

the closed window onto another life

Reflections on Culture and its Artistic Production

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"In the upside down world which makes dead labour worth millions more than living labour, the destruction... of the Mona Lisa... would receive a million more headlines than the death of someone unnecessarily freezing, which is a banality. Sure, the image of the "destruction" of the Mona Lisa ... could, and probably already is, used in some corny anti-art framework: the art of the "destruction" of art (now, putting Damien Hirst in a tank of formaldehyde would be a genuine anti-artistic innovation, at least if he were alive before work on such a creative act began). Less likely is the use of Da Vinci's painting on the front of a barricade, a version of what Bakunin had suggested in the Dresden uprising of 1849 - to delay the advancing armies of the State and save the lives of insurgents. In May '68 the Louvre was never attacked. But you could have been sure, the accusation of philistinism, not to say derangement, would have been hurled at those who would have dared destroy the original Mona Lisa, which supply and demand ideology ranks a million times higher than a mere exchangeable individual"

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A prisoner who cannot see the sky from his cell window may paint on his wall a scene of birds flying amongst clouds against a blue haze of space. Outside in the wider society art plays a similar role; what is denied and seems unreachable, but possible and desirable, is represented via the window of the picture frame or TV screen. So art/culture as the representation of what is repressed fuses with the commodity form; the very form whose domination has fragmented this creativity from the rest of life.

And with this fusion adverts become seen as "the cutting edge of art". Advertising is essentially advertising the positive qualities of the whole of the commodity system - not just a particular product, whose increased sales as a result of advertising isn't as socially important as the fact that what advertising sells above all is this society. The 'witty', 'inventive', 'imaginative' artistic permutations of advertising excuse its fundamental cover-up of a brutal system. The progress of advertising is the inevitable result of art and the best indicator of art's fundamental stupidity, a far more positive collaboration with this shit world than anyone who isn't officially 'creative', apart from politicians and big businessmen. The fact, for example, that surrealism has been part of advertising for over 30 years shows the poverty of even the best art.

The contradiction within art is that it appeals to our desire for realisation of what it represents - passion, creativity and other experience routinely denied in bourgeois society - but it only "realises" in a fragmented, isolated manner, separate from daily life. It is now art and the cultural spectacle, not religion, that is "the opium of the people" and "the heart of a heartless world". The art of an artless life. This is why, wherever circumstances allow, religion also organises itself in the image of the latest media technology - from slickly marketed TV evangelism to increasingly theatrical church services, Islamic TV and radio stations etc.^[1]

The critique of culture follows on from the critiques of religion and of philosophy; all are separations and divisions of labour that emerge with new developments in class relations.

By culture ^[2] here we mean its skills and arts that emerge with the development of class society and have always tended to encourage a division between professional specialist performers and passive spectator consumers - as in sport and the arts. We say *tended to* because culture wasn't always as clearly defined a separation as this - especially what is now retrospectively categorised as 'culture' amongst previous poor

sections of society in earlier epochs.^[3]

In saying that religion, philosophy and culture are separations coming from the hierarchical division of labour we cannot deny some sometimes excellent qualities expressed in these forms but to recognise also their fundamental limitations and weaknesses, miseries and even horrors (e.g. Greek philosophy was born in a slave society which the philosophers, for the most part, accepted without question; and dominant culture has always justified the horrors of class society, racism being one of the more obvious aspects of this culture). Religion is linked to the development of social hierarchy in early human society and the appearance of a division within the communal life where a representative caste of priests emerges to mediate between gods and society, sometimes including the aestheticisation of human sacrifice. Art appears linked to the development of magic, ritual and tools as society develops new relationships to the rest of nature. Before this, in tribal societies, there was no separate sphere called 'art' or 'culture': these activities were originally integrated into the totality of people's social relationships and their relationships with nature. But as class society develops, the fruits of exploitation flow to the rulers and create a class with a surplus of leisure time and resources to produce and create in non-essential activities - and so aesthetics develops as a specialised practice of both production (artistic creativity) and consumption (appreciation). The same occurs with the production of ideas and other intellectual processes, leading to philosophy.

**...dazzling colours cannot
compensate for a dreary
world: the greatness of art
appears at the dusk of
life...**

The Decorative, The Functional & The Ugly

"In spite of being by profession just a plain peasant, it was clearly seen from the small baskets he made that at heart he was an artist, a true and accomplished artist. Each basket looked as if covered all over with the most beautiful sometimes fantastic ornaments, flowers, butterflies, birds, squirrels, antelope, tigers and a score of other animals of the wilds. Yet, the most amazing thing was that these decorations, all of them symphonies of color, were not painted on the baskets but were instead actually part of the baskets themselves. Bast and fibers dyed in dozens of different colors were so cleverly - one must actually say intrinsically - interwoven that those attractive designs appeared on the inner part of the basket as well as on the outside. Not by painting but by weaving were those highly artistic effects achieved. This performance he accomplished without ever looking at any sketch or pattern. While working on a basket these designs came to light as if by magic, and as long as a basket was not entirely

finished one could not perceive what in this case or that the decoration would be like.” - (B. Traven, “The Assembly Line”).

As William Morris pointed out, there came a time in feudal society when the functional and decorative aspects of workmanship became separated in both the object and the producer, craftsmanship and artistic production becoming progressively separate commodities and separate skills. So the time when artists are craftsmen and craftsmen are artists' comes to an end. Whereas products of labour had most often contained their decoration and aesthetically pleasing qualities as an integral, in-built component of their functional usefulness, many things now came to be produced as either predominantly functional or aesthetic in their use. The capitalist mode of production has kept design aesthetics within the commodity - one that there is status in judging and possessing (“to be admired for admiring”) but little joy in its producing, standardised and mass-produced as market competition necessarily makes it^[4]. So bourgeois aesthetics expresses as a virtue the division of labour in class society between these previously integrated components. Artistic activity is the reproduction of these aesthetic values.

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Art move, experiments, dances....

**...but only when "life" is
petrified, unexperimental, asleep.....**

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Ultra-Left On The Shelf

The left and ultra-left generally ignore the repressive function of culture. Using categories that define proletarians solely as workers they relate to them only as components of production - the opposite of how most workers think of themselves. Their workerism means they fail to deal with proletarian life as a totality. This is despite the fact that nowadays, more than ever, proletarians define themselves far more by how they act/consume outside work than by their particular job^[5] (leaving aside the fact that the majority of the working class are not even directly wage-workers - children, housewives, the unemployed, the elderly etc). If the worker as consumer is acknowledged by leftists and ultra-leftists, it's often in as patronising a manner as the way they see workers as producers: to be **won over** - by providing them with 'radical' criteria for going to see this band, or watching this movie or slagging off this or that TV show. Like in the openly bourgeois papers, there's a TV page with recommended viewing, a book and film review or two, a music column etc.etc. These marxologists (or whatever) tend to treat cultural forms as neutral, judging them only on whether the message they carry appears “radical” or not (particularly in the case of music, that most illusory of radical' commodities). Despite their fetishising of rigorous Marxist categories they ignore the fact that the dominant cultural forms are commodity forms^[6] and that the cult of media celebrity is but one more manifestation of this society's hierarchical power (such wilful ignorance even led one anarchist to ask at a Reclaim The Streets meeting whether anyone knew any celebrities who could come along to speak at an RTS conference, to give it a bit of status and publicity, to bring in the punters - in the end Rob Newman, from the Z list, was selected).

