

THE MERIT OF ART: FINE ARTS AND CANADIAN CULTURAL POLICY.

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the dominant view of Canadian culture within policy circles, which supports massive government subsidy. The thesis specifically asks, what is the merit or value of the arts justifying this support?

An overview is provided of the most common and influential answers to this question by Woodcock, Peers, Frye and others. These answers fall into two main categories: economic and aesthetic.

Close examination reveals neither category provides sustainable criteria for evaluating the arts. The question then arising is, why has the dominant view been so "successful", i.e. so able to convince the polity massive government support of culture is justified? (This "success" can only be accounted for if somewhere there are at work criteria more powerful than those manifestly offered.)

In order to deduce these criteria the thesis turns to an essay by Georg Lukacs. The chapter of Marx's Capital to which Lukacs was responding is first examined so the issues involved, and their relevance to Canadian culture, might be understood. The essence of Lukacs's argument is then presented. Although at first it appears to have a direct application to Canada, Lukacs's essential but incorrect assumption of social conflict between two classes forces dismissal of this line of argument.

However, when this assumption is dropped, three characteristics of Lukacs's thought emerge: a stance of opposition; a self-conscious prioritizing of history; and a reverence for the new. These characteristics are then suggested to be the actual, if covert, criteria for evaluating the merit of the arts.

The thesis concludes by briefly overviewing the state of art in Canada to see if these criteria do indeed offer insight into the Canadian scene.

DEDICATION

To Andrew J. Simons.

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PREFACE

The present study arose as a consequence of my undergraduate training. I studied Fine Arts, and upon receiving my degree I undertook to begin a career as a painter.

However, after about a year I gave painting up. I did so not out of financial considerations, because I had good opportunities to support myself in ways that did not interfere with my painting. Nor did lack of ability stop me, since I had mastered at least the rudiments of my craft.

What compelled me to stop was the fact I had no idea what to paint. I had spent most of my time staring at blank canvasses, completely baffled about what to do. Nor was I alone in this circumstance. Most of my fellow students also stopped within a year or two, similarly unable to decide what to paint.

This was a peculiar circumstance: the enormously expensive training we had received actually left us less able to paint than we had been before undertaking our studies.

I turned to Communication Studies because it seemed only a multi-disciplinary approach could hope to provide any real insight into why such a situation had arisen. The present thesis is the culmination of that investigation.

[I believe art in Canada has come to be dominated by an ideology of art that is as damaging to producing good art as it

is pervasive.] If the thesis is correct, I hope others, more capable than I, will undertake the large project of adequately defining this ideology - - which I have tentatively referred to as "modernism" - - and eventually understanding it and surpassing it. Only then, I believe will good art in Canada again be a real possibility.

I would like to thank my teachers and colleagues at the Department of Communication at Simon Fraser University for all they taught me. In particular I would like to thank Dr. William Leiss for the excellent model of scholarship he provided. As well, I would like to thank my friends Phil Vitone, Alison Baird, and Richard Pinet for all the late-night discussions that eventually led me to undertake this project. I probably never would have completed it without the loving support of my wife, Ann McDonnell. The thesis is dedicated to my brother in appreciation of his unfailing enthusiasm for the various projects I have undertaken.

Despite the best efforts of everyone involved, this work still retains errors. These at least have the unique feature of being solely my own.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ARTS AND CANADIAN CULTURAL POLICY.

A tremendous amount of activity - - artistic, governmental, academic - - in this country goes under the heading of "culture". It is estimated the nation as a whole in 1981 spent seven to nine billion dollars on expenditures directly related to it; by 1984 that figure had risen to sixteen billion dollars. (Department of Communication: 1986; p. 21) It is the subject of a never - ending series of government studies and royal commissions. It figures prominently in most newspapers and magazines.

A great part of the energy directed toward culture ¹ is focused through the government. Hence, the often acrimonious debates surrounding this whole area tend to be centered around questions of government policy. These discussions have been heretofore dominated by what could be called a "cultural coalition".

This coalition of artists, social scientists, and bureaucrats, despite disagreements, has lobbied unceasingly for massive government intervention in the arts. Its unquestionable success in doing this derives directly from its ability to

¹Henceforth, unless otherwise noted, "culture" will be used as equivalent in meaning to "the arts", as opposed to anthropological definitions such as the customs and folkways of a people.

answer the question, what is the value or the merit of the arts? What criteria should be used in deciding how much social energy to direct toward culture? Who, out of all the competitors, should be the recipients of that energy?

Whether or not the coalition's answers have been "valid" has never particularly mattered, so long as they appeared valid enough to win more or less consensual support from the polity. For the first time since the Massey Commission in the mid-1950's, there are signs indicating the cultural coalition can no longer supply answers capable of maintaining that support.

For one thing, the government is becoming increasingly doubtful about its ability to beneficially affect culture. Even though the arguments put forth by the coalition have become increasingly sophisticated, the power of the government to effect change is uncertain. This is usually attributed to the state of the economy, and the huge government deficit, supposedly leaving less and less funds available for culture. As well, technical advances continually outstrip regulators' abilities to control them. Cable-television, then pay-television, the growth of computers, home video, electronic copying, have all seemingly frustrated rather than helped most indigenous artists. Government agencies designed to cope with the media - the CBC, the NFB, the CRTC - - have all to a greater or lesser extent come under attack for failing to serve Canadians' best interests.

At the same time as there is frustration about the effectiveness of government intervention, there is a deepening sense of malaise among Canada's artistic community. So many people have become artists competing with each other for funds and jobs that the growth of the arts industries seems to have resulted in more frustration for artists rather than less. And, from a purely aesthetic standpoint, a numbing volume of mediocre art ² is churned out daily, leaving individual artists feeling powerless to make meaningful art, no matter how hard they try.

Hence we appear to be in a transitional period. "Culture", and the huge apparatus now feeding it, cannot exist in a vacuum. Answers addressing the question of its merit must come from somewhere. Perhaps if we more fully understand than we do now where the answers have come from in the past, we will be able to see where they might come from in the new period we are now entering.

The question this thesis addresses then is, what is the cultural coalition's view of the value of Canadian culture? In all the often conflicting arguments of the cultural coalition an underlying set of criteria can, I believe, be gleaned. The major part of this thesis will be devoted to that task. By way of conclusion I will then suggest effects of the use of those criteria.

²As I shall argue in Chapter V below, good art plays with the difference between conscious and unconscious communication in order to provide a guide or feedback to the social elite. "Mediocre" art, then, doesn't play with those levels, but accepts as given, and does so for a large number of people.

The thesis follows three steps:

1. Identifying the arguments "for" and "against" culture, or put more accurately, for or against government intervention. This is by no means a complete summary of the entire literature, since that would include volumes of work beyond the ability of any one person to handle. I have looked at only the academic literature - - as opposed to, for example, legislative or regulatory literature - - on the subject, mostly, but not exclusively, written in the period between the Massey and Applebaum-Hebert Commissions. In keeping with my definition of "culture" as "the arts", I have omitted any work concerned with ethnicity.

Even within these boundaries there remains a large body of literature on Canadian culture. Most of that literature is "liberal" in the sense it supports massive government subsidy of limited cultural aims. These aims are limited to encouraging artistic production without the government itself producing art. To avoid confusion about the term "liberal", I will henceforth use the phrase "cultural coalition" to refer to those holding such beliefs.

One can summarize the central argument of the cultural coalition as follows: "Canada, as a result of both geographical and historical conditions, has a unique culture. This culture is capable of expressing the highest ideals of Canada's people, and explaining Canadians to themselves. However, due to a variety of

political and economic factors, the most serious being Canada's proximity to the U.S., this culture is in danger. Instead of expressing ourselves or our highest ideals, our culture tends to give vent to only our crassest instincts, and/or the powerful vested interests of a market economy. As a result, our lives are dominated by a consumer mentality, and we are unable to make intelligent choices in the market place or the polling booth. This abdication of the imagination threatens the existence of our national culture at the very least, and at worst Canada's survival as an independent nation."

Looked at superficially, the argument appears convincing, an impression reinforced through its constant repetition. However, closer examination reveals a number of assumptions requiring more explanation before the argument as a whole can be accepted. Let me give just two examples.

The following quote is from the Applebaum-Hébert report, notable for its heroic but tragically futile attempt to synthesize the various claims of the so-called "cultural community" (what I referred to as the cultural coalition):

If we fail to make the stimulation of our own creative imagination the heart of our cultural policies, we will continue to live in a culture dependent on the products of other cultures and we will never elevate life in Canada to a space essentially its own.
(Applebaum-Hébert: 1982; p. 6)

But what culture is not dependent on the products of other cultures? Why would we want to be so independent? What exactly does stimulate the creative imagination? It is arguable nothing

whets the artistic appetite like war and revolution. Are these the kind of stimulants the commissioners had in mind?

In a similar vein, Pat Hindley writes, "Without a vision of what our communications capabilities might do for us as a people, there is a clear danger that we shall continue as inarticulate consumers of American waste products" (Hindley: 1977;p. 9) Exactly who is inarticulate and how does this lack manifest itself? Is it in the inability to write generally misleading books? If so, is this so bad? And what is wrong with "mere consumers"? Admittedly we are not all producers of cottage crafts, but is that so awful? And it may be arguable that a lot of what the Americans produce is silly, but how many bad artists must fumble around before a Douglas Sirk or Barnett Newman are possible? Or before we get a Borduas or a Christopher Pratt? How do we separate the cream? And whose cream? One can find similar unproven assumptions throughout the literature.

Close examination of this sort will show the cultural coalition's explanations of culture's value to be surprisingly flimsy. "Surprisingly" because despite this, they have been remarkably effective in directing huge flows of public money toward the arts.

This leads one to suspect a deeper, more profound explanation underlies the public reasons offered for supporting the arts. But how to find it?

Answering this question requires an examination of the basic terminology the cultural coalition uses. The arts are felt to have certain inherent qualitative and quantitative attributes. Why?

2.) In order to clarify this problem I consider two theoretical essays directly concerned with the process of attributing qualities to things.

The first of these is the first chapter of Capital by Karl Marx. Marx tried to understand why commodities come to have the attributes they do. Discrediting the notion these attributes are "natural", Marx sought to understand the process via underlying social forces. We shall consider whether his resulting explanation is also true for culture, by "translating" his argument about commodities into cultural terms. From this perspective, the greatest weakness in Marx's argument is explaining exactly what merit proletarian (or in our terms, artistic) consciousness has.

In order to address the issue of consciousness, I turn to an essay entitled "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" by Georg Lukacs, written in 1922. Again, we shall seek to "translate" Lukacs's argument into contemporary terms. Lukacs's essay is really a theory of social conflict, and how it might be ended. I will suggest his understanding of conflict, for all the sophistication of the ensuing article, is simplistic and incorrect. At the same time, I also believe when we discard

Lukacs's dignosis of conflict, and instead ask, what characteristics does his argument, taken as a whole, manifest? the answer is: three criteria for evaluating culture. These criteria, I will suggest, are the actual, if unconscious, foundations of the cultural coalition's view of culture.

3.) Having determined these criteria for culture, I will then test their applicability, by considering the arts in Canada. I describe how a dilemma has arisen directly attributable to the use of criteria Lukacs described.

CHAPTER II

ARGUMENTS ABOUT CANADIAN CULTURE

The cultural coalition's perspective is difficult to sum up because there is no one writer who captures all of its elements. Indeed, there are many disagreements. Some feel culture suffers from poor marketing techniques, while others suggest the equation of culture with marketing is the root of all artistic evil. Some demand increased government subsidy, while others hope for more direct community support without the intermediary patronage of the state - - suggesting policies that will encourage the patron state to "whither away". Some see the discrediting of our indigenous popular culture as the crucial problem, others express concern over the dominance of popular culture to the detriment of superior cultural forms. But, in all cases the goal is the same: massive subsidy of the arts.

As well, the cultural coalition's arguments always distinguish between economics and aesthetics, quantity and quality. Hence, coalition writers tend to be both pragmatic and idealistic. While they favour policies aimed at allowing Canadian artists to compete more successfully at home and abroad, they also consistently try to articulate an ideal of culture transcending mundane practicalities.

So, on the one hand, culture is a matter of industrial strategy: measuring the impact of culture on the number of jobs available, standards of living, etc.; tailoring cultural

policies to conform with economic strategies designed to promote Canadian independence and self-reliance; controlling consciousness conceived as manifestly a market relationship - - through the deletion of U.S. television advertisements, differential publishing tax policies, the control of cable carriers, and so forth. On the other hand, culture is conceived as most essentially aesthetic in character: expressing purely Canadian ideals - - both regional and national in focus and universal in implication; independence from corporate and/or state control; struggling against the homogenizing, unreflective character of "mass" culture, usually American or an imitation of it.

To some extent, the distinction between the economic and the aesthetic is recognized by the cultural coalition as artificial. The two dimensions often jostle each other in the same sentence because the line between national goals of economic self-determination, and the creative imagination is often very fine. Nevertheless, this distinction is never completely avoided, and thus provides a valuable point of entry for our own investigation.

(The Quantitative Argument: Cultural Policy As Industrial Strategy.)

Most writing on Canadian culture shows a greater concern with the economics of culture - - cultural policy conceived of

as industrial strategy - - than with the problem of aesthetics.

George Woodcock, in his recent book on the arts in Canada, Strange Bedfellows (1985), defines a "cultural industry" as any satisfying needs "which are more than physical." (p. 125) He gives the example of food. Growing potatoes or carrots is not cultural but cooking them is. Clearly he has in mind here culture broadly conceived, but quantifiable at the same time, its effect as measurable as any other industry. This sense of Canadian culture enables Paul Audley (1983) to discuss buying or consumption patterns in culture. He concludes all things being equal Canadians prefer Canadian culture. Whether or not this is true, the covert message of the equation of culture with economics is more Canadian production equals more Canadian culture and is therefore good.

