

The State of Poetic License

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In their different ways, the books looked at in this article concern a politics of substitution, a sleight of hand trick, whereby competing ideas about art and culture eclipse economic thought. *The Social Impact of the Arts, An Intellectual History*, by Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett; *No Room to Move, Radical Art and the Regenerate City*, by Josephine Berry Slater and Anthony Iles; *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*, by Scott Lash and Celia Lury, all explore the spectacular clash of ideas about art and culture which overshadows economics – the dismal science. However, readers of the above books might still be reminded of Bill Clinton’s rebuke to George Bush senior: “It’s the economy stupid!” Because, oddly, none of them look into what may be the most crucial cultural-socio-economic matter of all, namely, the contest between economic survivalists and economic imperialists.

Until the revelation of stains on a dress and, on his character, Clinton pursued both interests in the United States with equal enthusiasm. Bush junior’s more single minded representation of the imperial interest was of course disastrous for the United States. According to his detractors, his only certain achievement was that throughout his presidency there was “no known oral sex in the White House”. Saddled with such a legacy, manifested not least in the crisis of the US car industry, Barack Obama has brought Motown music (the black Fordist product) back to the White House where it is on track again as an officially consecrated gift to the world.¹

What is striking about the British books mentioned above, is how class has been abstracted by critical discussions of arts and culture, in much the same way Detroit’s car industry jobs are outsourced. A largely unexamined antagonism, class, now seems to exist as an old fashioned, and sometimes sentimental refrain in cultural theory. This attitude might change as ‘economics’ and academia meet on increasingly unfriendly terms. Nevertheless, the difference in attitude between books written in the past twenty-five years, compared to the outlook of writers before the era of ‘globalisation’ will be obvious in this article. What this difference means is less obvious, and is the subject of what follows.

Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett, the authors of the 2008 book *The Social Impact of the Arts, An Intellectual History*,² are certainly aware of the way culture has become an object of protectionism, and potentially a protectionist instrument, for nations preaching the dogma of free trade in all other areas. Culture was given a legal boost by the Unesco Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions which came into force in March 2007. Because culture includes such things as cuisine, this treaty could, in theory, impinge on the domain of agribusiness as much as media corporations. Regarded as something like a protectionist’s charter, and no doubt as the thin end of the wedge into a broader economic hegemony, the US and Israel were alone in their opposition to the treaty.³ With characteristic British parochialism, Belfiore and Bennett have little interest in such matters. They briefly mention the Uruguay Round of negotiations on world trade on page three, where they also quote President François Mitterrand who expressed the French survivalist interest when he remarked that “a society which abandons the means of depicting itself would soon be an enslaved society.”

From this point in their book, actual market conditions rarely intrude into Belfiore and Bennett’s history of ideas about the arts and culture. Accordingly, their history emerges from a roll call of rather materially disembodied voices. The ideas of civilisation we meet could at least do with a better economic timeline, if not a material analysis. That would have helped to put some

badly needed contours on their map of the claims made about the positive and negative impacts of the arts.⁴ It is also noticeable that the contents of this book belies its technocrat friendly title, because what these authors are really aiming for is the space between contemporary policy discourses geared towards the socio-economic impacts of the arts, and reasoning about culture and society in more holistic terms. In fact, the use of the word “impact” is a misnomer when seen in this way. Marxian criticality would turn this on its head from the outset, and address historical social impacts on the arts, giving agency more directly to people than to activities. Nevertheless, the gap between these two areas of thought is certainly an important one to close. As Belfiore has argued elsewhere, cultural policy-speak is now an expansive field of “bullshit” and one which is very difficult to avoid falling into.

An example of the perils, aside from its rather misleading title, would be chapter four of *The Social Impact of the Arts*, where the authors discuss the arts in relation to Personal Well-being. However, they do this without registering that the language of *wellbeing* comes into policy discourses, just as the politics of *welfare* are played down. Equally troubling is their very thin engagement with cultural diversity policy, squeezed into chapter six entitled Moral Improvement and Civilisation. By bringing Tony Greaves’ writing in at the end here, the authors seem to imply the discussion of ‘plural monoculturalism’, Amartya Sen’s critique of the implementation of multicultural policy.⁵ Yet, Belfiore and Bennett seem uninterested in pursuing this, or examining the thinking of ‘minority ethnic’ artists on these matters.