Such illusions about culture completely miss the process of recuperation ^[7] involved. Cultural recuperation is often so effective that it's easy to forget that something real existed that needed to be recuperated. Capital has a constant need to use innovation and modification in a competitive marketplace to renew the content and appeal of its basic unchanging forms and categories. Anything that emerges autonomously from outside the marketplace in a non-commodified form is a threat to the commodity society and so must be either suppressed or co-opted - this is equally true in the fields of culture and politics (the very different histories of the blues and of punk, or of Dadaism and of Surrealism, are some examples of this process).

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Art Therapy?

Not all present artistic activity is totally commodified - when not being done to pursue a media career or some kind of cultural status it often fulfils the therapeutic desire to be playful and creative for its own sake, outside the motivations and necessities of market forces. It is part of a search for pleasurable productive activity beyond the confines of labour imposed by economic necessity. Creativity' in the workplace for most is usually either: a kind of improvisation imposed to deal with a failing in normal functioning of the production process; or some marketing ploy to give a product an edge against competitors (design, advertising); at best it's a feeling of job satisfaction at one's skills/application etc, even if applied to a task of no real interest or use (beyond the wages earned). Yet none of it comes close to the joyful possibilities of the conscious creation and reproducing of our collective life and environment... this lies somewhere beyond the limits of this society.

It's the social and economic role of the artist as celebrity and specialist producer that must be attacked - and the illusions it feeds. A revolutionary movement would seek to recover the lost unity between creative activity and daily life - where none would be "artists" but all would collectively reproduce a world full of sensuality and beauty. As Lautreamont said "*Poetry must be made by all - not one*", and in being made by all it will have little to do with the literary forms of poems and nothing to do with the role of poet. Consequently, it would also need to eventually overcome (as far as possible) the division between necessary work and creative pleasure. For William Morris "...*the ideal of the future does not point to the lessening of man's energies by the reduction of labour to a minimum, rather to a reduction of pain in labour to a minimum, so small that it will cease to be pain...*". To replace harsh economic necessity "*the true incentive to happy and useful labour must be pleasure in the work itself...*"(The Commonweal, Jan 22nd 1889.)

Morris thought that in a communist society the presence of a certain artistry in labour would be a measure of what work was pleasurable and therefore of what work people would choose to do: "...*commerce, as we now understand the word, comes to an end, and the mountains of wares which are either useless in themselves or only useful to slaves and slaveowners are no longer made, and once again art will be used to determine what things are useful and what useless to be made; since nothing should be made which does not give pleasure to the maker and the user, and that pleasure of making must produce art in the workman.. So will art be used to discriminate between the waste and the usefulness of labour...*". (Art Under Plutocracy.) What we think Morris meant here was what the Situationists later called "the realisation and suppression of

art". In Morris's time certain aspects of art were in the struggle against this world, but nowadays what Morris expected from 'art' could certainly not be put into artistic terms. 'Creativity' would be a better word to 'art', because creativity needn't be, and often isn't, specialised (we have no absolutist opposition to some forms of specialisation; it's more a question of opposing *resignation* to specialism, and the consequent entrenchment in a specialised role). This isn't to say that the word creativity isn't also open to pretension and ideology, but, depending on context, at least it's more open to what anybody can do.

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EVer-changing art cannot compensate for an unchanging life

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Culture & Daily Life

"Culture is still the location of the search for lost unity, but in this search, culture as a separate sphere has been obliged, in part, to negate itself. Each person contemplates not only objects and images, but also the aesthetic totality that he has made out of his daily life. Personality is the new artistic medium"
- Chris Shutes, "Poverty of Berkeley Life", 1983.

The fact that many forms of creativity have nothing *directly* to do with making money does not *in itself* mean that they are automatically non-hierarchical, nor that they are not products of externally defined, ultimately economically defined, notions of what creativity is. Whilst a degree of specialised effort and experience might be necessary to play a musical instrument or create something that looks nice, it is when such specialisations are seen as something to be put on a pedestal, something that makes you separate, a role, that they lose all desire for the kind of sociable communicative creativity that we find enjoyable. I knew someone who refused museum culture and had a critique of art-as-commodity but created some attractive visual art works *not* for sale (at least, not yet); he made slides of them and had them projected onto his wall, constantly changing during a party he gave, to the point where it was difficult to hold a conversation, the large visual display as distracting as a widescreen TV, and the loud techno music adding to the difficulty of talking. The fetishisation of this particular form of 'creativity' dominates not *directly* as an economic force but still debilitating.

Likewise, there are those who consider themselves best qualified to play a musical instrument and sing at parties, who resent others trying to play or sing because they are not so specialised, not so good at it, even though the communal joining in of singing and playing and drumming and dancing is far more pleasant, even if not 'expert', than the very best performance held in reverence. Taking your specialism too seriously solidifies a hierarchical judgement of individuals in terms of their ability, or lack of it, to express themselves within the narrow criteria of creativity defined in terms of their specialism. But everyone drunkenly singing loudly along to silly disco songs slightly out of tune is far more fun than a stiff appreciation of a really good musician.

Precisely because the ideology of creativity justifies almost everything, it is very

common for the artistic milieu, despite the pretension to being something better than 'business', to blur the distinction between friendship and economics, often functionalising people for their connections and money outside of work-defined contexts (networking at parties, for example)[8]: after all, it helps the 'creative process'. The specialisation process often appears to be something outside of money-making, developed in the specialists' leisure hours, though it is also often necessitated by the possible option of making future money out of this creativity. Which is somehow regarded as something natural, inevitable. Obviously we have nothing against people making money out of music or some other "artistic" form of alienated labour - depending on where they are in the social hierarchy; but it's the illusion of 'creativity' and the resignation to their specialism (they only come alive when they're performing) that make communication and the totality of social relations amongst artists so utterly conventional nowadays. For example, street performers who pursue the mirage of making it, whilst contemptuous of those further down in the hierarchy - e.g. the beggars who never 'create' anything, who 'give' nothing for their money (when often the 'creative' buskers - whether of music or some other performance, say a slow motion mime artist, can be just as easily as irritating as, or worse than, a beggar) [9].

