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#### ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to outline some of the relationships, historical and modern, between conceptions of art production and ideologies of social change. These phenomena are examined in terms of their relationship to both the decay of traditional European culture and to the industrial civilization that has replaced it.

Art is examined according to its social function (as opposed to an aesthetic approach) and so it has been necessary to distinguish between attitudes towards art production in traditional and modern society. The subject of art, then, has been subdivided according to perceived social function into 'art' and 'Fine Art'.

The idea of 'art', or material social production, is discussed in the context of the European guild system, and includes arguments on the social nature of creativity, the inherently social focus of traditional cultural production and the possible values to the individual member of society of such an approach. The resistance of traditional art to radical social change (discussed in terms of utopianism) is also examined.

'Fine Art', or art that does not serve a traditional social function, is seen as an approach to art aimed at reinforcing a particular form of elite class status -- upward social mobility. In this sense, the nature of the class patronizing art at a given time is considered to be as significant as the art itself. Therefore, considerable attention is given to the nature of the art market at selected points in post-Renaissance European history.

The paper concludes with a brief study of advertising, that medium that is considered most directly linked to revolutionary social philosophy.

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## Preface

This paper is perhaps not what is normally associated with a master's thesis. It is an ideological study and as such takes certain ideas as a given. Any thesis must do this to a degree, of course, and any thesis is ideological inasmuch as it is based upon "the ideas and objectives that influence a whole group or national culture, shaping especially their political and social procedure".\* All history, as has been said, is contemporary history. The past is shaped by the ideological position of the period viewing it. I don't know if it is possible or even especially desirable to avoid this situation.

The thesis is more pointedly ideological than is usual, then, not because it is ideological, but because it is, first a study of ideology and second, it adopts an ideological point of view contrary to that predominant in contemporary scholarship -- a 'traditionalist' rather than a 'progressive' approach.

Because this approach is not frequently used, an explanation of some underlying assumptions and key definitions may be of use to the reader.

The word 'social' is used to describe those forces in a society or approaches to art aimed at reinforcing, stabilizing or enriching the whole of a culture's social structure and not, as the word is often used, in reference to an individual class.

'Decadence' is seen as the natural process of decay in a social structure. Because this is understood to be a natural process, the underlying view of human society is cyclical, rather than strictly progressive. The process of decay is understood to be a 'de-socialization' of human society and of its system of production, including its production of art.

'Progress' refers to the ideology of progress: an "improvement; . . . movement forward nearer a goal". It refers, too, to the natural process of historical change, and as a cyclical study assumes

that society will progress to an intrinsically 'social' point, after which it will progress into decadence.

By 'individualism' is meant the ideological use of the term: the "social theory that emphasizes the importance of the individual, his rights, and independence of action". 'Individualism' is held to be distinct from 'individuality', the "quality or trait that distinguishes one person from others".

The definition of man as a social being offered in Chapter I is anthropological. Since two cultural views are examined, a cross-cultural definition was deemed more appropriate than a sociological or psychological one which, concerned primarily with contemporary life, would seem to be more biased toward a progressive ideological approach.

There remains the matter of proof. Because the central theme of the paper, the relationship of art and social decadence, is strictly ideological, it can only be presented in the form of an argument determined by a point of view. A point of view is taken, not proven. Because an ideological point of view sets parametres on a discussion, a certain element of tautology is likely to be present. This tautological aspect will perhaps be more glaring in a study that adopts an ideology counter to that in most frequent use.

\* All quotations from Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary, New York, 1968 ed.

CHAPTER I: Introduction: What has gone wrong?

1. A definition of visual art, and problems surrounding that definition

Social production is the species character of human beings. It requires the ability to project activity -- hence to value labour -- and thus produce activity instead of simply responding to nature.<sup>1</sup>

Visual art is material production. If man is a social being, then his material production will necessarily reflect the needs of his society -- for the hallmark of the social creature is not simply that he lives in communities, but that the interests of the individual are subservient to the well-being of the community at large.<sup>2</sup>

The functions that art traditionally serves -- and that the popular arts continue to serve -- are constant in virtually all human societies and may be summarized as follows:

. . . substitute image-making, which has become the special function of photography; beautification, comprising those arts which ornament and enhance man's artifacts and environment; illustration (storytelling), the particular function of narrative easel paintings, book illustration, comics, movies, and animated cartoons; and the arts of conviction and persuasion, among them political and social cartoons, certain kinds of sculpture and architecture, and advertising.<sup>3</sup>

The social utility of material production, then, goes beyond the simple manufacture of utilitarian artifacts. Art is a process

of humanizing those artifacts, an integral part of myth-making and the "spirit" of man, it is a profound socializing agent, unifying a social animal, not isolating an individual one.

Yet these definitions will still offend many -- Art Lovers will insist that Fine Art cannot be defined in these terms (and indeed it cannot, for Fine Art is something beyond these categories), that Art is thus relegated to the level of pots and pans, of idle diversions given precedence over Deeper Meanings, demeaning the Grand Tradition of human Creativity. But even worse, the definition of the social being proposed here belittles all of the human Progress achieved since the Renaissance -- a progress of human society of which Art forms only one small part.