Usually this evaluation is considered self-evident, but sometimes justification is offered. The first of these is attaining more currency in the face of conservative attacks: culture creates jobs, not only directly, for artists, but indirectly. A Toronto arts marketer, Neil Sneyd, states this case most bluntly:

...Toronto's greatest and most neglected tourist attraction is not its shops and hotels and tower and hockey...but (if one could ever bring them together and market them properly) the combined forces of its theatre, musical life, and other cultural institutions...(1976; p. 67)

Pierre Juneau intertwines this economic argument with a defense of "high culture". Art forms, which appear to be

economically negligible, have a spin-off effect benefitting the country as a whole (1977; pp. 13-14). At the same time, he argues the "mass" arts do not have the broad appeal they are routinely claimed to. He mentions as an example television, where only two-fifths of the population account for 70% of the total viewing.

Juneau, having thus reversed the normal equations (high art has mass benefits, mass art only appeals to a minority), then argues the system is in crisis. Because of what Steve Globerman (1983) calls "market failure", the arts industry fails to channel funds back to the producers - - the artists - - upon whom the whole system rests. Juneau gives the example of libraries. They use unauthorized, i.e. unpaid, versions of intellectual work, as in photocopying. The writers themselves receive no benefits from this use, hence decreasing their opportunities to produce work in the future (p. 18). Juneau claims this situation prevails across the arts. The Applebaum-Hébert Royal Commission on the Arts in Canada, terms this the ("cultural extinction theory") and finds it persuasive. (Applebaum, Hébert: p. 69)

Bernard Ostry (1978) offers a refinement of this argument. More than mere bad luck or ignorance has led to a failure to adequately support artists. It results directly from artists' tendency to be critical of the sources of financial power - - corporations, government - - that should be supporting them. Hence Ostry sees a structural disincentive to feeding funding

back to artists (pp. 42,190). Ostry concludes a more strictly maintained "arm's-length" ¹ funding procedure by the government is necessary.

The cultural extinction theory is weak, if only because if culture should become "extinct" in this country it would be the first known instance in human history where one could find people without a culture. One suspects proponents of this view are not foolish enough to think this possible, but rather what they mean is (the kind of culture they prefer may become extinct.)

Ostry offers another variant of the economic argument. Like Sneyd, he maintains the cultural industries (he uses the term, "arts industries") are very large. Unlike Sneyd, he then argues for government, rather than corporate, support: the arts industry is of a size at least as deserving of government support as other industries (p. 123). (He overlooks how this contradicts the cultural extinction theory.) If that theory is true then surely the only reason the cultural industry is so large in the face of structural disincentives is government support. In that case, the call for more government intervention is tautological: the arts are big because of government spending; because they are big they deserve more spending.

This contradiction is apparent in many of the calls for arm's length subsidy. Rather than resolve it however, most

¹"Arm's-length" refers to the distribution of government funds via an agency the government itself has no control over, so long as the agency maintains its legal obligations.

writers go in the opposite direction and expound at length upon the plight of individual artists. However much government and industry may have contributed to the arts, their share pales in comparison to artists' donations in the form of unpaid labour.

Woodcock, referring to investigations into standards of living among artists, notes,

It did not matter greatly what branch of the arts one chose...[artists'] income was round about the accepted poverty line, and their mean income was generally below it, which meant that when one had counted out the tiny minority of big earners, artists as a class were the poorest people in the country except for old-age pensioners and native people living on reservations. (Woodcock: 1985; p. 8)

The consequences of this flow of capital from artists are usually presented as dire: "If concentration of economic or political power prevents full presentation of options, provides stereotyped representations of life rather than a more faithful reflection of human reflection of human activity in all its diversity, or subordinate other interests to immediate commercial profit, the communications system will not advance man's true liberties." (Peers: 1975; p. 73)

This failure to advance liberty is usually linked with nationalist interests. Pat Hindley (1977) refers to the work of the of the economist Karl Deutsch, who describes the vital role of communications in business.

Communications links...keep business people efficiently in touch with one another. Simultaneously they can have one eye open to development in the world market and be open; ready to move and adapt to meet changing conditions. The business world, from [Deutsch's] point

of view demonstrates all the characteristics of a healthy community fed by adequate and well - utilised communications systems. (p. 6. Emphasis in the original)

Hindley then adds. "The same observations cannot be made of this country as a cultural identity."

Even if we accept this metaphor (business = open system, Canadian culture = closed) for the moment we are left with the purely pragmatic problem of how the "healthy community" should support the arts. For as Woodcock notes,

Would Mozart or Piero have been any less if either had been forced to make shift in ways other than those offered by even the best of their patrons? Or were their works any better in quality because of the patronage? We can answer such questions by remembering all those Italian and German princelings who from the fifteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, kept their courts filled with tame artists and, for all their generosity, did not feed a single poet or musician or painter who would be remembered after their lifetime or his own. (1985; p. 64)

He goes on to describe patronage as a ["meal ticket to mediocrity"]. But, nonetheless, he believes it serves an important "facilitating role" when vitality and originality are in fact there. He offers no evidence to back this claim other than one or two cases where artists fortuitously met with a receptive and generous audience and/or patrons. Certainly the Canadian experience offers no support to the claim patronage facilitates art. Both Woodcock (p. 166) and Crean (1976; p. 151) note how the massive increase in government spending in the arts did not trickle down to most artists. The "Great Art Boom" after the Massey Commission was primarily a boom of institutions; art galleries, museums, symphonies, and so on. Bayefsky and Milnes

even claim this support harmed artists. Referring primarily to painting, they claim,

...The 'fifties and 'sixties proved to be the undoing of art...The turbulent 'sixties were the beginning of a confrontation between the new art brokers, who appeared on the scene when instant money became available for the arts and the arts community...the traditional annual exhibitions [by art societies] in the public galleries were reduced and finally eliminated, leaving no opportunity for the artists to exhibit their current work to the public unless it conformed to the curators' and dealers' predilections. (Bayefsky: 1980; p. 142)

Most members of the cultural coalition paint a dreary picture of artistic life before the Massey Commission. Woodcock calls those times a "desert", Ostry describes them as "grey days". Bayefsky and Milnes suggest however things may not have quite so bad.

In the 'thirties the Art Gallery of Ontario...carried out its tasks efficiently with an administrative staff only one-twentieth the size it is today. For almost a century the organization of art in Canada through the art societies was without parallel anywhere else in the world. The societies gave support to the younger artists across the country as well as to the established artists. Their annual exhibitions provided almost the only exposure for new work, and these exhibitions circulated throughout Canada to areas where no works of art would otherwise have been seen. (1980; p. 136)

What then is so sparkling about the present situation that could lead Woodcock to describe what came before as a desert by comparison? Perhaps Bayefsky and Milne's view is unfounded also. The point is, how would we know? And, many critics point out how badly off artists are today; if they were any worse off they would presumably be dead. In that case Woodcock's "facilitating" argument appears unsupported by the Canadian experience. There

is no, or only conflicting, evidence government subsidy has supported artists. Of course, one could maintain art in Canada is not "vital and original", in which case one has to ask, why support it? Are we not perhaps a modern version of the German princes? Or, one could maintain the unarguable growth of art institutions has facilitated the arts. But, since this growth does not appear to have helped artists in any substantial way, we must conclude its benefits are, if anything, primarily economic. Government support has created jobs in construction, arts administration, etc.. In this case, the support has not aided artists' real contribution, which Woodcock elsewhere defines as gifts of the imagination.

This quandary has not gone unnoticed by the cultural coalition. For many it is further justification for arm's length subsidy. In this view, the inability to aid artists produce art arises because artists themselves don't make the decisions, or only with undue government interference. The attempt by the present federal government to attack the principle of arm's length is seen as exacerbating the plight of artists. As well, this argument often continues, an attack on arm's length increases the chances the State will take direct control of the arts, something considered a short step away from a totalitarian nightmare. But the problem remains: how does one know even an ideal arm's-length arrangement will benefit artists? That it will is always assumed, despite its never having been borne out by experience.

The New Right Attack.

The coalition's argument has been attacked by the small, but increasingly influential, amount of writing on culture from the right side of the political spectrum, which suggests a perfectly good mechanism exists for evaluating the relative merit of the arts and individual artists: the market.

A good example of this argument in the academic literature is Steve Globerman's Cultural Regulation in Canada (1983).

He takes as a given that the social benefits of government must outweigh the over-all cost. (p. xix) "It is necessary for the *ex ante* costs associated with [government] intervention to be less than the *ex ante* costs of the problem the intervention is designed to alleviate." (p. 23) He examines the arguments for government intervention in culture in the light of that assumption. He identifies eight basic claims.

1.) Canadians support subsidies for the arts.

An oft-repeated figure in cultural arguments comes from a 1979 Statistics-Canada poll, where 83% of the respondents positively answered the question, "In general, do you feel governments should give financial support to cultural activities?"²

Globerman suggests this figure is misleading. He mentions (p. 38) another Statistics-Canada poll in 1975 showing only 20% of the population had attended a live performing arts concert in

²See, for example, Paul Audley, referred to above.

the previous twelve months. The bulk of this attendance was at popular music concerts generally not subsidised by governments. He concludes Canadians may want culture in the abstract, but in practice they are unwilling to actually spend money on it.

2.) *Culture is inherently "meritorious".*

"The promotion of culture is necessary for national survival and...the state has a responsibility for ensuring the survival of 'artistic markets'" (p. 37) Globerman notes there are no good grounds for claiming this. He mentions increased housing or health facilities as more demonstrably able to increase national well being and hence likelihood of survival. Arts subsidies, on the other hand, tend to only support an elite at the expense of the majority; hardly a circumstance contributing to "national survival" in the absence of other arguments.

3.) *Culture leads to a stronger national identity: we express ourselves through this culture; it unites us; it eases social inter-communication.*

Globerman notes none of these claims, which he characterizes as "elliptical", can be demonstrated to be true. On the other hand, government subsidised culture does demonstrably infringe upon our freedom of choice. He mentions attempts to receive otherwise technically and economically feasible programming (especially American) that have been frustrated by regulatory bodies (p. 40).

4.) *Government subsidy of culture provides ancillary benefits, what economists call "externalities".*

These are:

- Many subsidised art forms provide training and employment which benefits non-subsidised art. For example, subsidised classical music can be used in commercial and non-commercial film soundtracks. Globerman claims such cross-arts benefits do not usually occur in fact, or when they do, costs can be "internalised" by determining property interests (p. 46)
- Experimental work is not financially self-sufficient but it aids the arts community as a whole, therefore, experimenters should be subsidised as a kind of risk-sharing. Globerman refers to "dry-holes" in petroleum exploration as an example of how cultural industries are not unique in this respect. Hence, why should culture be singled out for subsidy? Further, since experimental artists tend to be insensitive to the material benefits of their work, subsidy is unlikely to affect their output, and the only benefit may be increasing the income levels of the subsidised artists.
- Subsidy ensures future production, a condition referred to as "option demand", meaning it maintains future options for consumers whose demands are not presently foreseeable. Globerman demonstrates a number of ways such option demand can be expressed in the market. (pp. 49-50) He claims the possible losses of a market-based policy - - for example a reduction in the number of art forms available - - are over-emphasized.

5.) *People are ignorant about the arts, but would attend more art events if they were less so.*

Globerman calls this "informational market failure" (p. 51). He doubts whether this is in fact so, claiming instead a lack of interest in the arts probably reflects a lack of taste for them. In the light of no good "meritocracy" arguments, Globerman asks why governments should then feel obliged to create this demand.

6.) *The arts are labour intensive, hence they cannot meet rising costs through increased productivity using improved technology.*

Globerman asks whether arts organizations are being as productive as they might. For example, poor marketing and unusually high labour costs (because labour knows costs will be subsidised) are two common failures of arts organizations. (pp. 53-54)

7.) *Monopolies, particularly American ones, afforded "economies of scale" not available to Canadians, are able to "dump" on Canadian markets.*

Globerman argues the costs outweigh the benefits of combatting this phenomenon. He generally prefers to refer to "market complementarities" between the U.S. and Canada, which he claims allow economies of "scope" (p. 55). He suggest Canadian industries should not attempt to compete with foreign monopolies, which will do a better job anyway, but should rather specialize and thereby "complement" monopoly production.

8.) *Artists who earn very low incomes "deserve" more favourable treatment than is provided by a market system.*

Globerman responds there are really three income groups in the arts: a small, highly-paid group; a slightly larger group receiving above-average incomes; and a large part-time and full-time group with below-average income. Artists are aware of this income distribution when they embark on their careers. "Moreover, it is dubious public policy to promote increased employment opportunities for part-time performers solely to enable them to earn average or above-average incomes as full-time performers." (p. 59)

Globerman concludes none of the eight arguments demonstrate "market failure" - - where the the market fails to provide the greatest social benefit for the least social cost - - hence government intervention in the arts cannot be justified. Instead, the available evidence suggests subsidy effectively supports only a small elite, and also provides a disincentive to a healthy domestic cultural industry. He cites economically undesirable kinds of growth, such as non-profit organizations, maximization of profits rather than increasing output, the growth of intermediaries (brokers, lawyers, etc.), and the capture of regulatory agencies by producers as evidence of such disincentive at work.

Globerman's criterion - - social benefit vs. social cost - - provides a useful razor to cut through the flimsy claims of writers in the cultural coalition. However, as coalition members

never fail to point out in response to rightist attacks, this criterion really relies upon another, more crucial assumption: that social good is quantifiable and measurable. Globerman assumes any good not measurable in the market for all intents and purposes does not exist.