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Gone With The Wind-Up

The 'wind-up' is an example of turning miserable social relations into a work of (performance) art. Though economics had no *direct* reason for its development, it's 'spontaneous' expression coincided, in the mid-80s, with the intensified repression of class struggle. Before these defeats, the wind-up (including the practical joke) was usually used either against some of those in authority, those too submissive to authority, the most moronically naive or just against someone who behaved in a persistently annoying way. It had a conscious target, a point. From the 80s on it bit by bit it became indiscriminate who you wound up, an aestheticisation of the war of each against all. This had always been around but at this time it became a particularly humiliating form of 'creative play'. Having lost the anti-hierarchical reason for this originally subversive game, targetted at the right enemies, the increasing defeat of the class struggle turned the wind-up inwards - democratic, applied arbitrarily and equivalently everywhere whether against potential friend or obvious foe, the aim being not to change things but to make the victim feel very stupid and the victimiser feel very clever and very smug. Everyone their own Jeremy Beadle. The arbitrary spread of computer viruses is a particularly specialised part of this haphazard wind-up culture, turned even more alien through the relative safety of internet anonymity. Or a fairly recent commodity in which you pay for some pre-scripted put-down read out by the celebrity of your choice, which is sent as a mini-video to the mobile phone of the partner you've decided to break off with, a parting gift: no need to even say it to their face. An impersonal 'creativity': makes a Ukranian winter seem like a summer on the Riviera in comparison.

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Interpreting The Interpreters

It's vital to emphasise that within cultural forms (just as within religious forms in pre-capitalist times) there has always been a revolt against the existing order - Blake, the Romantics, the Dadaists, etc. etc. However, until the experimental projects of the Situationists in the decade before 1968, these movements never pointed to the way out of the art impasse: they remained trapped within the prison of art. What was original about the Situationists was that the most radical theoretical critique of society up till then

was developed from a critique of culture and of art. Coming from the avant-garde of art, the Situationists negated their own positions as cultural specialists in order to attack, with more coherence, the presuppositions of culture, and by extension, the entire social system whose very basis is the representation of life opposing itself to life. This they called "the realisation and suppression of art". In other words, struggling to realise, in the world around us, what was a separate and purely imaginary creativity, whilst suppressing art as a separate specialism. The recognition that the totality of life could be creative if we destroyed the commodity form, in which the spectacle of creativity is now inextricably a part, coincided, in the late 60s, with a massive assault on class society which gave a massively practical meaning to what initially had seemed like some wierd esoteric intellectually nihilist idea. The desire for scandal, which radical art has always expressed, realised itself in the most scandalous desire of all - the mass threat in May '68 to the essential repressers of genuine creativity, the State and the Economy.



"Humanity will only be happy the day the last bureaucrat is hung by the guts of the last capitalist"
(graffiti in the Sorbonne, May 1968)

Since then, to participate in Art has *clearly* been a way of bringing in as much money for the least effort as possible, an economic scam - and its pretension to originality has *overtly* merely been a marketing ploy. Hence, as a way of trying to hide this fundamental poverty, the enormous boom in the art interpretation business in the last 20 years - those endless 'radical' etc. interpretations of something that a 6 year old would put more energy and thought into.

The less intrinsic quality there is in an art commodity, the more the interpretation has to

convince the public that the Art Emperor has the most interesting clothes that clarify the false dichotomy expressed within the feminisation of structural dysfunctionality on the juxtaposed dissonance of extraneous modernity dissembling its ironic pre-tonal pretext within a critical distanciation from the original hypothesis bla bla bla. The 'qualities' of an artwork exist only in the interpretation of it; in this way it can be made to mean anything you want it to mean. It's like advertising for intellectuals: to give 'meaning' to a meaningless product in such a way as to make you think yourself more special than those who are conned by banal TV adverts. And it increases the investment value.

The more you interpret some banal piece of art as significant, radical, original, or whatever the more you can convince yourself that you are significant, radical or original by valorising the significance, radicality and originality of your taste (as consumer) or of your creativity (as producer). This is not a struggle to understand the world, life, and culture by trying to change and subvert them, to question everything about them, but a purely passive interpretation, like philosophy. Yet, the more verbal or written interpretation you produce the more you can convince yourself that you're *not* merely passive in relation to the artwork. Repressing all critical disgust, approving interpretations of some installation or whatever and valorisation of its innovative qualities is a way of showing yourself as an interesting creative person, a way of selling yourself, your personality, a way of proving how 'modern' you are. It's an aestheticisation of the intellect, a philosophising not to change things but to magically turn your passivity before a work of art into a positive influence. But all that changes are your undoubting thoughts and the possibility of valorising yourself through them.

In essence, all of these approving 'interpretations' have one basic statement: *"Very few people understand what this is all about."* The fact that only the very clever, the sophisticated, esoteric and intellectual, can offer an apparently clear interpretation adds to the rarity value, to the investment value. In an art world of High Finance, specialisation of interpretation is part of *"you scratch my specialism and I'll scratch yours"*. Inevitably, in such a narrow circle, the poverty of this art is hidden by the monetary value of it, interpreting their art all the way to the bank. In a world dominated by fictitious capital, art is as much a con as false accounting.

Doubtless one day, some ironic post-modernist recuperator will read this and be inspired to produce canvasses on which long interpretations are painted. Or better still, a large canvas on which is written *"Very few people understand what this is all about"* or *"We're taking the piss"* whilst the catalogue won't have any words but instead some small photos of a bag of mouldy doughnuts, a dead rat, a pool of vomit, cops in a car or whatever. Maybe it's even already been done.

Don't Say "Art", Say "How Much?"

In the context of a market economy, the artwork is the commodification of meaning, statement and expression - embodying them in a saleable object or activity, the name of the producer, and the interpretative ideology that goes with them adding or detracting from its value/price. Art is the domain of the "uniquely creative" specialist, the glorification of the hierarchical social division of labour. But to fetishise the uniqueness of one's own subjectivity is only to recognise its demise - we are all now products of a uniform age of uniform experiences ¹⁷⁰ - so the artist has to push the limits of his/her extremism ever further to make any impression on the jaded consumer: witness the

recent exhibitions involving the public vivisection of corpses in UK art galleries and the performance of the actual eating of dead babies by Chinese artists ¹¹ - confirming that though art may be dead it won't stop some consuming its corpse.