The first objection is a symptom of the second. The notion that the equation of art with material production, the tangible product of human labour, is a degradation of art merely reflects modern society's degradation of work -- a trivialization of social production that in its turn comprises one element of the rise of individualism in contemporary societies. Individualism in one form or another is the basis upon which all modern culture, free-enterprise, liberal or socialist, rests. To disparage that phenomenon, to deny the value of the forms of labour which develop from it, is to deny Progress -- for the ideal of Progress necessarily implies a progression towards a goal: a technological Utopia where the individual's liberation, by the machine, from most or all of the necessity for work, will result in the ultimate man -- the man of absolute liberty, absolute equality, at leisure to achieve absolute self-awareness. The means developed in all modern societies to achieve this goal, is, ironically, the absolute degradation of work: the work of the middle-class and of the industrial working class.

But if social production and the ability to value labour are indeed the species characteristics of man, if the social being is subject to the society as a whole, then the ultimate self-awareness of the work-less Utopia (even if it were attainable, and if the social fragmentation of individualism did not prevent even this goal from

dissolving into pettiness) is nothing more than absolute decadence.

A decadent person is one who lacks an animating vision of an ideal state of affairs. The idea of being motivated by a desire to contribute to the perfection of the whole is foreign to him. Or distasteful. He has ideals, perhaps. He may pursue something for himself -- comfort, power, acclaim, health -- or be absorbed in a private sphere, most often his family, and devote himself to its well-being. But in these concerns he shuts out the world; they fix for him the boundaries of the territory that really matters -- beyond lie only threats or the utilities with which he decorates his private spheres.

In this sense, most people are decadent: they live largely in private spheres and value the public domain for the contribution it makes toward enhancing their private lives. Their decadence reflects a comparable condition of the social system.<sup>4</sup>

The "animating vision of an ideal state of affairs" in the traditional society is embodied in and circumscribed by religion. Paradise is obtained not through Progress but stasis, through resignation rather than revolution: paradise has the immensely convenient political characteristic of being found only after death.

Religion is an extremely efficient method of social control: "it ensures that the rich stay rich, and the poor stay poor".<sup>5</sup> Or to put it another way, religion is one means of ensuring that the bulk of the traditional society remains actively involved in social production by being denied access to the work-debased ranks of the ruling classes -- an accessibility further restricted by the anti-libertarian codes of aristocratic succession.

But religion is much more than simple mob control -- for that function to be effective it must be accompanied by genuine belief. It is "a force for resolving conflicts, maintaining the stability of social structures, and bringing man to terms with his mortality".<sup>6</sup> It is, moreover, the vehicle which expresses the genuine strengths of a people -- their views of their society, their aspirations and spirituality. These are elements quite independent of the decadent classes which control the religious structures. Only in retrospect do religions seem vehicles of social oppression.

It is in serving these aspects of traditional society that so many of the arts of human history -- the arts of social conviction -- find their highest expression. The most obvious example is the Gothic cathedral, but perhaps a better illustration is the Romanesque, for a society will find the forms that it needs to express its 'content': the sober stability of Romanesque architecture, although comparatively unexciting to later ages, suggests for that very reason the stability of the European peoples that produced it, the strength of a spiritual self-image that needed only touchstones for expression and reinforcement. The Gothic cathedral is a much finer and more accurate expression of medieval spiritual conviction than is its Romanesque counterpart, but what is significant is that the Gothic builders felt the need to express the full depth of that conviction. The overpowering image of Gothic suggests, because of its magnificence, a society already feeling the threat that would eventually destroy it.

There is nothing sacred about these buildings. They served a sacred function, they reveal the spirituality of a people, but they are not holy in themselves. The problem of the confusion of the concept of worship with the object or structure whose function it is to suggest that concept is common to all of the world's major religions -- Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam -- and is indicative of the power of visual art, particularly in pre-literate societies, and of its success in presenting the social convictions of a time.

Of the three major Western religions, and with the exception of the iconoclast and Reform movements, Christianity has most thoroughly ignored the bans on scriptural iconography (Exodus 32). It is in this faith, then, that the arts of religious conviction appear in their least metaphorical forms, in architecture, but primarily in mosaic, stained glass and painting. Because dogma is presented as direct figural representation, the associations of the medium -- the vehicle of religious expression -- with the overriding social concept are greater than in either Islam or Judaism: the image of God, for instance, is not the idea of God as expressed in Islamic design, but an image of God the fact, a likeness and not a concept.

It should not be surprising, then, that the media that served that social concept will retain an aura of sanctity even after the concept itself is dead. Indeed, with no broader social function to serve, the medium itself will become the sole focus of faith. To criticize the concept of Arts freed from the restrictions of social function, is to attack an irrational religious belief.

But the word 'religion' is an inaccurate one, for the phenomenon that has developed since the Renaissance cannot be seen to have the social connotations of a religion. It must rather be seen as a cult of Art.

Cults develop as eclectic syntheses of ideas and practices available in the prevailing cultic milieu. Typically, the cult is conceived as loosely organized, with no clear distinction between members and non-members, tolerant of other groups and beliefs, and often transitory . . . These features of the cult relate to the characteristic which underlies cult organization -- individualism. In the cult, there is no locus of authority beyond the individual members. Unlike the sect, the ideal-typical cult has no source of legitimate attributions of heresy. It operates on the basis of

of 'epistemological' individualism which leaves the determination of what constitutes acceptable doctrine in the hands of the member.<sup>7</sup>

This paper will attempt to outline the historical evolution of a cult of Art as one facet of the secessionistic nature of a decaying traditional social structure.