The Qualitative Response

Because they are eager to discredit right-wing attacks, and because of liberal sensitivity to suggestions that support for the arts may merely be support for already affluent members of an arts services industry (lawyers, administrators and so on), the cultural coalition sooner or later swerves away from the economic dimension. To paraphrase a famous CRTC quotation, the only thing really mattering in culture is aesthetics - - everything else is housekeeping. Although virtually all liberal writing is primarily concerned with economic questions, they almost equally invariably claim the point of it all to be an ill-defined, perhaps undefinable, ideal of human expression. As Frank Peers puts it in his discussion of broadcasting,

Broadcasting which operates as an auxilliary to advertising must treat man as a buyer of goods; and the programs are subservient to that end. A full broadcasting service operates on quite another principle, appealing to man as an active and creative person, Aristotle's "political being", with a potential for growth. National control, then, is not an end in itself, and never has been in Canada. It is the necessary condition for a system designed, in the North American context, to assist Canadians to know the changing society around them, and to adapt sucessfully to it. (1975 [1969];p. 228)

Peers only infers what obstructs his "active and creative" person. Bernard Ostry states it explicitly: Americanization.

The need to create our own life and environment becomes more and more urgent as we feel the pressures to conform to the largely unconscious Americanization which acts on us through technology, advertising and other engines of commercial persuasion as well as through the popular arts. (1978; p. 176) ³

The clear inference is "Americanization" somehow "damages" us. How? Pat Hindley offers a medical metaphor: a national identity is comparable to the building of immunities within a biological organism. (1977; p. 7) These immunities protect Canada from U.S. "waste products". Susan Crean offers a similarly medical metaphor, although here more psychological than physiological. She discusses how Canadians are expected, "...to assimilate an aesthetic which, in terms of both class and nationality postulates their inferiority." (1976; p. 16) As a result, Canadians become "dependent". "The effect of this psychological dependence is as harmful to a group as it would be to an individual." (p. 18)

In the same vein, Alponse Ouimet refers to T.V. and radio. He notes how we have been "pushed" into the American broadcasting mould by what he terms the "American ethos". (1982; p. 134) He likens this process to a "transplant" (p. 142), and concludes that without cultural and economic sovereignty, there can be no political sovereignty (p. 132). This equation of the link between culture/economics/politics on the one hand, and

³For similar views see also: R.F. Swanson: 1982; p. 61, S. Crean: 1976; p. 18, R. Irving: 1962; pp. 227-8

"survival" on the other, recurs again and again in the literature. Stephen Clarkson: "The coherence of a state's culture is a crucial factor in the states's capacity to survive." (1982; p. 22)

Why culture functions, like a potent drug, to heal the body politic, creating Hindley's "immunities", is sometimes assumed to be self-evident. "If Canadians accept the idea that survival as an independent nation and preservation of a distinctive culture is an objective worth striving for, then certain legislative and policy steps in communication necessarily follow." (Woodcock in Hindley: 1977; p. xiii, emphasis added)

More often the "disease" threatening our culture is specified, as in the example here by Ostry: "...In cultural matters, where freedom of choice is threatened by the sheer volume of mass persuasion and mass culture and by the uniformity that results from competition for mass markets, it is probably only the federal government that has the power and resources to intervene and ensure the survival on a national scale of alternative cultural products." (p. 188) Earlier he is even more blunt: "The pressures of modernizing Americanization are toward uniformity, homogeneity, and conformity." (p. 176) In sum, the "disease" a "healthy" national culture must combat is (American) mass culture. Why? Because under its influence we lose our natural (?) creativity, and instead are weighed down by the "false" consciousness of consumerism. Northrop Frye: "...In the West [the nature of the messages with which we are bombarded]

reflects the eagerness of the economic establishment to keep the consumers buying." (in Hindley: 1977; p. 5) Crean adds, "Consumer choice is more apparent than real." (1976; p. 43)

Albert Trueman goes on to wonder whether the Canadian people, under a deluge of the "pretentious and false" can develop or retain an ability to "discriminate between the truth and the lie." (1962; pp. 8-9) Northrop Frye expresses the same concern in a discussion of the "inertia" he claims is destroying everything distinctive. "The fight for cultural distinctiveness, from this point of view, is a fight for human dignity itself, for the variety in life that nothing but genuine culture can ever produce, for the unity that is at the opposite pole from uniformity." (1982; p. 43)

The equation here is obvious: Consumption = no "real" choice (for example, not consuming?) = no political/economic/cultural sovereignty = diseased consciousness (uniform, homogenous, conformist) = sickness driving people to consumption.

The obverse side of the "disease" argument is a conception of "health". As Trueman (1962) poetically puts it:

We need to improve among our citizens the capacity for communication because we need to place in their hands the power to extend and enrich their experience (p. 5) ...to enable them to multiply their experience and to dwell in the minds of men, greater than themselves, who live or have lived in other places and at other times; to free them from the imprisonment of the immediate, the insistent here and now; to help them lift from their shoulders the oppressive weight of the present hour, which settles down inexorably on all of us. (p. 6)

Or Woodcock (1985):

Art...traverses boundaries of time and space...it is art's paradoxical achievement to work through the particular and discover the universal...art begins with the individual insight and proceeds to the universally understood truth. (p. 15)

He continues, in a passage already referred to above,

The arts are only viable, and only justifiable, if they serve values other than economic or political. Their real contributions are not in taxes paid or jobs created or propaganda provided, but in the irradiation of our lives by the gifts of the imagination, and it is for this reason that the community must support them. (p. 130)

Thus we are left with a clear opposition: on the one hand "sovereign" culture, enriching, irradiating, creative; on the other, "mass" culture, homogenizing, deadening, pre-empting individual choice, etc. Put in these terms much of the argument of Canadian liberals fits squarely in a debate that has raged since the Enlightenment at least: high art vs. popular culture.

CHAPTER III

THE POPULAR/HIGH ART DEBATE: LEO LOWENTHAL.

The origins of the modern debate over popular culture and high art can be traced back to the seventeenth century. Leo Lowenthal (1961) gives a good brief overview of how the argument developed.

He starts his review with Montaigne and Pascal, who he notes, layed out the two basic positions consistently recurring in discussions on the arts. Montaigne accepted the drive to seek entertainment as an unavoidable aspect of human nature. Pascal, in contrast, considered man to be perfectable, if the right conditions were attained.

Montaigne argued entertainment allowed men to adapt to increasing societal pressures. Men sought to soothe their souls through the arts (a clear distinction between mass and high art was not yet recognized), which provided them with the variety their own lives lacked. The arts could also respond to these needs because "writers and actors share with their audience the need to escape from their own woes." (p. 16)

Pascal felt the same growth of unanswered social demands as Montaigne; however, he sought to resist the temptations of the "escape" to entertainment (the escape metaphor originates at this time). Only contemplation could permit man to understand his place in the universe. The arts deny man that opportunity.

Hence in order to save their souls men should actively combat their influence. Lowenthal comments, "Pascal's critique of entertainment...prefigures one of the most important themes in modern discussions on popular culture: the view that it is a threat to morality, contemplation, and an integrated personality, and that it results in a surrender to mere instrumentalities at the expense of the pursuit of higher goals." (p. 17) We have clearly seen this argument propounded by writers in the cultural coalition.

Lowenthal then turns to Goethe, who injects three new elements into the debate.

(1.) A consciousness of the manipulative factors inherent in entertainment.

(2.) The new role of the businessman as an intermediary between the artist and his public.

(3.) A conflict between the true artist, committed to the highest ideals of his art, and the wishes of a mass audience.

These new elements arise in Goethe's various formulations of the character of the modern audience; the nature of the mass media; and artistic standards under new social conditions.

Goethe generally disparages the newly arisen mass audience. Reminiscent of Pascal, he characterizes it as restless, desirous of change for its own sake, and constantly seeking novelty and sensation. To Goethe these prevent the slow ripening

he feels essential to creativity. As well, the modern audience is increasingly passive, content to let the artists do the creative work for them. As a result, each individual, both artist and audience member, tends to conform to the wishes of the whole.

The same contempt, never openly acknowledged or justified, is apparent in the arguments of the cultural coalition of the present day, as in the equation of "consumption" and "disease", referred to above. This line of argument backs the coalition into the corner of suggesting that while they know what is good for us, we do not. If we did we would not embrace American culture as willingly as we do. Precisely why they alone are so enlightened is never explained since the only possible answer necessarily involves the concept of an elite, anathema to most members of the cultural coalition, publicly at least.

To return to Goethe, the proto-mass media - - arts aiming to entertain - - are as naturally inferior to him as they are to most liberals. They tend to only mechanically reproduce the world, especially its basic details, hence "crowding out" the imaginative, and often difficult to follow, leaps of a truly creative art. But Goethe openly admits this true art can only be produced by an elite, who should seek artistic expressions encouraging imagination and contemplation. The elite "betrays its mission" when "it plays up to the cheap instincts of the populace." (p. 22)

A somewhat different opinion was expressed by Schiller. He saw the two conflicting tendencies of men - - one toward unreflectively gratifying instincts and another toward a moral state - - as a necessary tension. Neither developed alone was satisfactory. Giving in entirely to instinct would reduce humans to an animal-like natural state. On the other hand, a wholly moral social order, one governed by strict codes of conduct would preclude individual freedom. The reconciliation of these two mutually exclusive drives was only possible one way: in art. Schiller saw the experience of beauty as a means to the good life. Like Goethe, and virtually all other aesthetes, Schiller opposed this experience to a mediocre art which lulls its audience into passivity.

Lowenthal next turns to nineteenth century English criticism, which he claims differs from contemporary German writing in two ways:

(1.) The concern with art is subordinated to a concern with culture as a whole.

(2.) Attention is focused on institutionalised social pressures and their attendant manipulation and mechanization.

English writers of this time tended to bemoan the dangers of yielding to conformism and passivity under social pressure as much as German writers. However, unlike them, the English tended to be more specific about the forms this pressure took. Arnold, for example, was most concerned about the effects of

mechanization which he called the "besetting danger" (p. 29). Walter Bagehot singles out newspapers for their regressive tendencies. He noted how newspapers deal primarily with politics, not with literature, or philosophy, or science. He blamed this condition on the producers, but he noted that consumers became like what they consumed, an early example of the "blank slate" psychology so common in contemporary debates on the media. Consumers are "written upon" by the media they watch; helpless, they then go and buy, or rape, or fall prey to despair, or whatever else the overt and covert messages tell them to.

Like Goethe, Bagehot saw the mass media "crowding out" spiritual and intellectual struggle. He saw this tendency counteracted by great art, which he saw as a force for the universal liberation of mankind. Lowenthal:

Such a concept of art, particularly of literature, as a liberating force, goes far beyond that of the classical humanists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries whose first concern was the individual, organized society being viewed as an agglomerate of autonomous moral subjects. This newer concept came to the fore after the boundless optimism about the potentialities of the individual had begun to recede, and it was rooted in the idea of superimposed social change which in turn would benefit the individual. (P. 32)

Hazlitt deplored the official pontificators of artistic matters, the growing role of money in the arts, and the tendency of the public to employ appearance as a means to success.

Hunt, like Hazlitt, felt the new artistic patron, the marketplace, devalued artists, who were encouraged to seek

novelties and tricks to win over the indiscriminating large audience now supporting them. Sir Walter Scott, on the other hand, saw nothing wrong with this circumstance. He felt the audience at which the art was directed was its legitimate critic.

Lowenthal concludes his discussion of the English writers by noting how the various writers, despite their differences, all "formulate an injunction, a moral judgement, which amounts to a condemnation of popular art." (p. 42) He contrasts these moralistic approaches with another, more sociologically - oriented one. In this vein he discusses de Toqueville, who approached art/popular culture without using good/bad categories. Instead, de Toqueville tried to outline the social conditions necessary for a mass art as opposed to a more esoteric high art. He noted how only mass communications is succesful in modern societies.

Lowenthal sees himself in this sociological tradition, one which charges itself with redressing the overwhelming tendency to denigrate mass culture in favour of high art. He points out, as a beginning point for this enterprise, three recurring assumptions underlying the critique of popular art.

1.) High art induces contemplation, struggles, morality, etc.

2.) Popular art only gratifies lower or more base needs.

3.) Mass media products are always of poor quality.

Using the work of the French critic of radio, Rene Sudre, as an example, he proposes research into the reciprocal effect of the consumers of mass culture. How exactly do they interact with each other and the media? Is the media "socializing or individualizing, integrating, or isolating...family conserving or family destroying...?" (p. 49)

Until these questions are answered, the "high art" view", as we have seen overwhelmingly the view of liberals in the cultural coalition, seems to be unjustified elitism.

CHAPTER IV
COMMODITIES AND CULTURE

What is most curious about the cultural coalition's arguments - - both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions - - is how flimsy they are. In preparing the present study, the most difficult problem faced when approaching the coalition's literature was not deciding if it could be attacked, but rather, in the face of so many unproven assumptions and contradictions, where to begin? How does one systematically approach an argument so rife with inconsistencies?

The flimsiness of the arguments presented leads one to suspect there must be, somewhere, a more solid intellectual foundation for the cultural coalition. After all, they were able to appropriate huge amounts of money for culture over the last thirty-five years.

But if the cultural coalition itself cannot or will not state what this foundation is, how do we find it? I believe the answer to this question can be found by returning to the problem of "mass" art vs. "high" art.

As we saw, in this debate considerations of mass or popular culture generally concern aspects of the effect of contemporary production techniques on culture: mass culture crowds out creativity, stifles imagination, prevents contemplation, and so on. These effects are almost always described via notions of

repetition and quantity. The primary focus or problem for criticism is how the consumption of mass produced cultural artifacts by large numbers of individuals affects them as individuals and as a society.