Taste & Tasteability: Taste Modern (& Ancient)

At the same time there is a popular disgust for the modern art con which nevertheless never gets to grips with the art it criticises and so ends up just being a superficial battle over taste. This is exemplified by the former Arts Minister Kim Howells' denunciation of "conceptual bullshit". It just leads to a petty reform of the Art spectacle - e.g. the obnoxious Saatchi's decision to exhibit.....horror shock....paintings painted with paint on canvas within a rectangular frame!!! - "The Triumph Of Painting" he's going to call it. Or the shock that last May's shortlist for the Turner prize contained not one single bit of shock art. So we see a demand for the return of something like the Old Masters, who developed their skill over years and years of dedication and effort and imagination and talent and genius (and, usually, massive *unacknowledged* plagiarism which they then made a bundle out of) in reaction to the hype of sharks in formaldehyde, unmade beds and endless attempts to horrify (which lost most of their scandalous power before these artists were even born). This popular disgust wants its art elitist - not something anybody could do, and certainly not something *they* could do (if they didn't have to lick so much arse to make money doing it, at least). They want a better spectacle of other people's creativity - a new Goya or Van Gogh ¹²- something to lighten up their lives or move them in some way, something to make them feel sophisticated in their taste, that they are people of quality because they appreciate things of quality.

Taste is the new politics. Taste is the new sport. For some pretentious bastards, it's the new sex.

Exchanging ones different tastes, arguing about what one likes and doesn't like about this or that different bit of culture is one of the most common forms of interaction nowadays. Most of what passes for criticism of this or that cultural thing is merely a battle of egos, a pointless exercise in my taste's better than yours': a pretty petty way of judging individuals. Kenneth Clarke, the former Tory Chancellor, likes Charlie Parker. Adolf Hitler was a vegetarian. We too like Charlie Parker and vegetables - but this is hardly the point. When attacked for ones taste, it's fine to defend it, to not be made to feel 'incorrect' and guilty about pursuing it - but there's a lot more fundamentally meaningful, critical, things to be said about cultural consumption. And when some people say some movie or commodified piece of music is more radical or more fascist than another, simply on the level of their immediate content, that says very little.

Above all, it is the taste for adventure, for experiment, for progress, that is repressed by arrogant battles over consumer tastes. In the commodity economy, "adventure", "experiment" and "progress" is permitted only in the form of a merely monetary measurability; "adventure" becomes a business risk, "experiment" becomes "let's try this new marketing ploy", "progress" becomes "I've made more money this year than last". Or, at best, they're seen in terms of your leisure time: "adventure" becomes sky diving or some other extreme sport, "experiment" becomes "let's go somewhere new", "progress" becomes "I can play pool better this year than last" - which are ok but are defined narrowly and, like all leisure activities, have no social consequence - they're not adventures, experiments or progress in social relations. Heated arguments over consumer taste try to obscure this fundamental misery whilst avoiding more profound

adventures & experiments and the realisation that, far from progressing, we're increasingly regressing. In this ever-narrowing cynical world based on defeat, asserting ones consumer taste seems a way of breaking out of this narrowness and defeat, apparently asserting ones personality, oneself, because asserting ourselves in any more experimental way seems like too much of a risk.

Taste is not the important thing - it's the social relations that come from the fetishism of cultural commodities and the way, within different epochs both historical and personal, creativity and communication is destroyed or enhanced by 'cultural' forms that's important. It's these fundamentals that are the essential basis for understanding and judging culture. So when we say we don't like Salvador Dali or John Lennon for instance, it's nothing to do with whether or not we like their pictures or their music.

In a world where morality is increasingly recognised as hypocritical and petrified, taste becomes an alternative, more fluid, less crude, more subjective way of asserting ones 'essential' superiority. Whereas morality was repressive, taste seems to be expressive. Although some search for a personal meaning seems to be expressed in terms of taste, taste is ultimately a sad consolation for not being able to really be creative oneself. Taste only *seems* to be expressive - it never gets beyond being a background commentary to the gaping wound at the heart of daily life. Taste is like a comment on the bandage covering that wound - what a wonderful pattern the blood stain makes. Taste gives the illusion of not being passive - yet it's as much flowing with the tide as talking about what you've seen on the news. Whilst mostly unavoidable, it's not a search for a way out of passivity. And in the end, cultural taste becomes a hierarchical battle, a subjective justification for the objective division of labour, a notion of superiority every bit as evasive and invasive as morality, a distortion of desire as destructive of the individual as morality.

Many of those consumers of art who get into taste fights often ahistorically mix up everybody who produced Great Works Of Art. For them, it's as if all epochs blurred into one and Creative Genius, at least in the visual arts, manifested its quality through a few rare individuals with some 'eternal' ability existing outside of historical influences. As if, in other words, one could somehow produce paintings as good as a Goya or a Van Gogh or an Henri Rousseau today and we could all admire them. As if the passions that inspired former artists in former epochs could somehow arise *within* the all-pervasive repressions of existing society. This is certainly not to say that 19th century/early 20th century capitalism wasn't also very claustrophobic. But at that time, if one made a break with aspects of it in some way, the greater extent to which life was not invaded by externally defined 'imaginative' forms enabled you to still express yourself with some originality and uniqueness *within* art. Nowadays, accepting these forms is already a denial of any authentic passions because these forms colonise us like never before. 'Originality' expresses nothing heart-felt, human or individual because people hardly have any heart or humanity or individuality. Originality's just a novelty designed to distract, to impress with its overwhelming monumental power, to be different for the sake of superficial entertainment. A true opposition to the horror that Modern Art has become can only use the inspiration of the past by looking at how these passions failed to develop so as to find a way through to expressing the *life and experiment* there used to be in art. The specialisation in creating aesthetic objects didn't always hide the ugly world around us, but expressed a desire, and was often nurtured in the struggle, to somehow supercede this world; likewise (but differently) the later specialisation in creating 'ugly' objects (by Man Ray, Duchamp, etc.) was originally an *attack*, first developed during the horrors of World War I, on the same decomposing world which

now makes such 'shock' tactics so profitable. It is only on the basis of recognising these failures that one can get beyond the superficial battles over taste, beyond good and evil, and recognise what was a truly radical desire in both previous Modern Art experiments *as well as* - in their different ways - in Munch, Rousseau, Van Gogh, Turner, Blake, Goya and thousands of others. At the same time, there's often an unhealthy servile respect for these 'greats' which puts them on a pedestal utterly above - and certainly nothing like - our own lives. People ignore what was *uncreative* in the lives of the 'greats', as well as diminishing what was or is creative, or potentially so, in their *own* lives. This excessively self-effacing, admiring and adoring attitude refuses to recognise some aspects of the contradictions of the greats in their own history of creativity and destructivity and the history of people they know and have known.

