the Phoebus, and pain comes from the limitations of the individual. The Dionysian Spirit is the great joy resulting from the direct encounter with the human existence ontology after seeing through and breaking through the various "illusions" constructed by Phoebus Spirit. Therefore, artists with the wisdom of Dionysus are always committed to overthrow the boundaries of moral and cultural norms. They follow Dionysus, who serves as the future god, and revert to the whole life in the "primitive pain".

#### *B. Discrimination analysis of Dionysus Art and Romanticism Art*

The reason for sorting out and discriminating the Dionysian Spirit and Romanticism Art is that on the one hand, it helps to further clarify the particularity and importance of Dionysian Spirit, so that people can form a clearer understanding of the connection between Dionysian Spirit and Andy Warhol's artistic spirit to be discussed later. Another important aspect is that, in Nietzsche's view of art, the difference between Dionysian Spirit and Romanticism Art actually reflects the distinction between modern art and postmodern art. Even Nietzsche later turned away from his greatest idol Wagner for precisely this reason. Because Nietzsche believes that music is the art form that benefits people's psychological expression and is the greatest copy of mankind, so he places music in the supremacy. The early Nietzsche believed that Wagner was an artistic genius, and at that time they shared a common belief; they all believed that art is a public intermediary that breaks the boundaries and isolation of life. Only

through art can reconciliation of life be achieved and through the public function of art can the interpersonal boundaries be broken down — to achieve empathy between people or group integration in the carnival of art, so as to achieve a kind of human community's fate sense. Unfortunately, Nietzsche finally discovered that Wagner, a romantic artist, was still an adherent of the principle of modernity, and did not possess the Dionysian Spirit he requested, so they eventually parted ways. He even wrote later famous works on this matter, namely "Wagner Incident" and "Nietzsche Anti-Wagner". Nietzsche attributed Wagner's music to romantic music, and he himself continued to follow the path of asking the character of Dionysus' music. It can be seen that the biggest difference between Dionysus Art and Romanticism Art is still the attitude towards modernity. Although they all stand on the standpoint of individual aesthetic sensibility to criticize the highly homogenized and abstract life state of modern society, the romantic aesthetic salvation theory is still based on modern aesthetic principles. And the ultimate goal of modern aesthetic principles is to confirm the human sensibility subjectivity, and on this basis, it emphasizes a display of human vitality. But Nietzsche, who wanted to wave goodbye to the entire modernity with reason as his fundamental principle, the Dionysian Spirit he preached was to abandon the principle of subjectivity and rational reflection, "revaluate all values", and break everything including self-discipline rule. Of course, despite Nietzsche's overall rejection of modern rational principles, he still seeks a way out from the standpoint of modern time consciousness, so he who has just opened the postmodern door has not yet walked out of the threshold of modernity. In other words, the Dionysian Spirit from the perspective of modernity can still be analyzed.

Therefore, after making a basic review and determination of the concept, characteristics and importance of the Dionysian Spirit, it is possible to proceed from this perspective to further analyze and explain the Dionysus consciousness or Dionysus wisdom in the artistic spirit of Andy Warhol.

### **III. THE MESSENGER OF DIONYSUS — ANDY WARHOL'S INHERITING OF THE AVANT-GARDE AND PIONEER SPIRIT OF MODERN ART**

Andy Warhol's catering to the Dionysian Spirit is mainly reflected in his inheritance of the rebellious tradition of modern art. This Dionysus-style rebelliousness can be regarded as outstanding avant-garde and pioneer spirit, which is mainly reflected in the cancellation and breakthrough of modern art to the established rules of traditional art. To analyze the problem of ruining rules, it is necessary to examine the basic meaning and position of the problem of visual modernity, because this will become all the theoretical