Production is generally considered less problematic when mass culture is concerned. Either production is not considered part of the realm of culture *per se* and hence is left for study by other disciplines such as economics, or production is considered to be formulaic, transparent and obvious. No one is particularly interested, except perhaps for technical reasons, in how "Hill Street Blues" comes to be written, since it is generally conceded the program has no inherent value.

The study of high culture, on the other hand, is usually concerned with unique works and their relation to autonomous individuals. Where for popular culture the key word is quantity, here it is quality. The problems dealt with are correspondingly different. Here the effect of the cultural artifact is of less importance than its inherent truth, although of course truth has its effects. But whereas a television show seen by only a few is a "failure", a work of art is "true" even if it is so for only a few. This biases research to the sphere of production, i.e. how (under what social and/or moral and/or psychological conditions) does "good" or "true" art get produced? Consumption thereby gets delegated to the margins. That "consuming" a work of art seems to be a contradiction in terms is evidence of this.

For some reason, mass culture is always equated in this way with quantity, and high culture with quality. Why? In the literature, so far as I know, only one kind of writing addresses this question: Marxian analysis. Marx himself did not directly. In fact, he wrote almost nothing about culture. However, he was directly concerned with questions of the commodity. The question Capital, among other of his writings, seeks to address is, why are commodities attributed with the properties they are, i.e. in some form equivalent in value to other commodities? By "nature", any two things are completely unlike each other. Yet, somehow, we accept their abstract equivalence: two apples = one orange, or two pairs of boots = one coat. In the classical political economy of Marx's day, this circumstance was accepted as given. But through analyzing this problem Marx hoped to reveal the underlying structural dynamics of capitalist society, which appeared incomprehensible, Marx felt, to bourgeois thought.

If we substitute "culture" for "commodity", then we see Marx was really concerned with the same problem we are: the imputation of qualities to entities, either material (commodities) or abstract (culture). As shall be shown below, there are crucial flaws in the Marxian argument limiting its usefulness. One Marxist writer, Georg Lukacs, seeking to remedy those flaws, wrote an essay providing criteria for evaluating culture. These criteria reveal the nature of the cultural coalition's intellectual foundation.

Marx's Theory of Commodities.

As is well known, in his analysis Marx divides the commodity into "use-value" (what economists today usually call "utility"), and "exchange-value" ("price"). He displays considerable ambiguity in his conception of use-value. He notes,

So far as [the commodity] is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point that those properties are the product of human labour. It is as clear as Noon-day, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him. (1967[1867]; p. 71)

Marx is describing a situation where, on the one hand, there exist human wants, concerning which he states, "The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference." (p. 35) On the other hand, there exists things as things. "The form of wood, for instance, is altered by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table continues to be that common, everyday thing, wood." (p. 71)

Utility - - use-value - - represents a clear ("as Noon-day") and consistent correlation between these two poles: things as things and human wants. Things in use satisfy human needs/wants. Why is there this consistent correlation? Because utility "...is not a thing of the air. Being limited by the physical properties of the commodity, it has no existence apart from that commodity." He continues, "This property of a commodity is

independent of the amount of labour required to appropriate its useful qualities." (p. 36)

A superficial reading of these lines would seem to lead to the conclusion Marx is attributing intrinsic value to things, independent of human desire or wants. But Marx is careful to deny this. He refers to the seventeenth-century economist Barbon, who makes a distinction between "intrinsic vertue", the value of things in use, and "intrinsic value", the value of things independent of their use for humans. Marx agrees with Barbon nothing can have intrinsic value. But when Barbon then goes on to say, "Things have an intrinsic vertue...which in all places have the same vertue; as the loadstone to attract iron.", Marx qualifies this by noting, "The property which the magnet possesses of attracting iron, became of use only after by means of that property the polarity of the magnet had been discovered." (p. 35n.)

Marx is too subtle a thinker to allow the notion that value in use is everywhere the same. It always requires human intervention to make a thing useful to us; hence in one specific social arrangement a diamond may be "useful" as a drill bit, but "useless" for adorning sacrifices, whereas in another arrangement the opposite might be true. He recognizes any particular thing can have a large number of uses; to discover these is "the work of history" (p. 35). But these "discoveries of usefulness" - - more precisely the social creation of utility - - are limited by the physical properties of things. Diamonds

cannot satisfy hunger. Hence they will never be discovered to be useful as food.

Marx, in a revealing analogy, compares this to human vision. "In the same way the light from an object is perceived by us not as the subjective excitation of our optic nerve, but something outside the eye itself." (p. 72)

Notice what Marx is saying here. He is describing a kind of "mistake" we make when we see: we don't perceive vision as the excitation of the optic nerve - - which is what is "really" happening - - but rather as an objective quality of what is seen. If the optic nerve is damaged this subjective quality becomes apparent. In cases of colour blindness for example, objects appear to lose their normal qualities, but of course the objects don't change at all; the perception of them changes. This is objectification: imputing to objects characteristics giving them their qualities as objects, qualities which then appear to arise independently of their perception.

Marx goes on to say, "But, in the act of seeing, there is at all events, an actual passage of light from one thing to another, from the external object to the eye. There is a physical relation between physical things." (p. 72) In other words, this kind of objectification, this "mistake" or "misreading" doesn't matter because there is a consistent correlation ("a physical relation") between it and what happens in fact - - viz. the passage of light, a physical relation

between physical things.

Like vision, use-value similarly involves an "error": we always mistake what we find useful in a thing for the thing itself. We "forget" usefulness only arises as a result of social intervention. But this, like vision, represents no problem for Marx because the number of ways we might forget this are always "limited by the physical properties of the commodity". The qualitative properties of things continually reassert themselves; the "work of history" is deciding which qualities will assert themselves at any particular time.

Marx contrasts this to things as commodities, things that are not only exchanged after they are produced, but also produced that they might be exchanged, "...and their character as values has therefore to be taken into account..."(p. 73)

"Value" is then traced by Marx back to what he claims is its root: human labour. The kind of labour creating exchange-value actually consists of two distinct types.

1.) A specifying kind of labour, so that the commodity satisfies a "definite social want", and,

2.) A generalising labour, so the specific kind of commodity satisfying a specific social want is equivalent to all other specific commodities, and hence become exchangeable with them. For the producer then,

...the character that his own labour possesses of being socially useful takes the form of the condition that the

product must be not only useful, but useful for others, and the social character that his particular labour has of being the the equal of all other particular kinds of labour, takes the form that all the physically different articles that are the products of labour, have one common quality, viz., that of having value.(pp. 73-74)

This character of having value,

...when once impressed upon the products obtains fixity only by reason of their acting and re-acting upon each other as quantities of value. These quantities vary continually, independently of the will, foresight, and action of the producers. To them, their own social action takes the form of the action of objects, which rule the producers instead of being ruled by them. (p. 75. Emphasis added)

Why do these quantities vary continually? Because "...the existence of the things *qua* commodities and the value-relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom." (p. 72. Emphasis added.)

Marx is describing essentially the same circumstance as in his example of vision. Here people similarly "mistake" subjective appearance - - in this case their relation to commodities - - for objective reality. People transfer social qualities to inanimate objects, much as they transfer qualities of light acting on the optic nerve to the things themselves.

But, Marx sees a problem here because, unlike use (or vision), in exchange there is no "physical relation between physical things". As he says, there is absolutely no correlation between what we perceive, and what exists in fact - - in this

case the physical properties of things as things, and the human labour all objectification in commodities ultimately manifests.

To sum up, Marx is describing both use and exchange as the intervening moments between human wants and things as things. In the former case - - in use - -the variety of uses of a thing discoverable by man is limited by the necessity of a material correlate in the thing itself; a thing can have only so many qualities. In contrast to this, there is no such limit in exchange. Quantity can vary continuously, in fact infinitely.

So, it is not simply the case for Marx that use is "natural" while exchange is "social", for he recognizes that both use and exchange mediate between these two poles. Rather what seems to bother him is the fact that exchange is by definition capable of limitless expansion.

The question then arises, just why does this bother him? Of course, we can easily suggest problems arising from a market seemingly capable of infinite expansion. Questions of ecological imbalance and of the quality of life are two examples that spring to mind. But the former was many years from being recognized as a problem when Marx was writing, while the latter, with a longer history of being perceived as a problem, is not referred to even once by Marx in the whole chapter on commodities.¹ So, what is the problem here? Briefly stated, it

¹ Elsewhere in Capital of course Marx goes into the abominable working conditions of eighteenth and nineteenth-century England in great detail. But clearly he sees these as symptoms of a deeper problem, not the problem itself.

is the difference in the relationship use and exchange have with human labour. At first glance the two relations appear similar for Marx. As we have seen, he describes how both use and exchange are how human labour appears to us. To find the usefulness of things is the work of history; it is equally the history of work. Similarly with exchange. It is the material form of value. Value consists of labour, both the specific labour meeting specific perceived needs, and labour in the abstract, making one thing equivalent to another.

Neither use/exchange, nor the labour they represent, can exist without things. It is how they manifest themselves; labour through things, and things through labour.

But when we speak of labour we refer to human labour, that is, the real human labour of actual individuals who have real requirements to meet if they are to keep on producing. Because use is by definition tied to the qualitative properties of things, for Marx there is no problem here. But exchange has no such qualitative basis. Anything can be worth anything else, can have any value, regardless of whether or not that value actually reflects the requirements of the human labour that commodity exchange ultimately reflects.

Marx feels since what might be called the "logic of exchange" has no inherent connection with the humans who create it, sooner or later that logic will contradict actual

requirements.² As he himself says, "...In the midst of all the accidental and ever fluctuating exchange-relations between their products, the labour time necessary for their production forcibly asserts itself like an over-riding law of nature. The law of gravity thus asserts itself when a house falls about our ears." (p. 75)

Elsewhere in Capital, Marx illustrates his argument with an example from the struggle to shorten the working day.

The capitalist maintains his right as a purchaser when he tries to make the working day as long as possible, as to make, whenever possible, two working days out of one. On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the labourer maintains his right as a seller when he wishes to reduce the working-day to one of definite normal duration. There is here, therefore, an antinomy, right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchanges. Between equal rights force decides. Hence is it that in the history of capitalist production, the determination of what is a working day, presents itself as the result of a struggle, a struggle between collective capital, i.e. the class of the capitalists, and collective labour, i.e. the working-class. (pp. 234-5)

² Whether or not this argument is correct is the subject of a large body of literature that cannot be considered here. It probably is relevant though to note in passing that a variant of this argument forms the basis of Lukacs's later work. As he says in his self-critical preface to the 1968 edition of History and Class Consciousness, in his writing on reification, "...the basic Marxist category, labour as the mediator of the metabolic interaction between society and nature is missing." (1971[1968]; p. xvii. Emphasis added.)

The 'Historical-Materialist' View Of Art

This is a neat piece of theorizing, but what relevance does it have to the problem of Canadian culture? We can probably best see the link through the problem of the "cultural extinction theory" referred to in the last chapter. It will be recalled how this theory suggests artists, upon whom the whole cultural edifice rests, are being wiped out, threatened with "extinction", due to either unconscious, systemic neglect ("market failure"), or through the conscious, overt hostility of governments and corporations to socially critical artists.

In Marx's theory we can see the "cell form" of this argument, in a way a more profound version than contemporary accounts. Culture could be seen as an excellent example of the kind of human, qualitative requirements neglected by the quantitative exigencies of the market system. The "plight" of artists can then be seen as analagous to the plight of humanity as a whole under capitalism.

This Marxist argument for the merit of the arts is expressed most clearly by Paul Cappon, a "historical-materialist" sociologist of art. He describes the arts as having a two-fold character.

On the one hand, art is susceptible to the same economic laws as all other social forms, so, historically speaking, it is increasingly controlled by bourgeois entrepreneurs. Hence

artists become increasingly alienated, a circumstance reflected in their art. Atomised by capitalism, they are unable to see the concrete economic reasons for their alienation. Insofar as they cannot, they perpetuate the mystique of the alienated individual among their audience.

On the other hand, the very condition permitting this circumstance also demands the autonomy of art from direct capitalist control. Hence the possibility remains alive for particularly insightful artists to present the contradictions of capitalist society to public view. This can occur even if the artists themselves are unconscious of the real significance of their work.

Thus we have seen, for example, that, although Balzac was a conservative, a monarchist legitimist, this is transcended through the realism of his work: what stands out is a realistic portrayal of a declining aristocracy in a new bourgeois order. Similarly, as Lenin declares, Tolstoy's mysticism could not prevent his work from allowing the Russian working-class to know more about its enemies. (p. 39)

Profound social change is part of the historical process. As people are progressively "squeezed" by capitalism, they respond violently for their own preservation, a dynamic reflected in art, unconsciously in the past, hopefully consciously in the present and future.

As historical and economic elements necessary for change appear, it is within the power of people acting collectively to produce those changes. Art and literature then should realistically reflect contemporary historical conditions, and the changes that may occur through human effort. (pp.11-12)

This "realistic reflection" will show,

...that workers are not without hope, [to show] that the people constitute a collectivity in opposition to bourgeois rule is to demonstrate that isolation and alienation are not the necessary human condition. It shows that, given the tools of knowledge and collective consciousness, change can be produced in the social sphere and in the individual's relationship with society.

There is a difficulty with this however, which we can see clearly if we return to Marx's original argument. He suggests commodity exchange distorts or misleads people about actual, qualitative, material requirements. This too is the basis for Cappon's claims for the merit of art. The question is, how exactly are people misled? Marx himself was apparently disturbed by this problem for after the passage quoted above about the labour time necessary for production being a "law of gravity", he adds a footnote by Engels:

What are we to think of a law that asserts itself only by periodical revolutions? It is just nothing but a law of Nature, founded on the want of knowledge of those whose action is the subject of it. (p. 75n. Emphasis added)

This subtly shifts the problem from being solely the contradiction between labour and exchange, to also the failure to be conscious of that contradiction. It is self-evident that the two must be connected. But how?