It is doubtful that the mendacity which troubles Belfiore⁶ can be countered if one treats economic thought as if it had not always been integrated within the field of culture and aesthetics just as it is integrated within religious thought. Today, one might even argue that what is on offer from culture is calibrated by the same logic that has given us the wonders of fractional reserve banking. In the financial universe the value of paper money is no longer backed by precious metal but, among other things, by the power to indebt, with the added attraction of recuperating the labour theory of value in the process of accumulating massive interest payments. Comparable to the conjuring trick of “producing money out of thin air” in the universe of capital, any number of projects claiming an “impact” on the social universe, make it look as though art is a productive element of socio-economic transformation, well-being, democratic public space and even happiness, just as the welfare State is rolled back and liberal democracy increasingly takes on the characteristics of calculated viciousness.

Asserting the primacy of these kinds of interconnection, and more especially their implications for practical reason, is not necessarily to collapse distinctive areas of reasoning into one another, but it may be to argue that the connections between economics, politics and culture still need to be examined carefully, and not merely seen *relationally*, as is now the fashion, thanks, in part, to the philosopher Jacques Rancière. Raymond Williams’ book *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, first published in 1958, is still a very good example of how to go about the task of examining such connections in depth, and Belfiore and Bennett say that Williams’ book also inspired their study, although it is difficult to see exactly how. The keywords emblazoned on the cover of different editions of his classic were; Class, Culture, Industry, Democracy, and Art. E.P. Thompson’s critique of Williams’ oeuvre was that he treated class as ‘a way of life’ and not ‘a way of conflict’. To that issue, another problem must be added, namely that writers in the arts and

humanities today are loathed to address the real extent of economic thought at all.

What seems to overcome the critical instincts of many writers is the general turn towards culture as promotion of the socio-economic self, the form, the group, the city, the region and the nation. We appear to be reduced to this spurious battle of categories, which, it should not be forgotten, was the desire of fascism.⁷ Yet, because capitalism has been globally re-released over the past three decades, the idea of *laissez faire* in culture is now virtually unthinkable. For many leaders, certainly not only for the likes of François Mitterrand, this would signify the road to slavery. The question that is rarely contemplated very much, is enslaved to what exactly?

From the perspective of cultural studies, Scott Lash and Celia Lury in their 2007 book, *Global Culture Industry*,⁸ argued that the “true industrialisation of culture”, now upon us, amounts to “a post-hegemonic age” in which power “no longer has anything at all to do with hegemony. The power lies in communication itself”.⁹ This Marshall McLuhan-like claim seems too grandiose and risks verging on the absurd. It fails to confront all sorts of geo-political events hinging on the requirement of natural resources, and the existence of use values, which will not be easily transformed into the exchange values of consumerist culture. To think otherwise is to take for granted the international division of labour and nature as it now stands.

Lash and Urry are certainly not alone in implying that empire is not what it used to be and we are now in an era of communicative capitalism dominated by the forces of consumer sovereignty. A generation of Western critics of capitalism have been accused of dissolving the concrete interests of the West into the seemingly anonymous operations of the global market in this way.¹⁰ Indeed, there is so much obscurantism on the Western leftfield, that it now seems a whole lot easier to come at the new spirit of capitalism from the other side entirely, (from the side now launching a major attack on higher education). As the good Lady Thatcher remarked in one of her more lucid interviews, “Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul”. Needless to say the efforts of the grocer’s daughter were not aimed at bringing about a post-hegemonic age. They were all about restoring Britain’s place in the world through her remarkable alliance with finance, insurance and real estate; the FIRE sector.

Mozart v. Muzak

Taking Belfiore and Bennett’s long view of arts and culture does, at least, show up some of the misleading clashes of meaning which have been kept on the pitch and kicked around partly to appeal to a modern artistic sensibility. Number one on the list should be the grossly inflated distinction between instrumentalism and artistic autonomy. As the authors point out in their conclusion; “instrumentalism is, as a matter of fact, 2500 years old, rather than degeneration brought about by contemporary funding regimes.” The perennial issue is art as a means of ordering ideas about culture.¹¹

Coming at this from the American progressive social philosophy of John Dewey (1859-1952), Joli Jensen offers an impressive account of the pervasiveness of instrumental logic in her 2002 book *Is Art Good For Us? Beliefs About High Culture in American Life*.¹² As she argues, high culture is regarded like “a tonic and mass culture as toxin: in either case culture is imagined as something we ingest that has direct effects”, and in this regard Jensen sees nothing much too choose between flimsy ideas of the “Mozart effect” or the “Muzak effect” both of which are alleged to change our mood and modify our behaviour.