All these different forms and content of art through different historical periods have now been turned into different share prices on the investment scale. Art has very clearly become what Shakespeare said of gold - "*Gold...will make black, white; foul, fair; wrong, right; base, noble; old, young; coward, valiant*" (Timon of Athens). Art is just an equivalent, an exchange value - it excuses all its own horrors and idiocies. It is this disgust for what art has become over the last 70 years that anyone with any integrity has rightly realised is something beyond the taste battle - it's an essential moment of discovering **the possibility of creative destruction everywhere.**

The Urge To Destroy Is A Creative Urge

Nowadays the destruction of museums is associated with the looting of the Baghdad Museum in 2003, immediately after the war in Iraq *officially* ended . A crazy response to a crazy war is how the liberal lefties would like us to see it: many of those who (rightly) opposed the war were (wrongly) shocked by this looting¹³; as if Iraqis didn't have good desperate reasons to loot the stuff, if it gave them a chance to survive a bit longer and better after years of brutal attacks by Saddam Hussein, the United Nations and the USA and UK. Although this looting turns out to have been much exaggerated, we have no qualms with the poor looting art in order to survive. As Karl Kraus, an independent old-style liberal, said after The First World War, "*In a time of desolation the truly creative act would be the resolve to cover a freezing man's nakedness with the canvas of the available Rembrandt*".

In the upside down world which makes dead labour worth millions more than living labour, the destruction of a Rembrandt or of the Mona Lisa, like in the picture at the start of this text, would receive a million more headlines than the death of someone unnecessarily freezing, which is a banality. Sure, the *image* of the destruction of the Mona Lisa that we put here could, and probably already is, used in some corny anti-art framework: the art of the "destruction" of art (now, putting Damien Hirst in a tank of formaldehyde would be a genuine anti-artistic innovation, at least if he were alive before work on such a creative act began). Less likely is the use of Da Vinci's painting on the front of a barricade, a version of what Bakunin had suggested in the Dresden uprising of 1849 - to delay the advancing armies of the State and save the lives of insurgents. In May '68 the Louvre was never attacked. But you could have been sure, the accusation of philistinism, not to say derangement, would have been hurled at those who would have dared destroy the original Mona Lisa, which supply and demand ideology ranks a million times higher than a *mere* exchangeable individual. Those who ideologise art

deliberately use simplistic equivalents, amalgam techniques, to try to associate an attack on art with fascist State repression, like comparing the act of an individual with what the Taliban did to the Buddhist statues. The accusation of 'philistinism' is often used against *all* those who for good material reasons have attacked art in the past.

We have no desire to offer prescriptions: we'll leave that to the Leftists who, because they want to discourage any autonomous thought or activity, always know what's best for us. And those who demand to know what they should do will be easy prey for the experts who try to provide positive solutions. However, it's worth mentioning a few examples of past creative subversion that puts to shame all those who think that artistic forms can be genuinely rebellious:

In 1914, on the eve of the first of many barbaric 20th century slaughters, Mary Richardson¹⁴, a suffragette, went into the National Gallery and slashed Velazquez's painting *Rokeby Venus* with a cleaver, breaching the sleep-inducing atmosphere with one swipe. Since then the museum has restored the painting and officially denies that the event ever happened: in the name of preserving the past, museums repress most of the past's best moments. At the same time access to the archive material on the event is denied to those seeking it on the grounds that it is "*classified material*", which the museum does not want published in order to avoid "*giving people ideas*", ideas being the last thing museum culture ever wants people to have. More recently, an unknown 'theatre producer' ¹⁵ chopped off the head of Margaret Thatcher, unfortunately only in statue form - a symbolic act that undoubtedly pleased millions. Nevertheless, attacks of this nature don't really amount to a critique of art, but rather a symbolic political attack on *certain types* of art.

In the 60s an artist in a small German town invited all the local dignitaries to the opening night of his exhibition. Whilst they peered at the pictures, the canvasses visibly decomposed in front of their eyes: the artist had covered them with a slow activating acid. The tannoy at the exhibition then blared out an announcement - "*Would you please evacuate the building. The artist has just phoned in to say he's left an incendiary device on the premises*". As the dignitaries left, the building caught fire, and the artist went on the run.

In 1968 Valerie Solanas, creator of the 'SCUM' manifesto, which had a pretty good critique of culture, even if it was falsely categorised as 'male' culture, shot and almost killed Andy Warhol, the vacuous vapid artist who once said he'd rather have been a machine than a human being.

In the late 60s a man who worked in a Blackpool rock factory was given his notice, but during the last week at work produced several miles of rock with the words "Fuck Off" written through the middle of it. Though unsaleable at the time, nowadays the culture of decomposition might very well turn such a product into a novelty item as long as it was produced *officially*.

In 1970, some radicals, at that time part-time lecturers in the history of art, set fire to a part of the Newcastle Arts College. Though never arrested and charged for it, one of

them was blacklisted by the Economic League, and couldn't even get a job in a factory after that.

In the mid-70s a few people went round an exhibition at the Royal College of Art next to the Albert Hall and spray-painted anti-art slogans all over the walls ("*Art is dead but the student is necrophiliac*", "*Art must be directly lived*" etc.). When one of the guards came in and politely asked what they were up to, they said, "*This is our art - it's an experiment. We come in and paint all over the wall and another lot come in and paint over our slogans and then we repeat the action and so on...*". The guard, genuinely perplexed, walked off saying, "*I'll just have to check that...*", and the group ran off through the library.

In the mid-80s an installation at a Hackney art gallery was broken into at night and the art works, which included ones by the obsessively anti-situationist Stewart Home, were sprayed over with radical slogans such as "*Dada did this before but better*" and "*Another Radical Wank*", and magazines by Home were pissed on. The installation was forced into an early closure.

Since these times, people have intermittently vandalised works of art - the Angel of the North was set fire to, and loads of other artworks have been attacked, but rarely have they been accompanied by a clear reason for the attack (the most recent attack - at the beginning of September 2005 - was the slashing of a Roy Lichtenstein painting by a German woman - not so much *WHAMM!* as *RIP!*). Much of the time, it's clear that these 'vandals' dislike the pretension of modern art or that they are disgusted with the way art is put up in green or open spaces or play areas on working class estates without the slightest respect for the environment or the people who inhabit them. Obviously we agree - it's basic. But when it comes to attacking more classical art, the ruling world (and many of those who approve of attacks on the more modern rubbish) presents such attacks as the actions of madmen or bizarre eccentrics. For example, in July 2004 a guy who attacked "priceless" religious statues in Venice with a hammer was detained in a psychiatric hospital. Until such people find the words to express the anger they feel towards the object of their attacks, it is inevitable that the ruling world will define such actions for them - as 'philistine' or 'crazy'.

PS

Section about THE ATTACK ON DUCHAMP'S URINAL added 16/1/06:

Recently, on 6/1/06, Duchamp's "Fountain", an upside down urinal, voted most influential artwork of the 20th century by 500 of the most powerful people in the British art world in December 2004, was attacked by a performance artist, Pierre Pinoncelli.