Marx does not deal with this question with the same degree of clarity as he does with use and exchange. But deal with it he must. If he argues human labour appears to men in distorted form under the regime of commodity exchange then he must take into account what form this appearance takes. Simply to say this

distortion appears as a commodity is not enough. For then we must ask, which commodities, and to whom? Does the problem arise for everybody, in every confrontation with commodities? Or does the problem arise from the total economy of commodity exchange? In that case is it still each (and every?) individual who is mystified? Or is it just those specialised branches of knowledge that take abstract totalities such as "the economy" as their object, (as in, for example, political economy) that are mystified? Or are these specialised, esoteric kinds of knowledge somehow related in mystification to the mundane knowledge of individual producers and consumers of commodities? In short, exactly who has failed to recognize the "labour time necessary for production"?

Marx gives no clear answer to these questions. He does state that, "Man's reflection on the forms of social life, and consequently also, his scientific³ analysis of those forms, take a course directly opposite to that of their actual historical development." (p. 75. Emphasis added)

So, in the first instance it appears it is man's failure, a failure of everyone in society. But then notice how casually he slips from that position (which is unprovable), to claiming it is a failure of rationalism. As man's consciousness goes, he

³ The use of the English word "science" requires qualification: Marx was referring to a (German) philosophic concept of consciousness broader than what is normally considered science in the English-speaking world. I prefer, and will henceforth instead use, the word "rationalism", defined as the use of reason to identify and resolve problems.

seems to be saying, so goes rationalism.

This requires some justification, for the identity of rationalism with human consciousness in general is not self-evident. Therefore Marx says,

The categories of bourgeois economy consist of...forms of thought expressing with social validity the conditions and relations of a definite, historically determined mode of production, viz., the production of commodities. The whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour as long as they take the form of commodities, vanishes therefore, as soon as we come to other forms of production. (p. 76)

Rationalism reflects or expresses the [capitalist] mode of production, but in inverse form: directly opposite to their actual development. If you change the mode of production, the inversion disappears.

Only then can we see how he could say,

The life process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men, and it is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan. This, however, demands for society a certain material groundwork or set of conditions of existence which in their turn are the spontaneous product of a long and painful process of development.(p. 80)

This does not mean, then, that consciousness will also disappear (or else how would men arrive at a settled plan?), only that consciousness will no longer reflect the mode of production in an inverse way as it does now. The important point here is that rationalism stands in the same relation to consciousness as exchange stands to labour. Rationalism is the

perverse form of the general category consciousness, just as exchange is the inverse form of general category labour.

Presumably, the problem here for Marx does not arise because exchange/rationalism "reflects" or "expresses" labour/consciousness since expression is inherent to any social form. Individuals are almost always unable to produce by themselves all they need to satisfy their varied wants. Therefore they must always, in some form or other, exchange things. Similarly, any mode of production requires reflection as to the conditions under which it could arise and remain possible.

So what is the problem? Not only does Marx not answer this crucial question, his argument raises another.

Marx suggests rationalism, the capitalist consciousness of things, results from the objectification of things as commodities (the capitalist mode of production). In short, consciousness is here an effect of the mode of production. At the same time he proclaims the problem of men's relation to things as solved when free men legislate and live according to a "settled plan", a phrase clearly implying there consciousness will direct men, i.e. become a cause of the mode of production.

The question is, how do we get from here to there? If our consciousness is a product of capitalist production how do we overcome this? Does the mode of production change first? If so, how? Marx suggests the proletariat, in protecting its own

interests - - its labour time - - overcomes capitalism. Does that mean somehow the proletariat, because of its class position, gains some insight different from what the bourgeois perceives? Does it then use that insight to arrive at Marx's "settled plan"? If the answer to these questions is yes, it means Marx must have had some idea - - or at least thought he did - - of what the proletariat's insight was to be, or else how could he know the proletariat would not establish a new form of, say, feudalism, or monarchy? Presumably Marx did not mean those when he called for "free men" and a "settled plan". He must have thought proletarian consciousness superior to that of the bourgeoisie. What then is its nature? What insight does it have that bourgeois consciousness does not? Can we analogously describe artistic insight? What is its special merit?

Lukacs's Theory Of Proletarian Consciousness

This problem was addressed in 1922 by G.Lukacs⁴, in a collection of essays entitled History and Class Consciousness. In particular, one essay in that volume, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat", struggles most forcefully with the question of the vantage point of proletarian

⁴ Since the present study is not a historical work I will avoid any discussion of the development of Lukacs's thought before or after History and Class Consciousness. For the reader unfamiliar with Lukacs, I will mention he was a Hungarian Communist intellectual and political activist who lived from 1885 to 1971. He was a major theorist in Marxism and cultural criticism. History and Class Consciousness has influenced virtually every major western European thinker since World War One.

consciousness and its consequences.

There are basically two answers possible to the question why proletarian consciousness is superior to that of the bourgeois:

1.) Proletarian consciousness is more "natural", or 2.)

Proletarian consciousness resolves problems previously thought insoluble.

Re. point one, proletarian consciousness is more "natural", Lukacs begins his essay with a description of modern society as different from the forms preceding it.

If we follow the path taken by labour in its development from the handicraft via co-operation and manufacture to machine industry we can see a continuous trend towards greater rationalisation, the progressive elimination of the qualitative, human and individual attributes of the worker. On the one hand, the process of labour is progressively broken down into abstract, rational, specialised operations so that the worker loses contact with the finished product and his work is reduced to the mechanical repetition of a specialised set of actions. On the other hand, the period of time necessary for work to be accomplished (which forms the basis of rational calculation) is converted, as mechanisation and rationalisation are intensified, from a merely empirical average figure to an objectively calculable work-stint that confronts the modern worker as a fixed and established reality. With the modern 'psychological' analysis of the work-process (in Taylorism) this rational mechanisation extends right into the worker's 'soul': even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality and placed in opposition to it so as to facilitate their integration into specialised rational systems and their reduction to statistically viable concepts. (p. 88)

This is not a particularly unusual viewpoint, nor very controversial, except perhaps the last sentence. However, Lukacs is not satisfied with this description. Sounding the battle charge for his own rhetoric, he exclaims this rationalisation of

labour "...must declare war on the manufacture of whole products." (p. 88). In this "war", traditional social forces "disintegrate", and communities "decompose" (p. 85). He becomes increasingly shrill, talking of "disastrous effects" (p. 86), "imprisoning" (p. 90) men in a "dehumanised and dehumanising...relation" (p. 92) where they are "crippled to the point of abnormality." (p. 99).

Obviously, the case Lukacs is so strenuously trying to make is capitalism is "bad". The question must be asked then, rhetoric aside, just why is it so awful?

At first glance, as evidenced by the quotes just listed, Lukacs seems to be making a diachronic argument, which, put in its most simple form, is the situation is now bad but once was not. He repeats what is by now a litany of accusations: capitalism is brutal, it oppresses and exploits people, it reduces people to mere cogs in a machine and so on. Presumably he has in mind some time when these kinds of things did not occur. However, Lukacs offers little concrete evidence to back up this claim. In fact, he says,

Oppression and exploitation that knows no bounds and scorns every human dignity were known even to pre-capitalist ages. So too was mass production with mechanical, standardized labour, as we can see, for instance, with canal construction in Egypt and Asia Minor and the mines in Rome. (p. 90)

He is even forced to concede present modes of extracting value are in some respects better than those preceding capitalism. "While [the process of capitalism becoming dominant]

is incomplete [a phrase encompassing virtually the entirety of recorded history] the methods used to extract surplus labour are, it is true, more obviously brutal..."(p. 91, emphasis added). Since presumably Lukacs is not seriously suggesting here that overt brutality is better than a covert sort, the question remains, how were earlier societies better off than us?

Lukacs mentions only one example of where human relations were more acceptable, where they were, in his terms, part of an "organic process". It is a village community (p. 91). Here, we can suppose, social relations were more "autochthonous", a word Lukacs's translator uses later (p. 184).

According to Webster's, "autochthonous" derives from the Greek *autos*, meaning self, and *chton*, meaning earth or ground. Together they form *autochton*; those springing from the land itself. Lukacs seems to be suggesting a model where this unity between the human and the natural occurred once, but has now been "lost".

This pursuit of a natural ideal seems to conform with a point of view Lukacs later in the essay attributes to Rousseau. "[This point of view] concentrates increasingly on the feeling that social institutions (reification) strip man of his human essence and that the more culture and civilisation (i.e. capitalism and reification) take possession of him, the less he is able to be a human being." (p. 136).

Compare this with the following passage by Lukacs where he seems to mean exactly what he attributes to Rousseau: "The separation of the producer from his means of production, the dissolution and destruction of all 'natural' production units, etc., and all the social and economic conditions necessary for the emergence of modern capitalism tend to replace 'natural' relations which exhibit human relations more plainly by rationally reified relations. (p. 91).

The crucial premise here seems to be "natural" relations exhibit human relations "more plainly". To prove this Lukacs must demonstrate some former social arrangement such as the village community indeed exhibiting its social character more plainly.

Lukacs relies on Marx: "' The social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour,' Marx observes with reference to pre-capitalist societies, 'appear at all events as their own personal relations, and are not disguised under the shape of social relations between the products of labour.'" (p. 91).

Unfortunately for Lukacs , this passage, looked at closely, does not support his argument. Marx only claims pre-capitalist social relations appear as personal relations, and while he says these relations are not disguised "under the shape of social relations between the products of labour", one is not forced to conclude social relations were not disguised at all. One can

only deduce social relations were disguised differently in pre-capitalist societies, quite different from saying they were exhibited more plainly.

This difficulty can be seen even more clearly in another statement made by Marx to which Lukacs refers to buttress his argument.

In preceding forms [that is, forms of social organization where capitalist relations existed but where they were not the organizing principle of society as a whole] this economic mystification arose principally with respect to money and interest-bearing capital. In the nature of things, it is excluded, in the first place, where production for use-value predominates; and secondly, where slavery or serfdom form the broad foundation of social production, as in antiquity and during the Middle Ages. Here, the domination of the producers by the conditions of production is concealed by the relations of dominion and servitude which appear and are evident as the direct motive power of the process of production. (p. 86)

Again, note Marx is only referring to economic mystification, not mystification *per se*. Even if Marx is correct, only this economic mystification is excluded in earlier, pre-capitalist societies. Note the conclusion of the passage; Marx states earlier societies were also organised around social relations characterised by domination of the producers by the means of production. That fact was also concealed by the only apparent motivating relations of dominion and servitude, just as the fact social relations similarly characterised by domination are (according to Lukacs) concealed from us. Therefore at best (or at worst), one can only claim our society is perhaps mystified differently from earlier societies.

Lukacs nowhere demonstrates why being mystified differently = a "deterioration".

In fact, Lukacs does not seriously pursue the "natural " argument. Never having shown any previous form of social organization to have been more "natural", he doesn't attempt the next step, which would have been demonstrating the proletariat to be the means back to that condition. Indeed, Lukacs later refers to these opening passages as "polemical" (p. 186). So, he turns to the second reason for the superiority of proletarian (or in our terms, artistic) consciousness, i.e. proletarian consciousness solves problems previously thought insoluble.

What problem does proletarian consciousness solve? Briefly stated, for Lukacs it is the problem of intellectual control of society. The bourgeois, he says, even though it gains increasing control over the details of its social existence, progressively loses control over society as a whole. (p. 121) In this it is to be replaced by the proletariat.

Lukacs constructs his argument around Marx's theory of the commodity, outlined above, extended into the realm of consciousness. ("...the subjective stance corresponding to [the commodity]" (p.84)). Lukacs's model of consciousness has two poles: "matter" and "consciousness", just as Marx's model of the commodity revolves around "things" and "needs/wants". Where Marx sees "labour" as the mediator, Lukacs sees "objectification".⁵

⁵Lukacs rarely uses this term, but it is what is meant by all the references to the subject/object relation.

This latter we have seen referred to by Marx as the imputation of qualities to things, qualities then appearing as if independent of their imputation.

Lukacs begins by describing "traditional", or "pre-bourgeois" consciousness, which he characterizes as rational, but only partially so.

In such systems the 'ultimate' problems of human exist persist in an irrationality incommensurate with human understanding. The closer the system comes to these 'ultimate' questions the more strikingly its partial, auxiliary nature and its inability to grasp the 'essentials' are revealed. An example of this is found in the highly rationalised techniques of Hindu asceticism, with its ability to predict exactly all of its results. Its whole 'rationality' resides in the direct and immediate bond, related as means to ends, with an entirely supra-rational experience of the essence of the world...[When the] rational system is conceived of as a partial system from the outset, when the irrational world which surrounds and delimits it - - (in this case the irrational world comprises both the earthly existence of man which is unworthy of rationalisation and also the next world, that of salvation, which human, rational concepts cannot grasp) - - is represented as independent of it, as unconditionally inferior or superior to it, this creates no technical problem for the rational system itself. It is simply the means to a - - non-rational - - end. (pp. 113-4)

In such systems, the relation of consciousness to matter is "direct" in the sense that purely qualitative properties of things surfacing poses no threat to traditional consciousness. These qualities merely arise, unquestioned, outside the domain of rational thought.

Bourgeois consciousness is quite different. This kind of rationalism, "...claims to be the universal method by which to

obtain knowledge of the whole of existence." (p. 114). The basic principle governing objectification is "...that every given aspect of the system...should be exactly predictable and calculable." (p.117). "...an attempt to establish a rational system of relations which comprehends the totality of the formal possibilities, proportions and relations of a rationalised existence with the aid of which every phenomenon - - independently of its real and material distinctiveness - - can be subjected to an exact calculus." (p. 129).