Nor should art as cultural criticism be viewed as social medicine, Jensen argues. The real issue, as it was for Raymond Williams, or Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), is the patterning of social distinction, and the way beliefs about the arts are connected to ambivalences about modern life, democracy technology and commerce.

Jensen's position is that instrumental logic makes 'art' into a self-aggrandizing substitute for criticality and freedom in society. In this regard, she argues that both "art for arts sake" and "art as cultural criticism" are caught up in a misleading culture war over the hearts and minds of the people. Of course this is not an especially North American phenomenon, nor does it really tell us enough about why 'culture' often seems capable of devouring politics.

Opportunities

The appealing fiction of disinterested or independent production on a battlefield which has been marked out much more broadly by Western intellectuals, comes in various State supported guises today, not only in art for art's sake but also in the form of the sort of critically engaged art longed for by Josephine Berry Slater and Anthony Iles, authors of the recent book, *No Room to Move, Radical Art and the Regenerate City*.¹³ What is worth saying right away about this particular contest with the socio-economic instrumentalism of urban regeneration is that while self-declared radical art in Britain, with its "lingering requirement for autonomy", may not be servile, it still takes the form of a public service.

The orientation of much critical art here can be traced back to this particular articulation of bourgeois civic virtue, which Williams contrasted with the virtues of solidarity. A contemporary example of the ethos of public service, now running wild, is only too evident on page eighty-seven of Berry Slater and Iles' book where the Freee collective (Dave Beech, Mel Jordan, Andy Hewitt) are represented by a larger group photo of apparently earnest youths (presumably students in the arts) brandishing posters bearing the words: "Artists cannot bring integrity to your project unless they provide a full and candid critique of everything you do." Of course the most expensive word here is integrity. Having dressed this up in Habermasian theory, Freee look willing to sell it off from the bargain basement of British governance. It's not that they might be putting philosophers out of business; it's that they pose a service which is quite beyond the scope of even moral philosophy.

Straight talking is worn on the sleeve in the discussion of Freee's projects, but it hardly conceals the facts of dependency and institutionalisation posing artfully as autonomy. Two pages after telling us; "there is some tension, usually, but we have also worked with some really supportive and brilliant institutions", Freee go on to tell readers how they are "heartened by the possibility that arts institutions might overestimate their own power to neutralise critique by incorporating it. Let them incorporate it even more! Let's saturate the fuckers with critique! Let's see how they neutralise that!" One of Freee's projects resulted in a massive billboard stating "The economic function of public art is to increase the value of private property." While this may be an intention in urban regeneration, the idea that art does actually function so effectively must be a property developer's dream.¹⁴

Of course Freee are not alone when it comes to artistic hyperbole. As anyone who has had dealings with the British Arts Council system might know, the supposed critical integrity of work done in the name of art is a foundational claim, not a real pivotal value since integrity can only be judged alongside a range of personal virtues which are specifically, and quite rightly, beyond the reach of bureaucracy. What stands in place of integrity is a slippery political contract which, in its current form at least, dates back to the aftermath of the Second World War when a new relationship between art and the State was forged.

There is no clearer statement of this profoundly instrumental contract, intended to end all

others, than the following footnote from Cyril Connolly, which may be read as the small print of a quasi-Arnoldian deal which Connolly and his supporters spent much of the 1939-1945 war brokering. As editor of the influential journal *Horizon*, Connolly argued in 1943, that British attitudes should be altered so that art be given "a place in our conception of the meaning of life and artists a place in our conception of the meaning of the State which they have never known before. Never again must our artists be warped by opposition, stunted by neglect or etiolated by official conformity".¹⁵ With this thinking in circulation among the ruling classes, the stage was set for supposedly autonomous art to serve in the glorification of the State.