## 2. Origins of the cult of uselessness

Even though pure art may be impossible there doubtless can prevail a tendency toward purification of art. Such a tendency would effect a progressive elimination of the human, all too human, elements predominant in romantic and naturalistic production. And in this process a point can be reached in which the human content has grown so thin that it is negligible. We then have an art which can be comprehended only by people possessed of the peculiar gift of artistic sensibility -- an art for artists and not for the masses, for "quality" and not for hoi polloi.

-- Jose Ortega y Gasset<sup>8</sup>

Fine Art is socially dead. It should be made clear from the outset that this is not a matter of opinion, but a fact insisted upon by Fine Art critics, connoisseurs and a majority of Artists alike.

The social function of Fine Art began to end the moment the concept of Fine Art was born: the death of the social function of art is precisely what defines Fine Art, what makes it so different from the majority of the arts of the past. To deny that fundamental difference in the nature of art in traditional and "modern" social structures, to read the concept of Fine Art into the whole of human art production -- in effect, to reduce the history of art to the history of style -- is simply to aggrandize modern Fine Arts production at the cost of trivializing the art of the past.

Of course, the transition from high art to Fine Art production took time, just as the transition from traditional culture to modern civilization was a gradual process. Throughout the nineteenth century, artists moved towards the theoretical ideal of an art severed from traditional function -- but even the early avant-garde, the Impressionists and social realists, seldom avoided traditional functional concerns for beautifying or illustrating. As most modernists maintain, it is avant-garde production from cubism onwards that marks the final break with the Western tradition of art.

But even during the nineteenth century, when practice was still unable to match the purity of Fine Arts theory, there can be no doubt that the death of the social function of art -- and the desirability of that fact -- was well understood. The cult of uselessness, as it developed in the first half of the nineteenth century, most clearly in France, was taken for granted by 1834, when Gustave Planche compared Delacroix' entry in the Salon of that year, Women of Algiers, with his Liberty Leading the People, of 1831.

His street urchin . . . following with sparkling eyes his young rigid-breasted Liberty, the furious Misery, . . . these were elements of interest and sympathy almost independent of the painting itself . . . In Women of Algiers, there is nothing of this sort; it is painting and nothing more, fresh, vigorous painting, energetically defined . . .<sup>9</sup>

Content has already become, if not an outright hindrance then at least an addendum to the important thing -- style. And style itself, far from being a social convention -- the particular means evolved by a society that expresses most accurately the facts or aspirations, the "content" of that society -- style has already become a transient thing, revealing more about the whims of the artist than of the social structure within which he works; Planche, in the same article, urges Delacroix to, "before looking for a new

style, await the glorious exhaustion of this one that he has just found."<sup>10</sup>

This is not to play down the importance of style in traditional arts production. The strength of the form of a work has always been the ultimate test of a work's success or failure, of its ability to communicate its content powerfully or weakly, subtly or heavy-handedly, spiritually or mundanely. Style may carry content well or badly, but a vehicle it remains, and it is as a vehicle that style finds its social function.

By mid-century, isolation of style from its social function, the cult of uselessness, was recognized, in name as well as in fact, as the paramount virtue to which art could aspire.

Art starts out from the useless;  
it aims toward that which is agreeable  
for the few. It is the egotistic  
adornment of aristocracies . . .  
Art has nothing to do with the people.  
Hand over the beautiful to universal  
suffrage and what becomes of the  
beautiful? The people rise to art  
only when art descends to the people.<sup>11</sup>

In this article of 1854, "The Death of Art in the Nineteenth Century", Edmund and Jules de Goncourt attack social realism not because they consider it politically subversive but because they consider it socially functional, an "art which abdicates out of deference to the gross instinct of the people".<sup>12</sup> Yet it was precisely to these "gross instincts" that the public art of the past -- much of it great art -- catered. The "death of art" referred to is the death of Fine Art at the hands of social functionalism (an accurate assessment of what would kill Fine Art, but far too optimistic in light of developments in the following century). That the death of Fine Art can be spoken of so soon after its birth, and the unequivocal manner in which art is equated with uselessness, testify not only to the thorough absorption of the concepts of Fine Art by this time, but also to the revision of the whole of art

history to fit those concepts. The de Goncourts obviously do not bemoan the end of a fifty-year-old phenomenon, but of the glorious tradition of all human art production. Yet little more than a half-century earlier the social function of art was still recognized, as the official catalogue of the 1793 Salon indicates.

The artist must remember that the goal which he has set before him is, like that of all work of genius, to instruct men, inspire in them the love of goodness and to encourage them to honourable living . . . May the arts speak to us always of the love of country, of humanity and of virtue . . . Let [the nation] raise statues to the great men who have deserved well of their country . . .<sup>13</sup>

This may perhaps be put down to post-revolutionary zeal, and is in part undoubtedly so, but it does not really differ from Louis XIV's famous admonition to his Academy a century before, "I entrust to you the most precious thing on earth -- my fame."<sup>14</sup> In both instances the social function of art is plainly understood -- in these examples to instruct, inspire, and glorify the state. The artist is subservient to the function of his work.