basis for examining and criticizing modern art. From the second half of the 19th century onwards, the masters of impressionism, as the artistic pioneers of the task of "sensual impulse rebellion against logos", became the initiators of modernity quality on the painting level. Their avant-garde and pioneer spirit nature mainly lies in — compared with the pre-modern paintings that emphasize the painting techniques such as perspective and the principle of realistic, accurate and clear reproducibility, impressionism successfully canceled the focus on the reproduction objects and themes through a series of distinctive features such as its own objects blurring, the disappearance of light and shadow, the contrast between light and dark, the outline of the line replaced by color blocks, and the depth of the painting object disappeared, and made a revolutionary effort to return to the two-dimensional plane because of its closeness to its own media essence. On this point, art critic Greenberg soberly examined the deep background behind it, arguing that it should be traced back to the self-confirmed nature of modernity. In short, since modernity legislates itself based on the principle of reason, since then art has been self-disciplined and all types of art must provide an effective explanation for the legitimacy of their existence. In this way, after the advent of photography, the paintings based on the principle of reproducibility were threatened by their own legitimacy, and then found that their essential provisions are actually in creating visual impact on the two-dimensional plane. In order to further understand this problem, clues can be found in Greenberg's famous paper defending modern paintings, especially abstract paintings — "Laocoon Towards Renewal". The article "Laocoon Towards Renewal" mainly opposes two kinds of rule: subject-centered rule and literary sense rule. Based on these two themes, Greenberg believes that the entire modern art transformation, that is, its avant-garde and pioneer spirit characteristics and impact summary, is reflected in the following three aspects. The first is that the importance of the subject matter or object disappears. On the contrary, the two-dimensional flatness of the picture itself is highlighted. The second is that in terms of painting techniques, Western perspective is no longer regarded as the fundamental law that must be followed in painting; in modern painting art, more expression is that the appearance of painting objects in the picture begins to appear distorted, split, exaggerated, fuzzy and other characteristics. The third is that the value consciousness of painting itself has undergone a fundamental change. Its core is no longer what to paint, but how to paint. In other words, the painter no longer strives to realistically reproduce an object with a three-dimensional or deep sense, but instead strives to create the beauty and visual impact of the picture. The essence of painting is no longer imitation, reproduction, and expression, but the creation of the picture itself. It is important that the visual impact is no longer dependent

on the object of reproduction, and the importance of modern painting for the object of reproduction is cancelled; therefore, as the basic medium of painting, two-dimensional plane and paint become a dimension with all creativity and possibility. And this is one of the signs of the opening of modern art. In addition to the self-confirmation aspect of the media, another sign of modern art is that the practice of art has broken through the traditional concept of "art must be an expression of beauty" in its own development; it innovates the modern taste of art and begins to challenge and subvert the existing ideas. There are numerous famous examples in the history of art: from Gustave Courbet's realism work that shocked the world — "The Origin of the World", to Picasso's efforts and attempts to break the three-dimensional illusion in visual art, through vitality and inheritance of abstraction, to Marcel Duchamp's avant-garde and rebellious "Spring" and so on. Through a series of avant-garde and pioneer art practices and their influence in the art world and art history, modern art gradually dissolves pre-modern art rules and aesthetic principles. The original unattainable elite status of traditional art also collapsed, and art began to become "not necessarily beautiful" things. On these two levels, it's possible to clearly see the strong rejection and subversion of modern art as a distinct consciousness of Dionysus against the centuries-old traditional painting principles and various technical rules constructed by the Phoebus.

What needs to be further clarified here is that the reason why Andy Warhol can be included in the perspective of modern art and analyzed as a messenger of Dionysus is more because of his inheritance and development of the Dadaist artistic spirit that appeared in the late modernism. The premise of discussing this problem is that the coordinates or dimensions of modern and postmodern should be explained first. The perspective of modern art or postmodern art can not only be placed under the dimension of time, but also can be considered in the dimension of a trend of thought or movement. On the level of time, the modernity can be thought of as a historical stage with the nature of the times, and the modern concept in the field of art also contains more complicated dimensions. This dimension is determined by the differentiation of modernity; under the environment of disenchantment, Kant's "three major criticisms" are used as the dividing line in various modern fields, and "human righteousness theory" is the basic guiding principle, which must be established by the test of rational light, thus forming a highly differentiated world landscape. When people examine in the dimension of time, they will find that the wide range initiation of Pop Art is after Dadaism, and its artistic spirit also appears on the basis of inheriting the Dadaism spirit. The Dadaism Movement with the keywords of "destruction" and "ruin" held a rebellious banner in 1915. Its