If commentators like Raymond Williams (1921-1988), Julian Symons (1912-1994) or E.P. Thompson (1924-1993) are to be believed, the artistic transaction with the State came at the cost of a cultural democracy, which might, in turn, have supported a more resilient social democracy. It is difficult to say whether the cultural wing of the workers movement was betrayed or simply neglected by their Labour Party representatives on gaining power in 1945. Leafing through the pages of *Our Time*, published between 1941 and 1949, one of Britain's few popular leftist journals, one might be forgiven for thinking that a democratic public sphere was already alive and well in Britain. With a war time social contract still in operation, (one which very significantly had the defence of Britain's national integrity to its credit) it may have seemed as if the negative liberties of liberalism did not urgently need to be counter-balanced by the positive liberties of democracy.

Interestingly, positive liberties were pursued much more meaningfully by the labour movement in Scandinavia and in other countries which had been invaded and where large sections of the capitalist establishment were exposed as traitors.¹⁶ In 1960, the well known British historian and campaigner E.P. Thompson, wrote on the importance of opposing capitalism's modes of cultural reproduction, as well as opposing the system at the point of production in the workplace, but the Labour party's adoption of ideas about culture from the New Left, at "the eleventh hour" before the 1959 election, was too little too late. In Thompson's view the Labour party was already "poisoned at the core" by its Cold War nuclear strategy and "the ethos of the Opportunity State."¹⁷

In the same article Thompson noted that there was a lot of "floating talk (...) about the integrity of the artist and the intellectual worker." But thanks to the gentlemanly amateur tradition lodging within the circles of the Left, he saw precious little material support for actual critical autonomy. The much less convincing part of Thompson's argument was his call to address this disabling situation through a voluntary Socialist tax ("without representation") to support the operations of *New Left Review*. All this is history. But its real bearing is of course on our own time. Like *Variante*, *Mute*, (publishers of *No Room to Move*) negotiated a fragile platform for critical reflection about the arts in relation to culture as a whole. This has never been a winning position in the arts, and increasingly it looks like a suicidal one.

Mute faces a 100% cut to their Arts Council funding. As a result of such attacks, artists and others working in the cultural sector will find it harder to distinguish the public interest, from private and corporate interests which reach into the public sector to turn the public interest into a market interest. By drawing Giorgio Agamben's philosophical writings into the context of urban regeneration – a context which really only exemplifies the structural problems seen by Thompson – Berry Slater and Iles argue that the artist has become "a 'whatever being', good for everything and nothing," the ultimate flexible capitalist subject.

What do artists want?

Berry Slater and Iles seem ill-disposed to consider what bystanders in the clash between art and



culture might reasonably decry as bad art. When these authors argue that "over-instrumentalised art", revolving around bureaucratically determined goals of urban regeneration, "may simply fail to be art" they are of course implying very lofty things for art *per se*. Going against quite a lot of evidence unconsciously provided in the interviews with artists in the urban policy arena, (Alberto Duman, Nils Norman, Laura Oldfield Ford, Roman Vasseur, and the Freee collective) Berry Slater and Iles claim that the future is bleak because "Art cannot do what it wants to do."

This looks like an exaggeration of the fact that artists, like many people, find it difficult to exercise their freedom meaningfully. Artists may, in fact, do what they want to do to a remarkable degree in Britain. The arena that is much more constrained, and increasingly monotonous, is politics, which of course has an impact on the issues of public patronage for the arts. But the two issues should not be confused, even when facing

'March For the Alternative: Jobs, Growth, Justice', London, 26th March 2011 Photographs, Owen Logan.

the sort of swinging cuts now being implemented. As the historian Ben Wilson argues, Britain has become illiberal in politics whilst becoming liberal in manners.¹⁸ Given art's long history of over-eager declarations of integrity, mixed in equal measure with embarrassing compromises, the arts have not done too badly from the mannered liberalism of "a taboo-busting culture."