When objectification occurs on these principles, the nature of matter changes to, "...an atomistic...multitude whose elements are...a quantity of points. This absolute substantiality of the points founds an atomistic system in practical philosophy in which, as in the atomism of nature, a mind alien to the atoms becomes law." (Hegel, p. 130).

This atomistic universe transforms the subject into a "...receptive organ ready to pounce on opportunities created by the system of laws and his 'activity' will narrow itself down to the adoption of a vantage point from which these laws function in his best interests (and without any intervention on his part)." (p. 130). Lukacs ironically describes this viewpoint as "contemplative", where "...the undeniable fact of change must then appear to be a catastrophe, a sudden, unexpected turn of events that comes from the outside and eliminates all mediations." (p. 154).

Lukacs holds two basic logical categories are incomprehensible to the bourgeois: the content of matter (the bourgeois can only understand forms of knowledge), and the totality of matter (the bourgeois cannot comprehend all forms of knowledge combined). He terms these two - - to him related - - incomprehensible categories of bourgeois thought the "thing-in-itself", a term taken from Kant. (p. 115)

What Lukacs is referring to in this somewhat opaque terminology is really not that difficult to understand. A good example of what he means is Marx's idea of use-value. We have already seen how Marx pointed out the requirements of things in use to fulfill the needs of the labour producing it. This is what Lukacs means when he refers to "content". Bourgeois thought cannot recognize this content for what it is. Why? Because it can only recognize the form of human relations, i.e. exchange, a form suited to the calculated rationalism of bourgeois thought.

Thus far, Lukacs is merely repeating what Marx has said. But with the second element of the "thing-in itself" he adds something new: bourgeois consciousness also cannot recognize the totality of things and the forms of consciousness corresponding to them. To Lukacs, these are flip sides of the same coin; understanding the content of commodities, their use-value, requires understanding the totality of relations of consciousness and things, while understanding the totality is only possible through a consciousness recognizing the qualitative, social core of all commodities.

Lukacs accepts Marx's contention that commodity exchange produces two groups with mutually-exclusive interests. The bourgeoisie only experiences the form of human relations, life covered by a cloak of all-encompassing rationalism. The proletariat, by contrast, experiences the content of human interaction: the qualitative, daily reality of the labour required to produce the social ediface. But Lukacs goes farther than Marx. He describes two "world views" - - kinds of consciousness - - corresponding to the relative positions of the two classes.

To the bourgeoisie:

The world appears as a vast collection of things, a multitude of points, outside of themselves, for which they must rationally account. This world of things Lukacs terms "immediacy" (p. 156), and considers it the bourgeoisie's "ultimate point of view, decisive for the whole of its thought." This rational world is periodically ruptured by - - incomprehensible - - crises where the qualitative requirements of things assert themselves.

To the proletariat:

Like the bourgeoisie the proletariat imagines itself to be the subject of the life-world. However, unlike the bourgeoisie, this "illusion" is destroyed by the fact it must "alienate" (the word is Marx's, not Lukacs's) its labour-power from itself, and sell it like any other thing. (pp. 92, 165-6, 172) Lukacs quotes Marx:

The property-owning class and the class of the proletariat represent the same human alienation. But the former feels at home in this self-alienation and feels confirmed by it; it recognizes alienation as its own instrument and in it possesses the semblance of a human existence. The latter feels itself destroyed by this alienation and sees in it its own impotence and the reality of an inhuman existence." (p. 149)

What is an incomprehensible crisis to the bourgeoisie, is quite different to the proletariat. The recognition of themselves as a commodity like any other "brings about an objective structural change in the object of knowledge." (p. 169).

This is the core of Lukacs's argument. The ultimate "thing-in-itself" to the bourgeois, i.e. unknowable content, is the social character of all human relations. This is something it just cannot comprehend. At best it can submit things to rational calculation. Its "objects of knowledge" remain unchanged. But the proletariat is pushed beyond calculation, since in the end calculation does not meet their qualitative requirements.

The specific nature of this kind of commodity [labour] had consisted in the fact that beneath the cloak of the thing lay a relation between men, that beneath the quantifying crust there was a qualitative, living core. Now that this core is revealed it becomes possible to recognize the fetish character of *every commodity* based on the commodity character of labour power: in every case we find its core, the relation between men entering into the evolution of society. (p. 169, emphasis in the original.)

The proletariat thus is propelled towards transforming all things, all commodities, into something new in human history, a society built upon the transparent relation between people. The objects of knowledge are thus "structurally changed". The

qualities of things are no longer incomprehensible "things-in-themselves", but active subjects aware of their own needs and capable of satisfying them.⁶

Armed with this insight, the proletariat, as a class, remakes society according to qualitative criteria. It thereby satisfies even the needs of its class opponents - - the bourgeoisie - - who, although unable to recognize those needs for what they are, being human do indeed share them. The proletariat thusly eliminates socially or structurally based social conflict, and its leadership - - the insoluble problem for the bourgeoisie - - is assumed without question.

This is a very powerful argument. Its effects can still be felt. But does it have any relevance to the problem of the merit of Canadian culture? At first glance, it does seem to. Consider some of the qualities Lukacs attributes to the opposing world views:

Bourgeois

- ATOMISTIC (viewpoint of the individual)
- VARIED SOCIAL ORGANIZATION (includes mystical, irrational, etc., forms of organization)
- TRADITIONAL (some things beyond question)
- UNNATURAL (quantitative focus)
- PASSIVE ("contemplative")
- MATERIALISTIC (needs of commodity exchange first priority)

⁶ "...That mode of being posited where the fact that an object is thought of implies at the same time that the object is conscious of itself." (p. 132)

Proletarian

- WHOLISTIC (viewpoint of totality, the unity of society)
- RATIONAL SOCIAL ORGANIZATION (only rational social forms of organization acceptable)
- RELATIVISTIC (everything to be judged by new criteria, nothing has inherent value)
- NEW (viewpoint arises for the first time)
- ORGANIC (qualitative focus)
- ACTIVE (intervening in society to reshape it)
- HUMANISTIC (society first and foremost a human creation, satisfying human needs)

If we substitute "artist" for "proletarian" and "philistine" for "bourgeois", we have a description of the relative merit of art frequently appearing in the literature on culture. Lukacs provides a theoretical underpinning to this description. ⁷

There is a problem however. The whole model depends on structural, pervasive social conflict between the two classes. On the one hand is the bourgeois, with increasingly sophisticated rational subsystems, increasingly losing control over society as a whole - - Lukacs likens it to a crust cracking

⁷Of course, there are some limits to the analogy of artists and the proletariat. No one could ever seriously claim artists are capable of solving previously insoluble social problems. But they frequently are held, as Cappon suggests, to function like a revolutionary unconscious, harbingers of a bright future, trapped in a dark present. See, for example, most theories of the "avant-garde".

open because of inner emptiness. (p. 208) On the other hand, the proletariat is roused to its historical destiny by intolerable conditions. Lukacs characterizes their plight as a form of "slavery without limits" (p.166), "a matter of life and death" (p. 164).

Without this conflict the argument collapses. Leadership of society ceases to be an insoluble problem, the key to which is held by the proletariat (or, in cultural terms, to a somewhat lesser extent by artists). Lukacs can be forgiven for presuming this conflict existed. At his time of writing Europe seemed poised on the brink of a revolutionary explosion.

It seems more difficult to accept this premise now however. Bourgeois crises seem episodic, even to most critics. The proletariat, now smaller and more difficult to even define, seems not to find its condition intolerable. A small minority of commentators find this circumstance to be only evidence of the unlimited distorting power of bourgeois society to hide people's own best interests from them. Even if this is true, and it is doubtful it is, Lukacs's argument for the merit of the proletariat remains destroyed. For he was not concerned with the ethics of class struggle, i.e. who was better or worse in any moral sense. He was only concerned with who would, by any means, attain complete, unquestioned leadership of society. He bet on the proletariat, believing it to have the best chance. This alone was their "merit".

Do we therefore need to throw out Lukacs's argument in its entirety? I believe not. If bourgeois society has attained relative stability, if the limit to rationalisation has not yet been reached, and indeed may be unreachable, we are still left with Lukacs's two world views, now not in competition but somehow complementing each other.

But how? If we merely combine the bourgeois and proletarian world views, and say, by analogy, the merit of the arts in Canada is that it is both wholistic and individualistic, traditional and relativistic, passive and active and so on, we have a not very satisfying or helpful listing of everything said about culture.

However, if we read Lukacs's argument discarding the central notion of conflict and the specific elements of each competing point of view, three general characteristics of society emerge.

1.)

"...Men are constantly, smashing, replacing and leaving behind them the 'natural', irrational and actually existing bonds, while on the other hand, they erect around themselves in the reality they have created and 'made', a kind of second nature which evolves with exactly the same inexorable necessity as was the case earlier on with the irrational forces of nature (more exactly: the social relations which appear in this form). (p. 128) ...History is the history of the unceasing overthrow of the objective forms that shape the life of man."(p. 186)

Attention is called to the image Lukacs creates in these passages: life as smashing, replacing, overthrowing. In other words, a life of constant opposition. What is opposed is

secondary. The important point is ceaseless attack on what is, or appears to be.

2.)

Classical philosophy did indeed advance to the point of this change of meaning and succeeded in identifying the substance, now appearing for the first time, in which philosophically the underlying order and the connections between things were to be found, namely *history*...Here and here alone is the concrete basis for genesis. ⁸ (p. 143, emphasis in the original)

The ultimate arbiter of human action is history. Therefore its judgement must always be taken into account.

3.)

It is only in history, in the historical process, in the uninterrupted outpouring of what is qualitatively new that the requisite paradigmatic order can be found in the realm of things. (p. 144) ...Time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature, it freezes into an exactly delimited quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things'...in short, it becomes space. (p. 90)

In Lukacs's argument these two statements are in opposition. The first is from the viewpoint of the proletariat. The qualitatively new in history provides the model for the proletariat seeking to understand its own struggle against bourgeois rationalism. The second statement Lukacs attributes to the bourgeois. Its rational systems turn time into space. But note how the two passages rely upon a common concept: the new. How is time turned into space? In the first instance, through measurement and calculation. But measurement and calculation of what? In the end, the answer must be: what is produced, i.e.

⁸ "Genesis" refers to the moment the world is self-created, as opposed to being "given", a "thing-in-itself".

what is new.

These three points provide what we have been searching for:
criteria with which to evaluate the arts.

CHAPTER V

THE ROLE OF ART IN CANADA

Lukacs never intended providing the three evaluative criteria of the arts I have described. His concern was to diagnose the social conflict erupting all around him. Since that conflict now appears resolved to a large extent, his diagnostic argument, of two mutually exclusive world views struggling to a new social order, appears unfounded. But, when the elements, no longer opposed, are combined, the essay manifests criteria of culture, still operative up to the present.

Such a claim is difficult to substantiate. The literature on Canadian culture makes absolutely no reference to Lukacs. Instead, all we found there were arguments so weak we were forced to conclude a hidden, more solid, basis must underlay them.

There is another way to validate my claim, one borrowing a trick from Lukacs. It will be recalled he suggested the value of proletarian thought lay in its ability to explain questions otherwise unanswerable. I similarly suggest the criteria derived from Lukacs can explain a situation otherwise difficult to comprehend. If they can, they must then have been operative to some extent. Of course, it will be impossible to be definitive, but I hope to suggest the validity of these criteria, and how their use might bear fruit in future research.

Another question requires addressing. If these criteria are indeed operative, why are they never acknowledged?

Both issues - are the criteria valid, and why are they not acknowledged? - hinge around the question of the nature of art. Art is commonly accepted as a commodity in our society, yet it appears to have a unique value or quality not found in any other commodity. What is that quality? We can begin to answer that question by returning to Marx's and Lukacs's descriptions of commodities.

The Idea Of Things

Lukacs's and Marx's description of what they find to be the most important characteristic of life in a capitalist society can be succinctly stated: the nature of things is misunderstood.

When we use a thing - - anything having value - we perceive its valuable qualities as arising from the thing itself. It appears a thing is useful, as a result we use it. Marx and Lukacs point to this as, strictly speaking, a misperception of our relation to things; actually only our labour makes a thing useful.

Behind the useful qualities of a thing stands a social ediface. Before a thing can be used, there must be in place a mode of production determining what is "useful". The conditions and relations of this mode give a commodity its value, not the

apparently innate ability of a thing to meet a need, nor the exigencies of the marketplace. "...it is not the exchange of commodities which regulates the magnitude of their value; but on the contrary,...it is the magnitude of their value which controls their exchange proportions." (Marx: p. 63)

So, on the one hand, Marx suggests, a thing appears to us primarily pragmatically, as a thing to use. It also has a recognizable abstract value, being equal in worth to x quantities of another commodity, or y hours of labour time. On the other hand, behind these more or less visible characteristics stand other factors - - particularly the conditions and relations of production - - never entering the consciousness of those using a thing. All these elements determine why and how a thing is to be used, not merely its visible characteristics.

Lukacs goes further. He tries to show how bourgeois knowledge always operates within the bounds of unquestioned, commonly shared assumptions. He repeatedly refers to "...the disregard of the concrete aspects of the subject matter of [the bourgeoisie's unified system of general laws], upon which disregard their authority as laws is based." (Lukacs: p. 101)

While bourgeois thought may be conscious of those assumptions, this consciousness does nothing to reduce their centrality to the rational bourgeois universe. They appear as a "natural" consequence of thought, conceived of as "ineluctably

contingent", that is to say, operating on the principle action can take place as if definitions of the world were true, but those definitions are subject to change.

He tries to show how this perceived absolute limit of contingency is merely the translation in thought of the bourgeoisie's position in society as uncertain rulers. Their thought, therefore, is a "thing" like any other: the part of the social edifice manifest in it - - particularly the bourgeois's position as rulers of society - - is mistaken for its "essence" or "nature".