The original 'Fountain' was refused permission to be exhibited in a 1917 exhibition apparently open to all, and has disappeared ever since. In 1917 Duchamp saw the 'Fountain' as a provocation - an attack on a very rigid traditional High Cultural definition of aesthetics, and, as such, was highly original, innovative, revolutionary even. But almost 50 years later - in 1964, having turned scandalous anti-art into an acceptable form of art itself, he made 8 replicas (i.e. bought some urinals and signed them, as in the original, "R.Mutt"). What is radical in one epoch is utterly conservative and banal in another. Such that nowadays even attacking *modern* art has become a form of art. In 1999, two Chinese artists, jumped on "My Bed", Tracey Emin's unmade bed with its empty bottles, dirty underwear and used condoms, on show at Tate Britain. The following year, the two artists urinated on Tate Modern's version of "Fountain". What is alienated here is not the fact of pissing around with the pretensions of art, but wanting to be merely *well-known* for it. They publicised their action by noting that Duchamp himself had said that artists defined art (of course, all specialists want to corner and define their niche in the market). Such innocuous "attacks" on art get plenty of publicity precisely because they are presented in the acceptable perspective of 'art'. Whilst in the past, messing around with works of art without seeking fame was part of 'subversive creativity' in daily life, today the totality of a persons daily life has to be spectacularised, a means of self-valorisation as a 'creative individual', a career move.

It is for artists to define art, said Duchamp, and Pinoncelli's act has already been hailed by many 'rebel' artists (artists who turn rebellion into money). Pinoncelli himself has always considered his acts as art, though with a tinge of left-wing politics - spraying André Malraux, de Gaulle's Minister of Culture, with red paint in 1969, holding up a bank in Nice with a fake pistol and no ammunition to protest Nice's decision to become Cape Town's twin city while South Africa was still under apartheid, parading outside Nice's courts, covered in large yellow stars, in what he called his homage to deported Jews, etc. Undoubtedly this guy is on the border of art and an opposition to it, but he can't really shake off the need to *perform*. This shows how it's not enough to merely attack works of art - you need to consciously develop a critique of the specialisation of creativity, its transformation into merchandise. There are some who think performance art transcends the normality of art-as-commodity, because it's transient, ephemeral, not tangible. On the one hand, this implies that only *things* become commodities, which is patently untrue. It also ignores the fact that much performance art inspires advertising.

Apparently Pinoncelli chipped off a bit of Duchamp's piss-take urinal, which, although one of 8 replicas, is still valued at almost £3m. This exemplifies the almost absolute arbitrariness of exchange value - contrary to the claims of the more vulgar of the traditional Marxists, who claim that the price of a commodity is determined by the labour needed to produce it, and who hardly ever look at mere hype in relation to the art world, which seems to have similarities with fictitious capital. This is not to say that it's not related to labour in some way - the value is seen in the supposed 'original mental conception' of a modern artwork, no longer in the traditional manual skills of the hands, i.e. in painting, sculpture etc: clever dick intellectual labour as opposed to manual dexterity, though of course previously there was a unity between concept and execution.

Maybe we have been a little ungenerous towards Pinoncelli - few people, at the age of 77, have done something as interesting as this. The guy got fined 214,000 euros (\$302,446 or about £140,000) and was given a three-month suspended sentence. Brutal. Pinoncelli explained to the court he had attacked the work in the same absurdist spirit Duchamp had used to declare it art. "This was a wink at Dadaism," Pinoncelli told the court. "I wanted to pay homage to the Dada spirit." The trouble is using a spirit borrowed from the past, a spirit which has long been integrated into the art world, doesn't connect to any understanding of the contradictions of this world. In 1991, another artist attacked Michelangelo's statue "David" and damaged a foot. This guy was described as "unbalanced", presumably because, like the previously mentioned guy who attacked "priceless" religious statues in Venice with a hammer - who was also psychologised into oblivion - his attack was against the generally revered *traditional* forms of art - though this was certainly not explicit. But explicit or not, such an attack on art has to be seen as a problem for the specialists in sanity, the uncreative specialists in getting people to adjust to an *uncreative* life in this utterly *unbalanced world*, the specialists in crushing people with sophisticated psychologistic vocabulary hiding crushing social relations.

...As long as this world is fundamentally
ugly and work-oriented
aesthetics
as a specialised activity
will try to make it look
nice and playful

Recommended reading: [The Revolution Of Modern Art And The Modern Art Of Revolution](#) by some of the excluded English section of the Situationist International and

others.

FOOTNOTES

1

In some so-called “less developed” countries Islam is using both its own media forms and censorship to compete with and resist the domination of the non-religious media - but the global range of satellite TV and the internet make this increasingly difficult. They are right to see the Western cultural spectacle as consumed via the media as another potential nail in the coffins of their brutal regimes. Just as the “communist” countries eventually submitted to the naked realities of the global market, so Islamic states will eventually probably make the transition to a “freer” market system with the accompanying relaxing of censorship and morals. Giving them the chance to buy (or be bought by) anyone and anything, if, by the grace of God of course, they can afford to (or can't afford not to be). Yet we don't mean to be determinist here by implying that the Western economic model is the inevitable next historical form for these countries, and even less that this is desirable. We recognise that there is no “pure” modern capitalist form of government or state - most of the world has various hybrid forms. For example, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia, even Britain with its monarchy and House of Lords, are all very influential in their own ways in global politics and economics; yet all retain strong elements from their pre-capitalist pasts in the fabric of their present state forms and social structures.

2

By culture here we don't mean (as is sometimes intended) the totality of acceptable customs and values of a society, even though these too have to be criticised for their repressive aspects. Societies have had often contradictory, though usually overlapping, cultures. On the one hand, the various dominant cultures tried, and continue to try, to preserve, reproduce and inculcate, both as tradition and innovation, the hypocritical values and principles that make domination possible (the divine right of kings to rule or the right of management to manage, for example). Whatever the various qualities these different dominant cultures had, and continue to have, the essential misery they all ensure is that freedom remains a crime. On the other hand, culture is a part of the social bonds and habits of the various oppressed groups and classes that made, and continue to make, survival and struggle against the oppressions of class society possible. This includes the necessary and desirable human co-operation that makes such struggle possible. This solidarity is the necessary pre-condition that makes the abolition of that society also a potential possibility. But they obviously also perpetuate oppressive and conservative habits endemic to a class society: ways of judging behaviour in a hierarchical manner, from a point of view external and existing previous to the individuals that are grouped round these customs and values, to which they have to submit and adapt. But both what is useful for the future and a burden of the past are contained in this inherited culture of the everyday. Any culture of resistance' emerges from this base and a confrontation with its limits. It emerges only because of, and in the form of, a growing convergence of smaller acts and forces of the everyday, which then accumulates into something exceptional. There are positive aspects of tradition amongst those towards the bottom of the social hierarchy (such as trust, respect, pre-existing networks of solidarity) and repressive aspects too undermining new struggle (hierarchies, deference, rigid tribal/group/cliقة loyalties, sexism etc.) that need

to be confronted and evaluated by all involved in this process. Any further development of this very general outline would need to be far more concrete and examine how all this manifests itself in a precise social movement (e.g. the development of culture in the South African revolution and how it is now) or in the precise histories of the authors and readers of this text.