If, as Berry Slater and Iles claim, art cannot do what it wants, then it seems far too easy to point the finger at the systemic constraint when artists are no more willing to organise to effectively defend their autonomy than when Thompson targeted the core ethos of the Opportunity State in 1960. Since almost every social and environmental ill, and every structural crisis of the public sector, is now turned into an opportunity for a mini band-aid arts project, a critique of the aesthetics of opportunism would be closer to the mark.¹⁹

The questions that ought to be levelled against

'March For the Alternative: Jobs, Growth, Justice', London, 26th March 2011 Photographs, Owen Logan.



the ethos of an Opportunity State, are only magnified by post-industrial ideology. It seems very difficult to grasp what is going on, not least in the "social engineering" happening under the banners of urban regeneration and place marketing and so on, without a critical sense of the doctrine of international comparative advantage. This has allowed for the collapse of the distinction between industry and services and the subordination of the economy to the FIRE sector. Nevertheless, the same competitive edge has served Britain's imperial wing (adjoining the Labour and Conservative parties) very well. Of course artists in Britain may be uncomfortable with their roles in this post-industrial renaissance, but there is no evidence that they are willing to collectively oppose its fundamental basis, any more than trade unions in the global North are willing to adopt the anti free market position of their counterparts in the South.²⁰

Signing up for the Global Bourgeoisie

The 2007 Unesco convention, mentioned at the outset of this article, may be seen as the last vestiges of the UN General Assembly resolution

in May 1974 for a New International Economic Order. This challenge to the West's terms of trade was defeated in piecemeal fashion by everything we now know to be neoliberalism. Like it or not, we are sailing in that same capitalist boat which may be one reason migrants come to this land of opportunity and often marvel at the ideological incoherency of the Left. Indeed, when it comes to the doctrine of international comparative advantage, sitting on the fence looks like the most fashionable Left position.²¹

Saying this is not to ignore deep psychological paradoxes of political subjectivities in both the North and the South. However, the contradictions resulting from a global fracture are surely a necessary premise if we are to understand the position of the artist in contemporary capitalist culture.²² The concept of the "whatever being" used by Berry Slater and Iles comes from Agamben's most obscure musings in his 1990 book, *The Coming Community*, the shortcomings of which are obvious to its author. Notwithstanding his extremely fragmented arguments, the "whatever being" was not intended to mean an indifferent persona but rather a certain singular identity, in limbo, and freed from belonging "to this or that set to this or that class", e.g. "the reds, the French, the Muslims."

Agamben traces the ancient roots of such a liminal status in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, (1998) where, far more coherently, he tackles the "bare life" existing and dying in political states of exception (not only concentration camps) which have resulted from the separation between the abstract rights of man from the juridical and substantive rights of the citizen. With that critical history of the European Enlightenment in mind, one may appreciate the significance Agamben and others have attached to an in-between consciousness. However, it seems important not to flatten these matters out and confuse them by ignoring gross inequalities. When it comes to the issue of "bare life", this has hardly ever been a voluntary option in the modern age. Key citizenship rights are denied, eroded, or taken, but they are never carelessly thrown away.

One strata where "the whatever being" has an obvious role is the "planetary petty bourgeoisie" whose vacuity, Agamben observes, nullifies "all that exists with the same gesture in which they seem obstinately to adhere to it: they know only the improper and inauthentic and even refuse the idea of discourse that could be proper to them" from the past. This would be no news to those who preceded Agamben in the critical analysis of bourgeois democracy and who argued, against the tendency of denial, that proletarian agitation has long been the fundamental condition of liberalism. In the short term, at least, the interests of capital and labour could come together in political corporatism, not least because of overlapping sectional interests on both sides.

In the long term the global bourgeoisie – which Agamben sees as a monstrous class, acting locally and thinking globally, and moving us towards self-annihilation – has no real need for any contracts with labour power having created a vast plutocratic network of non-governmental organisations all of their own. For the most part they seem committed not only to undermining militancy, but also to stamping out the labour theory of value wherever it turns up. In this regard, the vaguely left-leaning notion of global civil society looks like a risky political fantasy circulating through the same bourgeois quarters.