The converse is also true. The whole of the social edifice is conceived as a giant collection of its "visible" parts - - the "things" we use.

Lukacs thusly describes a "mismatch" between things - - whether material objects or ideas - - and our conception of them. Our conceptions are part of the story, the completion of which can only come about through conscious recognition of the heretofore unarticulated social conditions under which our conceptions occur.

So, the "misunderstanding" of the nature of things in bourgeois society described by Marx and Lukacs might be summarized as follows: descriptions of things (the parts) rely upon unarticulated assumptions about the nature of social being (the whole).

The Misunderstanding About 'Canadian Culture'

To some extent, this model of overt parts and the covert whole is applicable to Canadian culture, where arguments for support of it seem to rely upon assumptions about the role of art in society, and how that role might be affected. The most frequently used assumptions are:

1.) Only an elite can determine what is "good" or "meritorious" culture. This never appears in the literature, but it is implicit in the almost universal derision of mass culture.

2.) Culture is inherently "meritorious". This assumption gives rise to ancillary ones, some in direct contradiction of others: Culture should be supported regardless of the number of people who agree it has merit; people would support culture if they were better educated about it; regardless of its merit, Canadians support it.

3.) Artists deserve good incomes. Again, ancillary assumptions follow: Good incomes for artists enables good art; spending government money on the arts benefits artists; the arts are a net contributor to the economy as a whole, therefore support of the arts benefits everyone.

4.) If not supported, Canadian culture would become "extinct", extinction meaning, variously, the United States would take over, mass culture alone would dominate, we would lose our freedom of choice, and Canada itself would become

extinct.

That these assumptions (none of them, except the first, demonstrably true, logically or empirically) underlie so much of the writing on Canadian culture indicates a broad, unspoken consensus about the nature of art. In itself, the fact these assumptions are not provable is not necessarily a "problem". For most, there would only be a problem if the unspoken background consensus could be demonstrated to have undesirable consequences.

Few would suggest otherwise: that the existence of an "ideology" or "mythology" of art - - a mismatch of some sort between our concepts of things, and things as they "actually" are - - could be avoided entirely. Who would be capable of perceiving and articulating not only a thing, but everything implied by it?

The Match Of Things And Ideas

Not even Marx makes such a demand, at least not in Capital. He does describe a fundamental impediment to consensus on the structure of society, namely mutually exclusive class interests. As was noted earlier, he suggests changing the mode of production, causing the "inversion" of consciousness and things characteristic of capitalist society to disappear. Thereafter, men will regulate their lives according to a "settled plan". This suggests a relation of things to a background consensus or

set of assumptions about things will remain. The consensus will be "freely" arrived at however. Marx never specifies what he means by "free", but presumably he means all social members will be involved, and will have a clear idea of what is at stake, and how the consensus is arrived at.

Lukacs is more radical. To him such an analysis is merely a quantitative expansion of the situation: more people involved, to a greater degree. He argues instead for a qualitative change in the nature of consciousness. The relation between things and social consensus, explicitly described by him as the great "problem" of bourgeois society, would disappear. Under the rule of the proletariat, consciousness and the world (matter, "things") would match perfectly, i.e. become identical.

The proletariat, as a class, would become the opposite of the "thing-in-itself", namely, the "thing-for-itself", "...the mode of being posited where the fact that an object is thought of implies at the same time the object is conscious of itself." (Lukacs: p. 132) History thus comes to an end, since history is "...the unceasing overthrow of the objective forms that shape the life of man." (p. 186)

Consciousness, Unconsciousness, And Art

Not surprisingly, viewing the world in its entirety and our perception of it as somehow potentially perfectly matched, falls outside the mainstream of Western social scientific thought.

Gregory Bateson (1972) discusses various types or levels of "unconsciousness" and "consciousness" to describe the same phenomenon of part to whole, idea to background consensus. He notes, in what is probably a majority opinion, "...It is not conceivably possible for any system to be totally conscious." (p. 142, emphasis added) He continues,

Consciousness, for obvious mechanical reasons, must always be limited to a rather small fraction of the mental process. If useful at all, it must therefore be husbanded. The unconsciousness associated with habit is an economy of thought and of consciousness; and the same is true of the inaccessability of the processes of perception. (p. 136)

In a footnote he adds, "Consider the impossibility of constructing a television set which would report upon its screen all the workings of its component parts, including especially those parts concerned in this reporting." (p. 136n.)

Bateson also discusses another response to the relationship of part to whole that neither accepts it as a continually expanding premise for further investigation, nor rejects it as a "problem" requiring solution: art. He spends considerable time analyzing how art refers to a pre- or extra-linguistic background code.

This background code contains all the various kinds or levels of "knowledge" - - instinctual, cultural, habitual, and so - - too vast to be allowed free access to consciousness without impairing the functioning of the organism. Bateson suggests the unconscious code in any system is not somehow less communicative than conscious messages, but differs in form.

As an example of what Bateson is referring to, consider an acquired skill, such as riding a bicycle. Once the skill is learned it is no longer necessary or desirable to be conscious of how it is done.

Nonetheless, riding a bicycle remains a highly communicative act. The kind of bicycle ridden, how it is ridden, the obedience or disobedience of rules of the road, the clothing worn, all indicate the rider's social status, age, respect of social mores. Bateson calls this kind of communication "iconic" (p. 140). The rider assembles icons of status, beliefs, skill, and so on, often without being consciously aware of doing so.

Conscious communication, on the other hand, is most often digital or verbal. When a rider is made conscious of the act of riding, say by a near-accident, he can usually articulate his thoughts in language. ¹

Art "plays" with the interaction between unconscious, iconically communicated, and conscious, verbally communicated, levels. Bateson is unclear about how this play occurs. He seems to mean it involves, on the one hand, an unconscious consensus as to what skill is - - for example the skill of rendering perspective - - and on the other hand conscious, articulatory sensations and qualities of skill. The artist uses the latter to communicate about the former, or, as Bateson puts it, to make

¹Bateson points out verbal communication may also be iconic, as, for example, when a scientist describes an earthworm by starting at its head and proceeding sequentially down its length.

messages "...about the interface between conscious and unconscious." (p. 138)

Bateson notes the dilemma the artist faces: he practices his craft to permit better performance, yet in doing so he becomes, through habit formation, less aware of how he does it, the very thing the performance is designed to point to. Bateson goes on,

If his attempt is to communicate about the unconscious components of his performance, then it follows that he is on a sort of moving stairway (or escalator) about whose position he is trying to communicate but whose movement is itself a function of his efforts to communicate. Clearly, his task is impossible, but, as has been remarked, some people do it very prettily. (p. 138)

I have tried to show how Marx and Lukacs were discussing the same interplay of levels of consciousness. But art, never even mentioned by Marx, is explicitly dismissed by Lukacs, since in his view its very existence is merely a function of the incapacity of the bourgeoisie to integrate matter and thought. Lukacs's historical materialism obviates the need for art, since the proletariat, as a class, would integrate the conscious and unconscious levels Bateson describes as the basis for art. Art is seen by Lukacs as a symptom of a deeper pathogenesis, indicative of a pending crisis.

Bateson's idea of art as play communication about the differences between levels of consciousness is useful in that it removes discussion of the relation of parts and wholes in art from such an evaluative framework. Art is not to him a problem to be solved, or an indication of one, but at worst a

particularly curious phenomenon requiring better explanation, and at best, a solution to the problem of an overly great concern with purposive rationality.

However, the manner in which he does this - - equating art with a function of a cybernetic system replete with "redundancies", "arcs of circuits", and other such terminology of engineering - - causes two closely related problems.

The first is, how exactly does art as Bateson describes it differ from any other thing? As Marx showed, any commodity has a similar two-fold nature, a sensuous aspect, and a "second nature" of human relations taking on a life of their own through the thing. A car is not merely a way of getting from A to B. It is also - - necessarily, unavoidably - - a comment about how our society views getting from A to B, how important it is to get there, how quickly we can and should get there, who gets there "better". Not all of this "second nature" can be consciously expressed, so it is expressed iconically, through the shape of the car, its size, the value of its details. These aspects refer to or communicate the "unconscious" aspect of the "conscious" function of the car to move people from A to B. The vast variety of kinds of cars indicates a play between these two levels. A similar analysis could be made of any commodity. How then is art different?

The second problem indicates a solution to the first. Bateson's model of art makes no accounting for the interest of

the viewer. That is to say, he assumes art to be - - theoretically at least - - equally accessible to everyone. With some training, presumably anyone could recognize the play communication he describes in art. The question then arises, why do only some people seek access to art, while the vast majority does not? Furthermore, historically, this few have by and large come from the social elite. Even now, despite considerable effort, a large part of the audience for the arts comes from the wealthiest and most powerful strata of society.

It is routinely assumed only an elite patronizes the arts consistently because only they can afford to. But such a view is precisely the kind of inversion Marx went to such lengths to dismiss. The elite of society doesn't have power - - i.e. the ability to do what they want - - because they have - - or have access to - - more things, including art. They have more things because they have power. Why they have the ability to do as they please - - and even they don't have the power to determine what "pleasing" means - - is a question falling outside the scope of this paper. It is nonetheless unarguable only the elite of societies where high art exists has shown sustained interest in it. Attempts to interest other classes in the arts have either failed miserably, as in immediately post-revolutionary Russia, or when the effort has been prolonged, has resulted in bad art as I shall argue below, is the case in Canada.

The reason only the elite is interested in art is because art not only plays with levels of consciousness as Bateson

suggests, it does so to explore and play with the limits and means of maintaining social control.

The elite of society, like any component of a communicative system, requires feedback. It needs to know how completely its values are accepted by society as a whole, the source and strength of competing values, the levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction prevalent, and so on.

To some extent, an elite may determine such questions overtly through a number of evaluative tools: economic indicators, political trends, opinion testing. But such inquiries into the "consciousness" of society necessarily decline from analyzing the "unconscious" consensus underlying the system as a whole. As Lukacs pointed out repeatedly, bourgeois knowledge is systematically excluded from exploring its own limits and origins. There is, for example, no scientific approach possible to the ultimate value of science. No market research nor economic theory can indicate all the social costs and benefits of the massive collection of things Western society accumulates. No philosophy can definitely determine what is a "cost" and what is a "benefit".

As Bateson points out, such knowledge - - knowing everything at once - - would mean a dysfunctional overloading of the system. Yet allowing inarticulated conflicting pressures within the social unconscious to build to a point of rupture, i.e. where they unexpectedly take on a conscious communicative form,

would threaten the stability of the system.

Maintaining social stability is the function of the elite. Hence it is most important for them to receive feedback indicating possible areas of tension in the social unconscious. Equally importantly, such feedback must take the form of "play", since if it did not, if it was perceived as "real" - - as changing governments, or strikes, or recessions are - - then the feedback would have come too late to be of any use. Instability would already be occurring.

Art has provided this feedback by rendering the unpleasant as sublime. The elite seeks art inspiring awe. Work having this quality indicates a solution to problems not yet otherwise socially articulated. Turner painted man's delight and terror in mastering nature, but his work's truly sublime quality arose from how his romantic attitude solved the dilemma of how to conceive of the ugly industrial world then becoming omnipotent. Millet showed how the myth of the simple, honest worker alleviated the same tensions. Cezanne turned cold, scientific analysis of space into images of unearthly beauty.

Because for the elite the unresolved tensions of the social unconscious are matters of practical concern, these solutions generate pleasure. Thus art has been frequently noted to have a discomfiting aspect as well, since it brings to consciousness problems otherwise invisible. But if art is not encouraged to fulfill its role, or if its suggestions are ignored, as they

were by the decadent aristocracy of eighteenth-century France or of Eastern Europe early in the twentieth-century, then ruptures surface in the social fabric no longer containable in the "play" of art. The tensions become real, i.e. consciously articulated. Hence, periods prior to social change are usually artistically fertile, while periods of catastrophe themselves rarely produce art of any merit.

The 'Problem' Of Canadian Art

To sum up thus far, we have described how discussions about art in Canada rely upon a background set of assumptions. We noted how in itself this is not necessarily a problem, but could become one if these assumptions had undesirable consequences. We also discussed how the relation of overt qualities of things to background consensus indicates the nature of art and its most crucial function as an elite guide. If we combine these two aspects, we might conclude there may be a problem in the assumptions about art in Canada if they inhibit art from achieving its purpose.

Discussions about art in Canada are often confusing because Canada is in a probably unique situation. It has no long indigenous tradition of art (native Indian traditions excluded because they are not "art" in the Western sense) as a source of inspiration. Nor is it an imperial power with all the cultural prerogatives such power bestows. We share a common spoken and

iconographic language with countries that do have long and venerable traditions, and/or imperial power.

As a result, art specific to Canada has always appeared to be a problem requiring a rational solution. This is the context within which current debates about government sponsorship of the arts has occurred. Yet the arguments arising from this circumstance are not themselves rational; they cannot be logically or empirically demonstrated to be true.

I believe this circumstance arises from the manner the elite of bourgeois, Western society maintains its existence by the relatively wide distribution of the more visible perogatives or markers of elite membership: adequate, easily accessible health care, lengthy education, an apparent ability to control the direction of society as a whole, the means of producing and appreciating art.

This circumstance gives rise to a dilemma for the arts. On the one hand, it is "by nature" a means for the elite to "play" with their control of society. On the other hand, it is now being widely described as accessible to, and useful for, everyone.

This dilemma is not unique to Canada. It has occurred throughout the West. But it is particularly acute in Canada, where there are no, or only weak, countervailing cultural traditions employing art in its more traditional, "natural" form.