representative Marshall Duchamp "invented" the rebellious spirit of ready-made artwork; shockingly, he signed a male urinal with his name and sent it to the museum for exhibition. At the same time, he gave this "work" an artistic name — "Spring". This is the first time in art history that an artist has used everyday objects as works of art, which makes Duchamp one of the most controversial artists. However, what has to be admitted is that after drastically subverting the norms of art, Dionysus finally opened a new door for him. Duchamp created a paradigm of ready-made art and conceptual art, and also provided powerful resources for the prosperity of avant-garde art. It was followed closely by the emergence and rise of Pop Art known as "new Dadaism", which rebelled against abstraction and promoted concrete themes of popular culture. Because of its popularity, consumption, low in price and mass production, "Father of Pop Art" — Richard Hamilton summed it up as a short-term art that was designed for a "broad audience" and is easily forgotten. When it came to Andy Warhol, he expanded the range and scope of American Pop Art extensively. And as its leading figure, Andy Warhol's avant-garde and pioneer inheritance of modern art is precisely reflected in the spread of his image repetition, and the continuity of ready-made art in his installation works. Of course, on the other hand, in addition to inheritance, he actually reflects more rebellion in his works — in his art, all are filled with the concept of anti-notation, meaning destruction and value dissolution of the Dionysus style, which is exactly the manifestation of the Dionysian Spirit in Warhol's works of art.

#### **IV. THE MANIFESTATION OF DIONYSUS — ANDY WARHOL'S DECONSTRUCTION AND IRONY OF POSTMODERN ART**

However, despite the rebellious spirit of the various art schools of modernism and the transformation contends, the modernist movement is still considered to be an "anti-art" movement rooted in elitism. That is to say, the entire modernist art can still be regarded as ontological and essential, and it is still within the boundaries and context of media regulation, that is, self-discipline. As the Belgian art critic Deaver said: "The requirement of conceptual objectivity established by the judgment of 'this is art', whether it is merely aesthetic and subjective, has its basis and legitimacy. Therefore, modernism's pursuit of the ontological definition of art, its desire for ideas, and its reductionism that reduced art to the necessary customary self-referential have become meaningful..."[4] Therefore, at this level, it must be explained that although the ready-made art and conceptual art paradigms pioneered by Duchamp are classic moments in the history of modern art, it's necessary to deviate from this modern method of observation in linear time, and regard it as postmodern

art. At the same time, it is precisely for this reason that it can be said — when people examine in the dimension of temporal modern art, Andy Warhol may only serve as the messenger of Dionysus, famous for his destructive power, continuing and catering to modern art's crucial great achievements and glory on the construction spirit of the Phoebus. However, when Warhol is put and observed again in the context of postmodern art where he is, the Dionysus has already revealed his true strength and intention through his embrace of fashion. Correspondingly, what needs to be discussed next is the embodiment of Andy Warhol's Dionysus artistic spirit in the context of postmodern art. It should be noted that even if you enter the discussion perspective of postmodern art, you can't completely separate the internal connection between postmodern and modern art. In fact, from the minimalist multimedia breakthrough attempts, the visual impact formed by installation art through the transformation, disintegration, reconstruction, embezzlement, collage and other methods of objects, to the comprehensive innovative form of multiple combinations of conceptual art, its continuity is deeply embedded. In this regard, Professor Wu Xingming believes: "There are two points of postmodern art that are completely consistent with modern art: one is the continuous development of the subject's perceptual life, and the second is the continuous exploration of the prominent physical properties related to this. Moreover, its exploration broke all boundaries"[5]. The biggest difference between them is that the postmodern faces are always accidental, changing, and containing diversity and richness; postmodern art also completely eliminates the possibility of defining the concept of art from the perspective of the media's inherent stipulation. In other words, the sign of the turning point of postmodern art is that the rigid connotation of the media as the inherent stipulation is broken. Instead, the new and different sensuous forms that are constantly rolling are permeated in daily life in order to provide people with a transient "tremor" feeling. The boundary between elite art and popular art has completely disappeared, forming a long-lasting dispute between the aesthetic mechanism of daily life and the phenomenon of aesthetic generalization and the wane and wax "artistic endism". When going back to the late stage of Western capitalism in the 1960s, people will find that the formation of post-industrial society makes the consumption ideology gradually spread at that time, and also induces the phenomenon of commercialization of art. At the same time, the development of science and technology has provided specialized techniques for art production. The emergence of new media has established a new system of art communication, which has made art production a social economic growth hotspot. In this regard, Andy Warhol, who wears the crown of "King of the Consumption Age", can't go unnoticed for his contribution. As an idol-style art star