Class, Art and Virtue

Is the art world the natural home for an aspiring global bourgeoisie today? In their 2007 book mentioned above, Scott Lash and Celia Lury paint the now familiar picture of the neo avant garde art scene clasped to the magnetic power of the City of London and fully integrated with capitalism's constant search for (brandable) aesthetic meaning in the global market. The contemporary flows between art and commerce represent an obvious fracture with the complex normativity of the 20th century, when art's newness could be said to be born from its resistance to its own exchange

value. Indeed, the nature of the fracture calls into question the basic premises of modernist ideas of the moral dialectic of art "proper". Wherever one may stand theoretically, art demonstrably fails to defend culture from commerce (the object of the 2007 Unesco treaty). Only people can act in this way.²³ Some of them may happen to be artists. But unless artists organise, in ways not seen since the 1930s, their labours will be quite incidental to their political efforts.

A conservative (and profoundly ahistorical) sense of the category of art in the 21st century lends support to the argument that there is no reasonable way to find a "correspondence between aesthetic virtue and political virtue."²⁴ This is one of the key points in Jacques Rancière's political aesthetics. But in making his case, what Rancière takes as art proper looks exactly like the go-between aesthetic which arises from the consciousness of the "planetary bourgeoisie". In the tradition of *Vorticism*, it is an aesthetic which literally thrives on the tension between opposites as it surfs through places and *themes* hardly ever landing for long enough to be confronted by arts' own territorial problems. Political *issues* (such as arts and urban regeneration) are left to be picked apart by critical artists who want to recover a civic meaning for art and who, thanks to the patronage of autonomy, cannot help but express bourgeois ideas of civic virtue in the process. But in either case, the notion that there is no correlation between aesthetic virtue and political virtue is to ignore the way class consciousness and art have been historically bonded.

Art, no longer to be confused with the mere amusements of the nobility or the commoner, was transformed into culture in the 18th century and signified nothing less than the sensitivities and passions of Europe's nation building bourgeoisie. In their chapter on Moral Improvement and Civilisation, Belfiore and Bennett touch on Remy Saisselin's compelling study of these transactions, and the unintended consequences of attitudes about art which reached a climax in Romanticism. Perhaps the greatest gift to the romantic mythology of the 20th century avant garde, was its repression under fascism and Stalinism, something which tends to make us forget the subtle complicity of the movement in the politics of both.

The link between aesthetic virtue and political virtue, articulated influentially in Britain by John Ruskin (1819-1900), remains as an ongoing, and no doubt unending, discourse. If, as Rancière asserts, there is no correlation between the two areas of virtue, then there would simply be no way to challenge fascist aesthetics without merely resorting to similar totalitarian methods used by the Nazis to banish the avant garde. Nevertheless, the actual banishment of Nazi art from the public memory in Germany is not merely a random historical outcome (as Rancière would have it), rather the discussions about its consignment to the dustbin of history are a sign of some of the raw connections between political and aesthetic virtue.²⁵

What is undeniable, and must be admitted in relation to all of the above, is that the interdependency of virtues is one of the most problematic and complicated areas of moral philosophy. Some of the problems are evident in the title of Alisdair MacIntyre's 1991 essay, *How to seem virtuous without actually being so*.²⁶ (This title might be inscribed on a collective award presented to the art world). However, against MacIntyre's Aristotelian desire for a unified subject, or in other words, for a persona not fractured by histories of socio-political confusion and contradiction, Malcolm Bull argues that the unified subject has, by historical definition, been the political master.²⁷ On this account, which might offer another angle on the "whatever being", those of us further down in the pecking order are a more complex admixture of the master-slave mentality.

Nevertheless, overcoming this paradox does not mean that MacIntyre, or anyone else, might, in effect, be buying into a dream of mastery as Bull seems to imply. Rather, it is to measure virtues such as generosity and temperance alongside those of justice and courage. The underlying problem takes us back to the start of this article, and to the

economy, not in the sense Bill Clinton meant it but in the sense that Margaret Thatcher said it. Art in Britain still appears to be bound up, and even defined, by her economic project to change the heart and soul. If our post-industrial culture is in need of a heart and soul, art looks as if it is on call to offer that service to a people now more or less compelled to believe in the logic of international comparative advantage and consumer sovereignty. As one of *Mute* magazine's founders recently pointed out, to be a winner in the arts regime of the entrepreneurial nation, the first mode of compliance is "a near religious belief in the power of art to 'deliver' personal transformation."²⁸

Of course art and money have always converged just as much as art and politics converge. Art's transformation into 'culture' in the 18th century was only one aspect of the 'blame the losers' rationalism which turned enlightenment values into self-serving dogma. Given the way artists and artistic freedoms have glorified the State in the 20th century, it is still extremely pertinent to consider the impact of class on the way culture is governed, in part, by ideas of what 'art' might do, and what politics increasingly does not do; as if accumulating forms of cultural and social capital was not linked to the possession of political capital.²⁹ Casting a veil over the very resources needed most by the subordinated classes is surely the greatest disappearing trick performed in the pursuit of bourgeois civic virtue.