The solution to this dilemma, developed mostly in the beginning of this century in Europe, is "modernism". We have already examined in some detail one of the exemplary texts of modernism: Lukacs's "Reification" essay. The characteristics it manifests have become the criteria by which all modern art is judged. To review, these criteria are:

1.) Art must be opposed to something: an artistic style, a political view, a way of life. As Bendix points out,

...an ethics of social despair has led by circuitous routes to self-created, hermetic worlds of pure subjectivity in which neither the old romantic ideal of the human personality nor the objects and themes of ordinary experience have a recognised place or meaning. Thus, in the dominant culture of the West, a type of sensibility has developed which reacts to the world as a provocation, and which hostile to intellectual positions that retain a belief in the constructive possibilities of knowledge for all their questioning of fundamentals. (1971; pp. 95-6)

2.) Art must be self-conscious of its place in art history. The most successful work illuminates the history of art, and by extension, history itself. Jurgen Habermas writes of an art,

...Characterized by attitudes which find a common focus in a changed consciousness of time. This time consciousness expresses itself through metaphors of the vanguard and the avant-garde. The avant-garde understands itself as invading unknown territory, exposing itself to the dangers of sudden, shocking encounters, conquering an as yet unoccupied future. The avant-garde must find a direction in a landscape into which no one seems to have yet ventured. (1981; p. 4)

3.) Art must be new. Probably the most frequently used adjective of approval for art is "innovative". An artist is rarely praised for doing work just like someone else's. In his book, The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, (1976), the conservative thinker Daniel Bell discusses "the impulse of quest as a mode of

conduct" (p. 22), the idea "life itself should be a work of art" (p. 20), "a dominant impulse toward the new and the original, a self-conscious search for future forms and sensations, so that the idea of change and novelty overshadows the dimension of actual change" (p. 33).

He concludes this impulse has, in the last fifty years or so, been legitimated.

Society now accepts this role for the imagination, rather than seeing culture, as in the past, as setting a norm and affirming a moral-philosophic tradition against which the new could be measured and (more often than not) censured. Indeed, society has done more than passively accept innovation; it has provided a market which eagerly gobbles up the new because it believes it to be superior in value to all other forms. Thus our culture has an unprecedented mission; it is an official, ceaseless search for a new sensibility...A society given over to innovation, in the joyful acceptance of change, has in fact institutionalized the avant-garde and charged it, perhaps to its own eventual dismay, with constantly turning up something new. In effect, "culture" has been given a blank check, and its primacy in generating social change has been freely acknowledged. (pp. 34-5)

Positive And Negative Aspects Of Modernism

These three characteristics of modernism have permitted Western art to function as both a guide for the elite in maintaining its position, and a tool in the process of wider distribution of signifiers of privilege.

Its oppositional stance has torn down many taboos previously ordained by the elite. At the same time, it has functioned as a safety valve, allowing the elite to test the

limits of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and possible responses. Sometimes this testing can be quite abstract. Pop artists indicated the relatively mild alienation of people by mass media imagery. At other times, the testing can be quite directly purposive, as when Bauhaus showed capitalists how to integrate housing into mass production.

Modernism's concern with the new has also contributed to the devaluation of many traditional social forms, allowing ones more widely held to be accessible to develop. At the same time, the concern with history has maintained continuity with older social conditions, avoiding any radical rupture. A dynamic yet stable balance between old and new is thereby maintained.

However, in a society, as in any system, the introduction of new forces sets in motion reacting ones. This is the case with modernism. The problems it has created are becoming almost as acute as the ones it solved.

1.) To set in motion an ethic of opposition leads to the eventual destruction of all traditional constraints. Not that constraints themselves are removed or reduced in number. On the contrary, judging by the great conceptual difficulties faced by artists today, it appears the number and/or power of constraints has if anything grown. But these constraints are no longer traditional, i.e. they no longer appear in (relatively) easily recognizable form, with a set of methods developed over time of dealing with them.

The flip side of destroying traditional constraints is the avoidance of setting clear criteria. If constraints are thought of as illuminating art in negative relief - - art cannot be this - - criteria illuminate positively - - art is this. Yet in an atmosphere of opposition, no one wants to take responsibility for extolling specific criteria, since doing so invites attack and certain eventual discrediting. This avoidance of responsibility takes a variety of forms: writers on art seek refuge in arcane jargon where no one is certain what is being said, art teachers avoid clear evaluations of their students, and so on. With both clear negative and positive relief obscured, art itself becomes fuzzy, difficult to define and understand.

2.) The consequence of placing art first and foremost in a historical - - i.e. rational, generalizable, universal - - context (as opposed to earlier irrational contexts such as spirituality, which were determinedly not applicable to everybody or every situation) is to relativize art.

For example, most painters these days have received art historical training. Art history courses are standard components of university fine arts and art school programs. Yet it is a peculiar kind of history, one entirely presented through slides. In a process one critic compared to feeding battery chickens, art students are fed literally thousands of slides in the course of their studies. The avowed purpose is to make the future painter aware of the context of his own work. Hopefully he will

someday contribute to the great chain of slides reaching back to the dawn of time.

At the same time, the inference is clearly made that what is considered significant may change at any time. The whole modern period was founded on just such a revaluation. The stock of all painters is subject to change, as new work or interpretations are presented. Some slides disappear, and are replaced by new ones. In sum, the position of any single work, or artist, or sometimes even whole epochs, is relative to art historical forces beyond the artist's control. How then could the artist evaluate his own work when the measurement constantly changes?

3.) Constantly upholding the new, turns the future into conquerable space. Time, since the invention of timepieces, has always had quantity. But now it has a manifest quality as well. The past, present and future no longer have a mere abstract existence. They smell, taste, and feel a particular way: a style of clothing, a kind of food, a trend in art. As Marx might have noted we have thereby appropriated time through our own labour, "discovering" it, turning it not only into a thing, but a particular kind of thing, something both quantifiable and qualifiable, a commodity.

Art conceived as a quest for novelty has aided in the production of time as a commodity, and has in turn been produced by it. Modern art is a particularly distinctive marker of this commodified time, time we can, and must, "use", unlike past art

that stressed continuity, and timeless truths.

As such, art is "rational", in the sense suggested by Lukacs. As a commodity it becomes susceptible to mass production and consumption for the first time. Previously art by definition could not be taught to, or appreciated by everyone - - for example, the lower classes. This development went hand in hand with refinements in technology.

As a result, a peculiar situation has developed whereby the arts have become gripped by an ideology of unlimited growth. This ideology states that, because some people in the past have benefitted from exposure to the arts (as producers or consumers or both), it therefore follows everyone should be exposed in some fashion, because everyone will benefit.

Only now have some limits to growth become apparent or appeared desirable. First, there is a financial limit. The lifestyle of an artist appeals to large numbers of people. Only a very small percentage of those people have enough talent to attract independent financial support. If everyone who wants to is encouraged to pursue careers in the arts most of them must necessarily be supported by a group who doesn't care whether good art is being produced or not. In Canada, only the state is capable of such largesse.

But even the state can only artificially create so many arts-related jobs. At the same time, it is easy, and relatively cheap, to train people for non-existent jobs. As a result, we

have large numbers of people who have been extensively trained, but not enough jobs for them to go around. This understandably generates considerable dissatisfaction.

The Dilemma Modernism Causes Artists and Bureaucrats

This situation poses problems for bureaucrats and artists.

Bureaucrats must somehow resolve these conflicting impulses, without recourse to a discussion of the role of art as servant of the elite. For to do so would bring into the open the conflict between this role, and the much more generally acknowledged one of art as a tool in the attainment of social privilege by the majority. Hence, just as members of the cultural coalition shift from quantitative concerns to qualitative ones to avoid uncomfortable questions of precisely who benefits from subsidy, so too must they shift back again to quantitative explanations when inquiry probes too deeply into what exactly our society gains from its art. ²

The problems generated by modernism are just as acute for artists, if not more so. The most difficult problem an artist must resolve concerns style. There are so many styles extant, yet to be considered a true master of his craft he must develop

²It will be most interesting to see how the government and the cultural coalition resolves this issue in the freer trade negotiations with the U.S. For the first time this vicious circle of quantity and quality will run up against an outside arbitrator who likely will not accept the easy sliding back and forth between quantity and quality that has so dominated discussion within Canada.

yet another style, a unique form of expression.

The difficulties arising from this situation are exacerbated by the lack of clear imperatives or "rules" - - formal, social, philosophic, etc. - - governing the process by which new styles are arrived at. We have attributed this lack to the contradictory role art plays in our society. As a result, a plethora of conflicting rules for art have developed from which it is difficult to make any sense. Some examples: art should express the social realities of its time; or, art cannot express anything except its own nature, and should therefore follow the formal boundaries set by the medium; or, art should transcend previous codifications to express the innermost drives of the alienated individual, and so on.

Among all these conflicting imperatives there is only one upon which virtually everyone who takes art seriously can agree: it must reflect or express significant aspects of human experience. Of course, no one can agree as to what is significant - - only that what is good is also significant. Trivial experience is out.

This imperative or evaluative criterion has probably existed in the West for a very long time. Relatively recently however, perhaps since the beginning of this century, a new, related problem has arisen. Simply stated the problem is: what if art itself has become trivial? What if art, simply by the fact of it being painting, is incapable of expressing significant aspects

of existence?

This problem arose within art itself, and without, in the relation of art and its audience.

Within art, radical stylistic developments had the effect, if not always the intention, of discrediting traditional artistic subjects and forms. This was made possible by the growth of the "avant-garde". The term is taken from military usage, referring to an elite group that goes ahead of the main force to soften up resistance through the use of shock tactics. The artistic avant-garde assaulted traditional artistic values with an unceasing barrage of ridicule and debasement of the old, and almost cult exaltation of the new.

The doctrine of novelty and experiment led many artists to a relentless pursuit of the "essence" of art. One tack taken was to seek minimum dynamic form. Another was, in as unmediated a way as possible, to scratch or screech out hyper-emotional states. The most radical version concentrated on the process of art while excluding all else. In this approach even the concrete work of art itself was considered peripheral to this process of creation. The "things" of art, it was suggested, merely created commodities for a market, or markers of wealth and privilege, or perpetuated a sterile and moribund art "industry". To avoid this, many artists turned to "pure" conceptual work, and explored other, apparently more relevant media: music, video, and so on.

Art seems compromised, historically, socially. Whence the effort on the part of the artist himself to destroy it.

I see this effort taking three forms. The artist can shift to another signifier: if he is a writer, he becomes a film-maker, a painter, or, contrariwise, if he is a painter, a film-maker, he works up interminable critiques of the cinema, painting, deliberately reduces art to his criticism. He can also 'dismiss' writing and become a scientist, a scholar, an intellectual theorist, no longer speaking except from a moral site cleansed of any linguistic sensuality. Finally, he can purely and simply scuttle himself, stop writing, change trades, change desires. (Roland Barthes: 1975;p. 54)

Art seemed to hit a dead-end. The growing influence of the constant devaluation of various artistic traditions eventually ended in the devaluation of art itself. The "significance test" of art took on another dimension. Not only was the validity of this or that style or particular work to be judged by the canons of art - - most essentially significance and triviality - - but art itself had become open to the same kind of judgement. Since few people like to devote themselves to the shipwrecks of history, this was a real dilemma for the arts.

While the antics of the avant-garde were being transformed into a new form of orthodoxy within art, the art world was undergoing a tremendous expansion, becoming big business. The solicitous patron was replaced by the dispassionate market and professional investor, later complemented by the largest art patron in history, the liberal, post-industrial state.

A whole new service industry of brokers, insurers, lawyers and auctioneers sprang up. Photomechanical reproduction made

high quality prints widely and cheaply available. High circulation art journals and art schools proliferated, and eventually fine art became a generally accepted course of study in university curricula. Attendance soared at a rapidly growing number of museums and galleries. ³

For artists, this combination of a dominant "shock" aesthetic with a tremendous growth in artistic endeavour has had a curious result. Never before have so many people trained to be artists, just as never before has the question, what to do? seemed so difficult. As a consequence, a large group, thinking of themselves as artists, feel somehow "cheated". They feel they work hard at what they do, yet they are unable to derive satisfaction - - personally, financially, or otherwise - - from it. Instead they circle around and around a series of imponderable questions: What makes art important? Is my art important?

³ This led to the question, why are so many people doing this? One answer was people liked to see "superstars": Picasso, Cezanne, King Tut. But that really only begged the question. The Museum of Modern Art in New York in an advertising campaign claimed more people went to see art at that museum than went to see the Mets play baseball. Their answer as to why lots of people went, and should go, was that lots of people went. One is reminded of the hot dog commercials of some years ago: "They're fresher because more people eat them; more people eat them because they're fresher." Just as the old advertisements ascribed the quality of consumption ("freshness") to the quantity consumed, so the MOMA hoped to inject "meaning" into seeing art via the quantity of viewers.

Conclusion

We began this chapter by noting a broad, unarticulated consensus about the nature of art. As was stated then, neither the existence of such a consensus nor its unspoken nature presented a problem, unless this consensus could be shown to have undesirable consequences. As has been shown, the nature of the consensus in Canada does have such consequences. Bureaucrats are unable to devise satisfactory policy. Artists cannot perform satisfactorily. A problem therefore does exist.

We can resolve it by openly admitting we have burdened art with mutually exclusive aims: social monitor for the elite, and tool of the majority for dismantling elite privilege. We must decide which we wish to pursue.

Whether or not the existence of an elite can be demonstrated to be harmful or undesirable, one in some form has persisted in Western society throughout its recorded history. That persistence indicates to me that only massive social upheaval could alter this tendency, and even then the chances of success are slim. It is doubtful many would wish to embark upon such a course.

As an alternative, we should consider dropping our collective embarrassment about the existence of an elite. We should encourage it to take up more fully again its traditional role as patron and appreciator of the arts. The emergence of

good art in Canada might then become possible.

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