But even the 1793 catalogue does not predate the eighteenth century rebirth of Fine Arts ideology that has today long realized its inevitable outcome. It merely predates the systemization of that ideology into an ethic governing the perceived worth of all arts production, present and past. The Salon, functioning as an arm of the forerunner of the modern super-state, is forced by the ideology of the new revolutionary state to recognize that artists "are free by their very nature. Independence is the property of genius."<sup>15</sup> The apparent contradiction serves to illustrate the imposition of traditional culture on revolutionary society -- an imposition that, while greatly diminished, continues to influence modern society and contemporary popular art.

It is to the Enlightenment that an awareness of the most recent embodiment of the Fine Arts ideal can be traced. In the original edition of Diderot's Encyclopedie, 1751,<sup>15</sup> the traditional distinction between liberal and applied arts was maintained. In a supplement of 1776-1777, however, in addition to the previous categories, a long section entitled "Beaux-Arts" was included.<sup>16</sup> While the article, clearly written under the influence of Diderot, was critical of the Fine Arts of late Antiquity (they "ceased to serve the good of the state [and] became arts of luxury")<sup>17</sup> it still recognizes the phenomenon as being fundamentally different in concept from that governing traditional art production -- and suggests further an awakening of the idea in the society immediately preceding the Revolution.

By 1793 debates were being waged in the press as to art's social function,<sup>18</sup> but this merely reflects a much larger issue -- what was to be the role of the individual in the new societies vaguely envisioned by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, and how could the basic changes in human nature necessary for a new social order be brought about? And as for art, how could its liberation from traditional function best be used to lead the masses not only to a useless art, but to that ideal State as well?

## FOOTNOTES (Chapter I)

1. James C. Faris, "The Productive Basis of Aesthetic Traditions", Art in Society, eds. Michael Greenhalgh, Vincent Megaw (London 1978), pp. 317-339, esp. p. 319.
2. In the 'primitive' society, like that of medieval Europe, the "individual personality tends to be effaced, and much more of the organization of society will depend on certain recognized groups, smallest being the family.  
. . . Paradoxically, although history shows how open any culture is to change, we are forced to assume -- at least of any pre-literate society -- that it is stable and uniform."  
-- Thomas Crump, Man and His Kind (London 1973), pp. 6-7.
3. Alan Gowans, The Unchanging Arts (New York 1971), p. 54.
4. Lawrence Haworth, Decadence and Objectivity (Toronto 1977), p. 3.
5. Thomas Crump, op. cit., p. 127.
6. Ibid.
7. Roy Wallis, "The Cult and its Transformation", Sectarianism, ed. R. Wallis (London 1975), pp. 33-49, esp. p. 41.
8. Jose Ortega y Gasset, The Dehumanization of Art (Garden City, New Jersey 1956; [rpt. 1948 ed.]), p. 11.
9. Gustave Planche, "The French School at the Salon of 1834", The Triumph of Art for the Public (New Jersey 1979), pp. 331-344, esp. p. 338.
10. Ibid.
11. Edmund and Jules de Goncourt, "The Death of Art in the Nineteenth Century", Realism and Tradition in Art, 1848-1900, ed. Linda Nochlin (New Jersey 1966), p. 17.
12. Ibid.
13. "Official Catalogue: Salon of Year II (1793)", The Triumph of Art for the Public, op. cit., pp. 45-47, esp. pp. 45-46.
14. John Berger, Art and Revolution (Harmondsworth, Essex 1969), p. 23.

15. "Official Catalogue . . .", op. cit., p. 46.
16. Donald Drew Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts, Western Europe (New York 1970), p. 33.
17. Ibid.
18. E.G. Hold, "Paris: The Official Exhibition of the State", The Triumph of Art for the Public, op. cit., p. 44.

## CHAPTER II: The Italian capitalists

## 1. The economic confrontation

The concept of liberty -- the idea that Man can control his destiny, free from the interference of his state or his gods -- is born out of the fact of individualism. That the causal relationship occurs in this order, that individualism is not a product of liberty, if it is not self-evident, should be made clear by a brief historical analysis.

The history of individualism in the post-medieval West is a cumulative one -- various expressions of individualism, most rapidly since the Enlightenment, have evolved from a core concept of freedom to produce a broad social regime spanning our entire modern political spectrum, from extreme conservatism to anarchism. That initial core concept is quite clearly 'laissez-faire', economic individualism: the desire for commercial freedom of action unfettered by governmental or religious strictures.

Inasmuch as all things in the world have been made with a certain order, in like manner must they be managed -- most particularly those which are of the greatest importance, such as the business of merchants, which, as we have said, is ordered for the preservation of the human race. Hence a merchant must manage himself and his merchandise with a certain order tending to this purpose, which is [the attainment of] wealth.

Nonetheless the order must be different according to the different substance and capital which a man happens to have. A very rich man must manage one way, a rich man another, and a man who has a small capital still another . . . For those who are rich and have the management of many weighty matters ought to maintain their

intelligence on a high [plane], and to investigate lofty matters in a rational way, as the saying goes, 'The greater the ship, the greater the labor.' . . . And this method, in my opinion, is very efficiently followed by the Florentines more than by any other people . . .<sup>1</sup>

By the fourteenth century, Florentine banking had given that city economic ascendancy over the trade and manufacture-based economies of Venice and Genoa. Banking brought with it other advantages as well -- the Florentines maintained influential court connections throughout most of Europe, "and since their trade required little work from the individual it left them plenty of leisure time for higher interests."<sup>2</sup>

For Cosimo de'Medici (the father of the Florentine city state that promptly, upon his ascension to political power in 1434, spawned the Renaissance proper) these higher interests seem to have been limited to attempts to save his spiritual neck following the sins committed in the line of commercial duty.