On March 26th somewhere between 250,000 and 500,000 people marched in London against government cut backs. Many had placards calling for a general strike. I too would happily raise my hand for a general strike. But to all intents and purposes a general strike would now be illegal in this country – an issue on which too many trade unionists, libertarians and believers in civil society have remarkably little to say. Rather like a people who have swallowed too much well meaning art, our faith in poetic licence has eclipsed our political reality.

Notes

- 1 Both Clinton and Obama brought Motown to the White House, See 'Obamas celebrate Motown in the White House', *The Telegraph* (25/2/2011) <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama/8347058/Obamas-celebrate-Motown-in-the-White-House.html>, accessed March 2011. For account of the factors influencing the decline and crisis of the US car industry see *The Great Auto Crash; The Inside Story (Globalisation)* by William Vukson (2009) published by G7 Books.
- 2 *The Social Impact of the Arts, An Intellectual History*, by Eleonora Belfiore & Oliver Bennett, (2010) Palgrave macmillan, Basingstoke (paperback edition).
- 3 See <http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2005/October/20051020170821GLnesnoM3.670901e-02.html>
- 4 The discursive categories Belfiore and Bennett adopt are: Corruption and distraction; Catharsis; Personal well-being; Education and self-development; moral improvement and civilisation; Political Instrument; Social stratification and identity construction; Autonomy of the arts and rejection of instrumentality.
- 5 For this discussion of diversity policies see *What Price Liberty, How Freedom was won and is being lost*, by Ben Wilson, Faber and Faber, London, pp 363-390.
- 6 See 'On bullshit in cultural policy practice & research', by Eleonora Belfiore, *Variant* issue 37/38, Spring/Summer 2010.
- 7 See *Under the Axe of Fascism*, by Gaetano Salvemini (1936), Victor Gollancz, London.
- 8 *Global Culture Industry: The mediation of Things*, by Scott Lash and Celia Lury, (2007) Polity Press, London.
- 9 Ibid. p84
- 10 Fernando Coronil argues that "capitalism parades as (...) universal and independent of its material foundations" thanks to the shift from eurocentric to globalcentric representations. See 'Towards a Critique of Globalcentrism: Speculations on Capitalism's Nature', in *Public Culture* 12(2) 2000, Duke University Press. See also *Democracy and other Neoliberal Fantasies, Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, by Jodi Dean (2009) Duke University Press.
- 11 For example, Jacques Rancière, (2009) makes the point that " 'art' is not the common concept that unifies the different arts. It is the *dispositif* [the stance] that renders them visible." Nor is art, in the first instance political because of its content but rather because of the way it reframes culture and politics in this way. See, *Aesthetics and its discontents*, Polity Press, London, p23.
- 12 *Is Art Good For Us? Beliefs About High Culture in American Life*, by Joli Jensen (2002) Rowman & Littlefield, New York and Oxford. See also Belfiore & Bennett (2010) op. cit. pp 32, 98-99.
- 13 *No Room to Move, Radical Art and the Regenerate City*, by Josephine Berry Slater and Anthony Iles (2010) *Mute* Books, London.
- 14 The inflation of urban real estate values is considerably more complex than the presence of public art. It involves a co-ordinated range of public and private investments and public give aways. In relation to the arts, what does seem properly functional in this context is the sort of "social engineering" that involves, for instance, the short term leases aimed at artists, as "scuzzers" in the effort to attract yuppies mentioned by Berry Slater and Iles. And here one may well argue that it is artists that are required as bearers of the entrepreneurial spirit, more or less regardless of the content of their work. See Berry Slater & Iles (2010) Ibid. p11.