in the United States in the 1960s who conformed to and even led the trend of art and fashion, Warhol declared that "everyone is an artist". Because in his eyes, "life is an illusion" and the reality isomorphic with the natural life form is in fact the art form. Through his great success in the art market, Warhol's familiarity with art "games" is discovered; in his "I Am a Machine" manifesto and his extremely indifferent attitude, in his attention to the theme of celebrities and death, in his indulgence and pursuit of money and fashion without modification, in his publicity about his self-image and his attitude towards games of life (such as the work "Shot of Andy Warhol" after him being shot) and in his long and "boring" movie "The Empire State Building", his Irony and ridicule of art as institution and meaning anxiety can be discovered. And all this is full of Dionysus wisdom. Through the previous analysis, it can be found that all the "illusions" of order that were constructed through the blessing and illumination of Phoebus were deconstructed, melted, and transformed in the ironic, ridiculous, and playful postmodern art characteristics of Warhol. And he also gained extraordinary life consciousness and brand-new observation vision in this superficial "superficiality". His powerful influence and "devil god" status in art history may come from his intensity of life. And his life intensity may lie in the systematic, structural, and essential Phoebus dimension of modernity, he can calmly, playfully, and even controllably face the "torrent and abyss of existence." In addition, Dionysus appeared as Andy Warhol, a fanatical fashion fanatic and keen on fashion nerves, as a "libertine" in Baudelaire's mouth. When talking about the "libertine", Baudelaire put it this way: "For him, the problem is to extract what it may contain from the popular things that are poetic in history, and to extract eternity from the ephemeral".[6] In "The Painter of Modern Life," he commented: "The beauty of the libertine's beauty is in particular the indifferent spirit, which comes from the unshakable determination to never be moved; it can be said that this is a potential fire that can be guessed. It can't and doesn't want to emit light. This is what is perfectly expressed in these images"[7]. Standing on the postmodern dimension to observe Warhol's artistic spirit, people should understand that art doesn't possess eternity. Art is the power of perceptual and intuitive. Even under different time, space and context, intuitive power can continue to give people the power to be struck by life and the intuition of art through continuous and endless creation.

## V. CONCLUSION

Andy Warhol's dimension of Dionysian Spirit brings people a revelation: the value of art is temporary, but it will also be transformed into essential at the same time, which is a state of continuous change. And the best expression and carrier of this new emotional

replacement process is the surging fashion itself. The essence of fashion is time, and the word fashion itself is a conceptual expression of time, meaning that a certain sense of stasis develops at a certain moment in the flow of time; this sense of stasis can refresh a new sensuous style. It can be presented as a new fashion with a distinct sense, and its essence is a certain aesthetic style in the state of time. The sharpness shown in fashion undoubtedly reflects an intuitive and progressive sense of the times, then surging into a historical process with a sense of time. It can be seen here that the great achievements of the consumer society "fashion" represent the forefront of new sensibility. It is a momentary sense of liberation that is free from social order, is not restricted by reason, has a clear sense of alienation from daily life, and is fractured. And the reason why Andy Warhol can become a shining star in the history of art is precisely because his Dionysian Spirit in the art spirit and the light of wisdom lead people to form a strong sense of commonality in the aesthetic agreement of fashion. The art design that he points to with fashion as the core has also continuously led people to a new starting point for social waves one after another. And it is precisely because of this, in the current direction of the future, in the package of the fashion tide, in the sense of commonality with the guidance of the aesthetic spirit, in the process of its continuous growth, melting and self-renewal, the economic driving force guided by aesthetics will continue to be drawn to breakthroughs and advances to a higher point. Therefore, such a conclusion may be drawn: Andy Warhol, who is shown here as the Dionysus, is indeed the embodiment of the fashion spirit.

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