Business acumen, not infrequently ruthless, co-exists with deeply-felt Christian religiosity. One heads one's daily ledger entry with the traditional religious formula: 'In the name of God and of the Virgin Mary and of all the Saints in Paradise' or else, more tersely . . . 'In the name of God and Profits'; and then one proceeds to enter earnings from money lending condemned by canonical law.<sup>3</sup>

Cosimo remained bound to medieval social tradition in virtually all aspects of his life but commerce. He lived as spartan an existence as was possible to one of the world's wealthiest men, retreating periodically to a bare cell reserved for him at the friary of San Marco.<sup>4</sup> Like most of the Italian merchants and bankers, he poured

large sums of money into the construction, restoration and decoration of churches, monasteries, convents and charitable institutions all over Florence and the countryside around, "as though determined to leave his mark on Tuscany."<sup>5</sup> While Cosimo, like many of the Early Renaissance merchant princes, clearly suffered under the guilt imposed by a millenium of Catholic social domination,<sup>6</sup> he was further tied to traditional social concepts by the emergent capitalist state's inevitable legitimizing association with its predecessor, the aristocratic state.

Renaissance classicism was the perfect metaphor of 'laissez-faire'. Just as fourteenth century merchants perfected double-entry bookkeeping to rationalize, order and control unruly medieval systems of accounting,<sup>7</sup> so their fifteenth century successors accelerated the revival of classicism, both as a parallel to that sense of anti-traditional economic rationalism and to express their rising sense of trade-based Italian nationalism. Yet the Florentine bankers still regarded "the old feudal standard of life of the knights as a distinguished corollary of the actual calling by which they had made their money",<sup>8</sup> and continued to legitimize their rule in those aristocratic terms with no sense of contradiction. As a result, Cosimo could commission his Palazzo Medici in 1444, a monument to both Renaissance classicism and the stable Medici bank, and seven years later construct his purely medieval villa at Cafaggiolo, complete with crenelated fortifications, moat, drawbridge and watchtower.

Even the flowering of humanism in the Neo-Platonic Academy, often thought to be the most pointedly anti-traditional, anti-Church development of the Renaissance, grew more from the "luxuriant vegetation of medieval thought"<sup>9</sup> -- and in particular from the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas<sup>10</sup> -- than directly from the philosophy of "pagan" antiquity.

It was not really until the third generation of Medici rule, Lorenzo's, that a less religiously stigmatized humanistic flourishing occurred. It is true that Cosimo promoted humanistic study, founding the Neo-Platonic Academy, but his first great interest

remained his business. Lorenzo, secure amid the fruits of his grandfather's economic prowess, turned his back on business (as far as he was able) and plunged even more wholeheartedly into the aristocratic ideal.<sup>11</sup> But that ideal had become less an overt means of legitimizing his political power than an end in itself, a courtly individualistic model of social uselessness that demonstrated his contempt for, and superiority to, business.

It is true that Lorenzo well understood that the real basis of his political power had nothing to do with birth and everything to do with banking. An excerpt from his 'ricordi' is as clear a statement of the ultimate necessity of 'laissez-faire' economic policy as one could hope for: "in Florence one can ill live in the possession of wealth without control of the government."<sup>12</sup> At the same time, he resented this admission of common birth. When asked to deal with a dispute in the Bruges branch of the bank, he replied that he "did not understand such matters."<sup>13</sup>

The conservatism that led Lorenzo to, as far as was possible, reject Cosimo's economic progressiveness and embrace a traditional role was accompanied by a similar reaction to the Church. He wrote to his son Giovanni, the future Pope Leo X, in 1492, urging him to lead a virtuous life: "I know, that as you are now to reside at Rome, that sink of all iniquity, the difficulty of conducting yourself by these admonitions will be increased . . . You will probably meet with those who will particularly endeavour to corrupt and incite you to vice."<sup>14</sup> He was not alone, neither in his condemnation of the corrupt elements in the Catholic Church nor in his association with the social structures of the past. Girolamo Savonarola, the Florentine monk who began his programme of internal reform as prior of the Medici-funded San Marco in 1490, held perhaps the most purely medieval vision of a reconstituted society of all the later reformers, Catholic or Protestant.<sup>15</sup> As a denial of the rising individualism of the age, the "kingdom of Jesus Christ" that Savonarola established in Florence in 1494 was bound to failure despite his broad popular support, and it was crushed by the Papacy four years later.<sup>16</sup> The Middle Ages

had gone, in the eyes of the ruling elite: new, purely economic interests had to be accommodated in any reform.

And this is perhaps the most striking element of Renaissance social relations: the comparative docility which the Church proper showed towards the new order. Catholic states throughout much of the Middle Ages had recognized the threat posed to their social concepts by the economic progressiveness of all the merchants classes, and had severely limited their activities.