13

Even in pre- or early bourgeois culture, this division of labour wasn't always so clear as it is today: e.g. the poor used to go (in the cheap seats - the Gods) to Mozart's operas and sing along to the well-known tunes. If it happened today outside of the last night of the proms, it'd be a scandal - it'd give Pavarotti an art attack. This is not to say that opera couldn't reform itself in this way - sweeping away some of the current constraints of Classical Music. That stultifying atmosphere where everyone sits very still and very silent, sucking in the emotional experience in a purely intellectual non-physical, non-sensual manner. This repression is suited to the suffocating emotions of the bourgeoisie who by their material existence have to enormously repress their feelings and body in order to justify and thrive on this existence. However, it's not inconceivable that there could develop a false community of a 'popular' cheap opera in reaction to its current blatant elitism, which could become the latest boost to classical music, a bit more practically innovative than Nigel Kennedy's punk look. But, like all reforms, it would only be a momentary breath of fresh air - a moment in which Classical and Rock audiences become increasingly similar, mixing emotional and intellectual reverence more equally, whilst the cost of live classical music dropped, and that of rock rose. The innocent crowds of 18th century operagoers could certainly never be re-born today except maybe as a pale imitation - maybe in the form of themed parodies of 18th century opera houses. That is, unless a revolution makes people want to create opera, and all other kinds of music & games, in a non-commodified and far more playful form. And even then the crowds would certainly not be as innocent.

14

The exceptions are true craft production in developed' countries for the exclusive alienated consumption of the rich - and craft production in less developed areas where absence of modern technology and/or poverty determines the use of more traditional methods. But even here craft production takes on a very modern slant e.g. the recycling of discarded soft drink and beer cans in the hand-made production of toy airplanes, cars, etc. which are then transported to markets in the wealthier parts of the world to be sold for at least 10 times cost price.

15

This is not to accept people purely by their own self-definition: often workers try to ignore what they do for survival, in the production of their alienation, because it is in their consumption that they most consider themselves as individuals. It is essential to understand the struggle against this society in terms not just of a struggle against its production but also its consumption. It is in the culture industry that this is most visibly inseparable.

16

This is only part of a larger phenomena whereby the insights of earlier theories

are not transcended but repressed; the Frankfurt School and the Situationists, whatever their very different limitations, recognised the necessity of a critique of culture and of daily life. "In an age that has forgotten theory, theory has to begin in remembrance.... There is history that remembers and history that originates in a need to forget." - (C. Lasch.). Even most who pay a lip service recognition to earlier critiques - just to appear knowledgeable - have retreated into a dull marxist objectivity ' concerned mostly with the great ultimate questions of theory whilst applying the great eternal truths of communism to all events in the present; but carefully only dealing with external events in the arena of bourgeois politics, never challenging the complacency of their own role (or theory) by theorising its limits. "Objectivity' though in practice as unattainable as infinity, is useful in the same way, at least as a fixed point of theoretical reference." But these marxists forget that at least an attempt at a "knowledge of one's own subjectivity is necessary in order to even contemplate the objective '... " (C. Hitchens, Orwell's Victory - even an old bourgeois popinjay like Hitchens can sometimes see the obvious). This marxism, as an intellectual doctrine, seeks security and certainty in grand generalities, prescriptions and pronouncements on the totality of existence; an essentially religious attitude. So it tends to deal in deterministic general abstractions applied uniformly to all events - but avoids the more difficult yet necessary complexities and contradictions of any specific situations that might lead to significant conclusions - such as real challenging activity. While its terminology and categories sound radical, their usage is profoundly conservative - trapped in the same straitjacket as the rest of bourgeois thought. And no, we ourselves probably haven 't always completely escaped falling into that trap... This text has itself been criticised for being a little abstract, not being concrete or specific enough etc. This is somewhat true, but in these times the subject seems to demand this treatment to a degree; art and cultural forms as aspects of alienation and domination are often the biggest blind spot for those engaged with radical theory. So an attempt at spelling out the basic principles of a critique of art and culture - as an essential part of any radical critique - may be necessary for a renewal of that critique... this is only a small contribution to that process.

17

'Recuperation' is a term meaning' basically, 'co-optation', though its origins are more radical than the more leftist term 'co-opt'. This society recuperates from the injuries inflicted upon it by critique and struggle by absorbing certain more limited aspects of such opposition into 'rebellious' merchandise or 'revolutionary' ideologies or 'radical' roles.

18

Non-creative professions do this narrowly self-interested networking too. Self-development courses even teach it as a social technique! In both creative and non-artistic professions personality has been aestheticised as a vehicle for selling one's self through the performance of one's social presence.

19

Sure, beggars are not irritating in the way a statue-like mime artist is. What's nauseating about statue or slow motion mime artists is the way the apparent transformation of the absolute mechanisation of the body into clockwork, or into a video, becomes a source of fascination. At the same time the reduction of the

body to a machine made into a source of amusement hides the fact that the reduction of the body to a machine is the lot of millions of workers for whom it is not at all amusing. And the banal repression of the body, bizarrely exaggerated by the mime artist, is the lot of everyone walking through the streets, including the mime artists fans. But really we shouldn't be so serious - lighten up - hey, it's all just a bit of fun!

The beggars who are more obviously living in the street, even the most placid ones, are partly considered unattractive because their 'eccentricity', unlike the mime artist, causes them to not conform to any coherent world of appearance: they're 'wierd' partly because they don't dress right and their 'wierdness' is not entertaining. Beggars haven't become the same as street theatre, because their relation to the street is very different - at least, so far. If beggars are irritating it's not just because they're sometimes too pushy and persistent and smell a bit more rancid than most. A beggar is often irritating because we feel awkward contradictory emotions with a beggar - an anxious mixture of guilt, pity, sadness and contempt, even suppressed aggression. This is partly because they most epitomise, in an extended and more shocking form, the most abject aspect of ourselves, of what we could become, and our rejection of the beggar is also the line at which we draw our dignity. The beggar too blatantly expresses the need for submission which is the crushing rule of this society. If beggars are despised, it's because they reflect too crudely people's own slavishness. Beggars are both an aspect of ourselves, of what we're forced into, which we fight against and the warning, and even threat, to us all of what could happen.