- 15 See Comment, by Cyril Connolly, *Horizon*, London, January 1943. A comparable contemporary argument is made by Martha C. Nussbaum (1995) in her book *Poetic Justice, The literary Imagination and Public Life*, Beacon Press, Massachusetts. Nussbaum's argument for the importance of the literary imagination to jurors, to the justice system and to public rationality in general recalls Adam Smith's (1723-1790) "judicious spectator." This well travelled idea was taken up by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) from his "*lieblich*", Smith. As Peter de Bolla argues, Smith's 1759 work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, hangs on the transference of ethics into a politics of seeing, and specifically into Smith's 'doctrine of sympathy' whereby social differences are seemingly overcome by a power of the imagination which allows for the spectator to put himself in the shoes of the other. See *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, edited by Teresa Brennan & Martin Jay, (1996) Routledge, London.
- 16 One cannot walk into a high street retailer like W.H. Smith in Britain and purchase a quality newspaper called Class War, subsidised by the State as a meaning bearing publication. For that near-Habermasian experience one would need to go to a place like Norway where social democracy was not purchased on the political cheap through the notion of equal opportunities and the broader ideological practices of an Opportunity State.
- 17 See 'The Point of Production', by E.P. Thompson, (1960) *New Left Review*, no 1/1 January/February, 1960.
- 18 See *What Price Liberty – How Freedom was won and is being Lost*, by Ben Wilson (2009) faber & faber, London, p.329.
- 19 This is central to Walter Benjamin's definition of 'the hack', made in his 1936 essay, *The Author as Producer*.
- 20 Presently, incapable of voicing their own interests through anything more effective than a *servicing* union, visual artists are especially removed from their own labour power in "post-industrial" Britain. See "Art Workers Won't Kiss Ass", Comment article by Owen Logan, *Variant* no. 37, Spring/Summer, 2010.
- 21 This ambiguous position has roots in Marx's critique of Jean-Baptiste Say's law of markets. Say's theories represented the most decisive break with the labour theory of value in classical political economy. Broadly speaking, however, Marx deferred to those aspects of the global market which he saw leading towards communism, in the long run. See 'Karl Marx and Say's Law', by Bernice Shoul, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (Nov, 1957), Oxford University Press. The alternative socialist case for State-led semi-autarky is an undeniably utopian position. However, as one of the better known defenders of this position argues, it is no less utopian to believe that capitalism will iron itself out globally. The sort of totalising military-industrial destructive force that it has now produced could barely be conceived when Marx was writing. See *The Post Industrial Utopians*, by Boris Frankel, (1987) Polity Press, London, p267. There of course many 'small is beautiful' arguments which see the State as an unreformable obstacle. As one of the more reflexive advocates of socio-economic regression from society to community, points out, this would be at best a "grubby sort of utopia, not cultured, or liberal, or advanced, or powerful". But, it is hoped, "warm, kind, peaceful, healthy, lazy and parochial." See *To End Poverty, The Starvation of the Periphery by the Core*, by Richard Hunt, (1997) Alternative Green, Oxford p202.
- 22 See *Global Fracture: The New International Economic Order*, by Michael Hudson, (2005 Second Edition) Pluto Press, London.
- 23 Without doing down the insights of Theodor Adorno, it would seem that aesthetic philosophy always requires this corrective. In the words of the zealous band leader, played by the late Pete Possethwaite in the film *Brassed Off*, "I thought that music mattered, but does it bollocks, not compared to how people matter..."
- 24 See *The Politics of Aesthetics*, by Jacques Rancière, Continuum, London, p61.
- 25 See, 'Banishing the Past: The German Avant-Garde and Nazi Art', by Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang, (1996) in *Qualitative Sociology*, Vol.19, no 3, Springer publishing.
- 26 *How to seem virtuous without actually being so*, by Alisdair MacIntyre, (1991) Centre for the Study of Cultural Values, Lancaster University.
- 27 See 'Slavery and the Multiple Self' by Malcolm Bull, (1998) *New Left Review*, Issue 231, London.
- 28 See, http://www.metamute.org/en/mute_100_per_cent_cut_by_ace
- 29 The complex inter-relations between types of social and cultural capital with political capital is one of the areas of social theory that has been critically gutted by the World Bank's patronage of capitalist friendly research. See *Theories of Social Capital: Researchers Behaving Badly*, by Ben Fine (2010), Pluto Press, London.