Charlemagne, for example, made a genuine attempt to create a Christian economy. As a major part of this programme, he progressively outlawed usury and speculation, in bans issued in 798, 806 and 809.<sup>17</sup> "Morality and charity alike required stability of prices for the basic foodstuffs"<sup>18</sup> but the fact that prices remained relatively stable seems due less to the specific legislation of mercantilism than to the social status of the merchant classes: "they seemed to the medieval mind to be incapable of leading a truly just and righteous life."<sup>19</sup> While medieval canon law did not expressly forbid mercantilism, it left little doubt as to the Church's view of the profession: "To fornicate is always forbidden to anyone, but to trade is sometimes allowed and sometimes not."<sup>20</sup> The merchant or banker was in no position to flagrantly abuse his calling for he lacked the prestige and power to succeed.

Clearly the rampant 'laissez-faire' of the Renaissance reflects a dramatic change in the influence of the Church. While under Charlemagne the charging of interests was banned, by the early Renaissance usurers not uncommonly demanded interest of 266  $\frac{2}{3}$ %<sup>21</sup> -- and while there was an extreme reaction to the new economic order, it did not come initially from the established hierarchy of the Catholic church.

The rise of centralized monarchies in the thirteenth century and the subsequent breakdown of feudalism,<sup>22</sup> the society that so clearly expressed the medieval Church's view of mankind, permitted not only the rise of a capitalism virtually freed, for the first time since antiquity, of major hindrances to commerce, but funda-

mentally changed the nature of the Church as well. From a molder of human society, it became a follower. The economic individualism of trade that was rapidly changing the European landscape from a rural to an urban one was paralleled by a growing individualism within the Church itself, reflected in the thirteenth century dualistic philosophy of Thomas Aquinas: the recognition of the natural as well as the supernatural ordering of the world.<sup>23</sup>

The State, which in its real sense was an unknown phenomenon in the Christian unity of civilization in general, arose out of the republican city organizations, out of the growing national feeling among the peoples, and out of the military-dynastic federations between different lands.

A nascent Capitalism, with its monopolies, its practice of credit, its associations for trade, and its home industries, destroys the moderate recognition of natural requirements, which were all that the simple ecclesiastical ethic had known. The transformation of the conditions of life which was involved in the growth of possessions, and in political independence, created a civilization of the senses which set aside the ecclesiastical principle of a love of the world which could be combined with religion.

The individualism developed by the Church, and the traditions of Stoicism and Neo-Platonism which she contained seized on the aesthetic methods of differentiation and training of the personality alongside of methods which are purely religious, and thus bit by bit the inheritance of antiquity was again brought to light as the method of a supplementation and cultivation of individualism in other than merely religious directions.<sup>24</sup>

The Catholic Church was forced by the social changes of the late Middle Ages to adopt a paradoxical view of humanity, and so in effect reconcile itself to the rise of capitalism. But the capitalist families themselves amounted only to a political-economic contender to power. The Medici had no desire to eliminate the Church, only to control it -- as the election of two Medici popes in the sixteenth century, Leo X and Clement VII suggests -- as secular factions had sought to control the Church since the Emperor Constantine.

In summary then, perhaps paradoxical is the best word to describe the whole Renaissance view. Changes and concessions were made, but they were largely made in the traditional spirit of changing to stay the same. The new economic forces that were unleashed, however, and the rationality that enabled them to flourish demanded change. And it was the Church which made the greatest concessions.

The individualism of the Renaissance is not particularly inconsistent with that of any court structure. Savonarola's popular success with the lower classes suggests that little of that individualistic ethic had filtered beyond the capitalist and Papal courts. Moreover, the fact that the Medici felt the need for a distinguished aristocratic corollary amounts to an apologia for their true vocation. This was not a social revolution, but an economic one. The Medici showed no particular desire to re-arrange established social orders, other than to ensconce themselves at the top: that is the definition of a political-economic coup, not of a social revolution. To the majority of Florentines, life went on much as always, an entirely agreeable situation to the would-be merchant princes who looked to the past, not the future, for justification.

The century-old Medici dream of legitimization in the traditional social context was realized in 1530, when the Spanish installed Alessandro de'Medici as the hereditary prince of Florence,<sup>25</sup> finally ending the Medici's inconvenient and often embarrassing need for confrontation with the traditional order.

2. Antecedents: The cult of uselessness in the theatre of the absurd

The Medici court under Lorenzo embraced the concept of Fine Art, as it adopted the standards of the feudal aristocracy. Lorenzo de'Medici did not invent the cult of uselessness, he merely inherited a courtly tradition of uselessness that can be found in the courtly arts of any period -- from Byzantium to Japan, or from Charlemagne to Louis XIV. The ethic that determines courtly Fine Art production goes far beyond the production of art works. The existence of arts of uselessness in the traditional ruling class structure is a reflection of a primary social function of that class.