As for buskers, it's a common misconception that they're just one rung up from beggars: a minority of buskers do quite well financially, the rest well enough to keep doing it. Some others do it not because they need to, but in pursuit of being 'discovered', a pursuit which is almost invariably a mirage. Others see it as paid practice time. Probably less buskers now than ever before can make a full time living from it. But very few are really the next rung up from beggars - if they weren't buskers hardly any would fall into beggardom (though it has to be also added that there are a few beggars - of course, not as many as the tabloids pretend - who also make an ok 'living' out of begging, though this is probably getting rarer).

10

Tourism is a good example; the really adventurous tourist seeks out locations where tourism has not yet penetrated - his arrival there ensuring that this place will, soon after his discovery, become just another tourist destination.

But the banalisation of space that tourism contributes to is becoming more and more vicious, like every other aspect of this world: in Albania, the privatisation by Club Med of an incredibly beautiful bay met with protests by the local villagers who said the area belonged to them, and then escalated when 600 armed cops, together with police snipers, surrounded the area of protest and moved in, making arrests, putting some locals under indefinite house arrest and the cops wearing bullet-proof vests, training Khalaznikovs on the area they are now (March 2005) occupying. "Tourism" - how the Americans pronounce "terrorism". The women of the village that defied the German Army in World War II said, "At least the Germans never bothered the women." and, referring to recent events, "Until the day I die I will remember the screams of the women."...

11

The situation in the Chinese art world mirrors the contradictions of the wider Chinese society. The ruling Communist party has always kept tight control over all ideological and artistic expression (in retrospect the occasional mild liberalisation allowed might be seen to function as a means to flush out the dissidents). The State-approved artists toe the line in form and content, their role being Government propagandists. The (baby eating) avant-garde that has emerged, being disapproved of by the status quo and antagonistic to its values, necessarily leads a marginal existence. Whereas the traditionalists put their art in the service of the State, the avant-gardists put theirs at the service of the market. Its main outlets - galleries and dealers - are on Hong Kong, in the heart of the new rapidly expanding entrepreneurial Chinese economy.

12

At the age of eight, Van Gogh destroyed a little clay model elephant he'd made and a curious picture of a cat he'd drawn, because, he said, there was too much of a fuss made of them. Children often have reasonable instincts that adults, adapted to political economic realities, find bizarre. It seems he was upset because his creativity was being treated far too preciously. Doubtless he would also have felt like destroying his 'Portrait of Dr. Gachet' when it too was treated far too preciously - selling for over \$80 million a few years back. Van Gogh never properly adapted to political economic realities and so one likes to think he would have felt like destroying a gift to the world that had become an incredible investment/fuss, that had become a suffocating distortion of his original intentions. A way of taking revenge. Particularly as Dr. Gachet was the person most responsible for his suicide other than Van Gogh himself, and didn't find this portrait conformed to his conservative notions of correct aesthetic taste - so never displayed it, hid it away somewhere in his attic or basement. And especially as Van Gogh could have done with \$80 million whilst he was alive (though it would have been his ruin far quicker than the madness of unrequited love). For Van Gogh painting wasn't a career move - he painted to express his feelings and to really connect, a spirit totally, and inevitably, absent today in the world of art, whether in its cynically sinister side or its naive side.

13

Sure, some of the looting was by gangs, and some of those gangs would've been like any other thug-businessmen, but an intelligent refusal of moralism should lead us to make distinctions. Typically, liberal journalists, always incapable of making any distinctions whatsoever, lumped the looting of the museums with the looting of medicine and medical equipment from the hospitals, which very clearly was an attack on the poor. On the other hand, in most people's minds there's a difference between attacking an art museum and attacking a museum preserving a "nation's heritage". Most people probably couldn't give a toss either way about wrecking an art museum, but people often identify with museums holding a "nation's treasures". For the patriot, there is an emotionally colonised identification with these treasures, at least when they're looted. Such museums are meant to preserve a country's memory: that this memory is reduced to monuments and artifacts in which the miserable social relations that produced them are entirely forgotten illustrates how much this memory is merely the memory permitted by a nation's ruling class. People are meant to ignore the fact that these beautiful 'treasures' on display hide, and implicitly justify, the brutal exploitation that produced them. All this helps the continuation of this horrible history into the present (the reign of

things over people, the fetishism of "treasures" divorced from their use, their use as a means of domination, etc.) by dazzling us with a collection of fascinating artifacts.

14

The dominant (and feminist) re-writing of Suffragette history always focuses on the martyr/victim picture we have of the movement: women manacled to railings, the woman who threw herself under the King's horses' hooves, the very brutal force-feeding of suffragette prisoners on hunger strike. What's largely forgotten is the excellent violence of the women against private property and against aspects of culture and religion in this movement: Mary Richardson herself was imprisoned in October 1913 for burning down an unoccupied house, and was, with another woman, the first woman forcibly fed under the Cat and Mouse Act against hunger strikers. In 1914, in the seven months before the outbreak of a very convenient war: 3 Scottish castles were destroyed by fire on a single night; the Carnegie Library in Birmingham was burnt; Romney's "Master Thornhill" in the Birmingham Art Gallery was slashed by Bertha Ryland, daughter of an early suffragist; Carlyle's portrait of Millais in the National Gallery and a number of other pictures were attacked, a Bartolozzi drawing in the Doré Gallery completely ruined; many large empty houses in all parts of the country were set on fire, including Redlynch House, where the damage was estimated at £40,000 - no precise calculations here - but certainly well over a million quid in today's money, possibly over £3m. Railway stations, piers, sports pavilions, haystacks were set on fire. A bomb exploded in Westminster Abbey and in St George's church where a famous stained-glass window was damaged. There were two explosions in St. John's, Westminster and one in St Martin in the Fields, and one in Spurgeon's Tabernacle. The ancient Breadsall Church and the ancient Wargrave Church were destroyed. As far as we know, nobody was hurt in these explosions and arson attacks. The Albert Hall organ was flooded, causing £2000 worth of damage. One wonders if this fury, expressive as it was of a wider social movement, was one of the factors not just in the push for war (the classic use of war and nationalism as partly a method of distracting from internal conflicts) but also in getting Emily Pankhurst to support this massacre, and even maybe, do a deal with the State to initiate a limited womens' suffrage as a reward for her loyalty...? One wonders...

15

We put this in inverted commas because, for all we know, he might have been a student or unemployed, but it sounds good in court to say your job is 'theatre producer' even if you've only produced some street theatre play once in your life; but then maybe he really was a theatre producer.