

The conceit of a mere theory of art to intervene in questions of such breadth and severity can only come down to a ham-handed breach of disciplinary consilience. The consilient direction of application is the other way: there are myriad granular details of Becker's account which any contemporary theory of art would do well to account for, if only *for its own good*.

Foremost: as Becker develops the notion of "working out of one's problems and ambitions on others," he lands not merely on mundane or altruistic gestures (e.g. Goffman's "facework") but also on such malign social epiphenomena as "priestcraft," "scapegoating," and "transference." He uncovers "cosmic heroism" in the common life, and he uncovers nothing less than "the origins of inequality" in the very fabric of human association. For Becker it is all in the mix, as it must be for someone who mined the anthropological record so thoroughly. Becker attacked his questions from all angles and so his work is well-suited to confront one-sided social theorists of art and stare them straight in the eyes.

To use a contemporary term, priestcraft is "transactional," but with a twist. The currency in which priestcraft transacts is what Becker calls "sacred power." It is at root an *existential* rather than straightforwardly economic transaction.

All power is, as [Norman O.] Brown says, sacred power, because it begins in the hunger for immortality; and it ends in the absolute subjection to people and things which represent immortality power.

And again,

men are always dissatisfied and guilty in small and large ways, and this is what drives them to a search for purity where all dissatisfaction can come to a head and be wiped away.

But this sacralizing of mere human objects is bound to miscarry.

No human relationship can bear the burden of godhood, and the attempt has to take its toll in some way on both parties. The reasons are not far to seek. The thing that makes God the perfect spiritual object is precisely that he is abstract—as Hegel saw. He is not a concrete individuality, and so He does not limit our development by His own personal will and needs. When we look for the "perfect" human object we are looking for someone who allows us to express our will completely, without any frustration or false notes. We want an object that reflects a truly ideal image of ourselves. But no human object can do this...

Of course art also is typically thought unable to "bear the burden of godhood," the occasional bohemian ruse notwithstanding. Art is not thought able to support this kind of weight *precisely* because it seems to consist, largely if not entirely, of mere "human relationships" and man-made object-idols; that is, it seems to consist of "concrete