The court did not serve merely as the home and governmental headquarters of a ruler. It can also be observed as the nucleus of a ruling class, as a planned monumental environment, as a prime focus of culture. But its basic political function was to serve as a medium of propaganda suggesting power and stability. In an age when Church and State tended to be dominated by physical symbols, a court naturally tried to become a permanent pageant: a concentration of grandiose buildings, art treasures, overdressed grandees so brilliant as to dazzle the beholder and to impress even the subjects and the foreign rivals who learned of it at second hand.<sup>26</sup>

The function of the court was largely theatrical, a display of wealth and power. This theatrical function is clearly presented in Castiglione's Book of the Courtier: "he sees the ideal courtier essentially as a performer who produces beautiful spectacles continually for an appreciative audience. In this view, the court becomes a great theatre; an individual's actions, really acting; and the ideal courtier, the star of stars."<sup>27</sup>

The court was not an image of the moral values and aspirations of a culture; that function was carried by religion which, as in the medieval West, generally preached codes of social behaviour antithetical to the examples set by the courts. This fact was understood by no one better than the courtiers themselves, it was a measure of their social supremacy that they could ridicule the religious structures that held the mass of the population in check, and that not incidentally helped to keep the ruling class itself in its privileged position.

What do I care about paradise?  
 I don't want to enter it . . .  
 Nobody goes to paradise except  
 such people as I shall name for  
 you. Old priests go there, old  
 clodhoppers, and one-arms who  
 all day and all night crouch before  
 the altars in the old crypts,  
 old fellows with threadbare cloaks  
 and old tattered clothes, all naked  
 and shoeless, and tumored old  
 folks who are dying anyway of  
 hunger and thirst, cold and disease.  
 All those go to paradise and I  
 don't give a damn about them  
 because I myself want to go to hell.

To hell go the fine intellectuals,  
 and the handsome knights dead in  
 tournaments and gallant wars, and  
 good soldiers and fine fellows.  
 I want to go with them. And into  
 hell go the lovely ladies of courtly  
 life who have had, each one of  
 them, two or three lovers along  
 with their own barons.<sup>28</sup>

To the lower social classes, the propagandistic nature of courtly display was two-sided: while it presented an image of indisputable and often brutal might and authority, it also provided spectacle, the opportunity for momentary escape in a glittering fantasy before returning to the generally cruel realities of daily life. "In more

than one respect life still had the colours of a fairy story. . .".<sup>29</sup>

To the members of the class bred to this theatrical and non-productive social function, the importance of appearances -- the nature of their display, manners and style -- becomes paramount. The medieval text of Aucassin et Nicolette provides a typical example of courtly quality.

Her hair was golden, with little  
love-locks; her eyes blue and  
laughing; her face most dainty to  
see, with lips more vermeil than  
ever was rose or cherry in the  
time of summer heat; her teeth white  
and small; her breasts so firm  
that they showed beneath her vesture  
like two rounded nuts; so frail was  
she about the girdle that your two  
hands could have spanned her, and  
the daisies that she brake with her  
feet in passing, showed altogether  
black against her instep and her  
flesh, so white was the fair  
young maiden.<sup>30</sup>

There is no mention of the woman's nature -- the style's the thing, apparently; the container is far more important than its contents.

Of course this fetish for appearances was intended to reveal something more of the individual, "expressing the qualities within -- urbanity, tact, measure, as in certain types of architecture it is held that the facade should be an exponent of the structure behind."<sup>31</sup> But these 'inner' qualities are themselves mannerisms, affectations shielding the true nature of the creature: "outward appearance sought to reveal the self, not as it is, but rather as it should be, or as it is at its best -- solicitous for elegance, for the niceties of human intercourse, for proprieties and traditional standards."<sup>32</sup>

The systems of courtly manners developed in most civilizations are in large part clearly aimed at demonstrating the aristocrat's

superiority to the gross physical labour required of the 'masses'. The excessively long fingernails and bound feet of the Chinese courts -- mannerisms that made unaided movement or manual labour virtually impossible -- reinforced this idea by stressing the functional uselessness of the elite. "We can find the same origins in the contempt for any kind of work held by the feudal aristocrat of Medieval Europe, who felt degraded by any kind of work, even the labours of management and trade."<sup>33</sup> But in the West, some notion of the idea of work was retained in the fetish for play and gamesmanship -- symbolic ruling class work, promoting physical health yet stressing domination by remaining socially unproductive.

[They are] inured to a life of physical effort by riding, boxing, boating, hunting, for if the body has its outdoor diversions, it becomes more mannerly, more readily tamed. Such men are in these matters the workers, and all people are beneficiaries of their labour.<sup>34</sup>

These demonstrations of social superiority -- however arbitrary they may be -- are elements removed from the courtly function of display. They may be physically debilitating, making the courtier in fact unsuitable for manual production, but for the most part, to most people, they are invisible mannerisms, part of an internal court etiquette seldom seen at close hand. They are, then, clearly aimed at re-inforcing the elite's own self-image. They are arbitrary structures that the courtiers, by common assent, assume reflect their heightened quality.

One of these qualities was Taste, an innate gift granted through birth more than through privilege or education, to discern the subtler shades of significance in existence with an insight denied the common herd. Or at least, so the social elite have traditionally justified their privilege.

In practice, however, this Taste or connoisseurship was based

less on the appreciation of quality than on the random selection and appreciation of new styles, as may be expected of creatures of style. But the styles -- whether of dress, conduct, games, poetry -- had one thing in common, they were prized primarily for their social uselessness.

The gentleman's Taste in art must reflect his social stature. "Love of beauty is the achievement of intelligence, sensitiveness, and emotion; and as high intelligence, delicate sensitiveness, and passionate emotion are rare, so both creators of beauty and connoisseurs of beauty are rare."<sup>35</sup> Few people would today suggest that intelligence is the privilege of a class. If sensitivity was often blunted in the lower classes, it was certainly not guaranteed in the upper. And if anyone had a monopoly on emotion it was the lower classes, for their social superiors were diligently trained in the suppression of human emotion. Moreover, the creator of beauty and its connoisseur were generally not one and the same. The creator of the clothing, of the chess piece or snuff box, of the manuscript illumination in the later courts, was an artisan, a man supposedly incapable of experiencing those refined sensations.

To speak of true courtly Fine Art, then, and of genuine connoisseurship, it is necessary first to outline all of the possibilities for its production in the courts: whether they were arts of public display or of private use, and whether they were produced by craftsmen or by members of the court. Arts of public display clearly serve a distinct social function and may be disqualified as candidates for the title of Fine Art -- churches, palaces, carriages, ceremonial and processional robes, armor, crowns; none can be considered useless. Similarly, the product of the craftsman will seldom qualify, as Chapter VI should demonstrate, for the social nature of his understanding of work would limit his production of an intrinsically useless artifact, and his incapacity for connoisseurship resulting from that understanding of production would preclude any Fine Arts commissions from the court. This largely

rules out the skilled manual disciplines: mosaic; painting; metal, ivory and woodwork; pottery and sculpture.

The medieval peasant, it is safe to say, would have been more moved by a beautiful artifact than would the blasé courtier -- if only through lack of exposure. Connoisseurship, then, necessitates one of two courses: a love of the beauty of the past or of the esoteric art of the present.

In a sense, all of the arts of the past have become Fine Arts. As the societies that produced them died, so did the social function of their artifacts. The connoisseur, safe with a now socially useless article, is free to admire its style (the more alien the better). But this is a risky road to follow, for the qualities built in to an object and determined by its function will express certain basics of human understanding, as the success of recent exhibitions of Egyptian and Viking art -- both extremely foreign to modern culture -- suggests.

By far the safer proposition, that which definitely points out the connoisseur's social superiority, is the cultivation of a taste for the Fine Art of the present or of the past -- art that never did serve a social function and never was lumbered with basic, comprehensible human qualities -- an art for 'quality', and not for hoi polloi.

The Fine Arts of traditional societies therefore were made for the court by members of the court, for they were the only ones who could even conceive of such a notion. Perhaps mercifully for the history of art, this production seldom took the form, in the West, of visual art, being far more typically confined to poetry. The reason for this comparative dearth of visual Fine Arts production again centres on the matter of the gentleman's superiority to manual labour, (and hence on the status of the artist), a phenomenon that amounts to a given among aristocratic classes generally, whether in nineteenth century Britain or in the Greco-Roman world: Plutarch suggested that Phidias should be a model for no young gentleman,

"a gentleman enjoys the contemplation of the sculptor's masterpieces, but he would never himself use hammer and chisel and get covered with sweat and dust."<sup>36</sup>

Poetry, on the other hand, was intellectual labour, and fell as such within the realms of seemingly gentlemanly behaviour. As with all Fine Art, its primary concern was with style rather than content. Accounts survive of Byzantine court poetry, exalting its appearance -- the colour of the page, the use of gold lettering, the clever contrivance of words and lines to produce a perfectly square block of lettering -- with no mention of, and apparently no concern for its contents.<sup>37</sup> The courtly romances of the Middle Ages did not deal with the nature of love as much as with the proper form to be used in pursuing it.

Courtesy demands of the man complete acceptance of the fact that the object of his worship is wholly unattainable; self-indulgence in the pains of love, an emotional exhibitionism and masochism -- all features of modern love-romanticism which here occur for the first time. The lover as longing and renouncing, love as something to which attainment and fulfillment are irrelevant, . . . a 'love of the remote' without any tangible or clearly defined object . . .<sup>38</sup>

The Fine Art of love, or at least the romances that chronicled that theoretical concept, attain a seldom-reached level of uselessness. No passions are quelled, no happiness brought, no goals realized: the style of love becomes all, the appreciation of emotional nuances the only desirable goal, the spectrum of human sexuality reduced to self-satisfied pining, the dehumanization of love in which any suitable object of affection is randomly interchangeable with any other -- the connoisseurship of love.

This connoisseurship took two forms: secularization and, to a lesser degree, esoterica. Seeing the peasantry as dehumanized by

its submission to higher wills, the Knights denied "the concept of a hierarchy of powers" and sought freedom -- not yet the libertinism of the later courts, but a secular elevation of self through submission to the one law of pure beauty, the lady.<sup>39</sup> Poised on the brink of a potential for spiritual self-perfection autonomous from God, the poets, unable to formulate this higher consciousness in mere words resorted, in some 'trobar clus' poetry to the esoteric:<sup>40</sup> "I entangle, thoughtfully thoughtful, rare words, dark and highly coloured."<sup>41</sup> In other forms as well there is "both an attempt to hedge the courtly themes round with a certain obscurity, and a confused sense that there are indeed deeper meanings which have not yet been grasped."<sup>42</sup>

But if the courtly romances demonstrated to the courtiers their superiority to the concerns of the lower classes, the act of courtly love itself, when viewed in its broad social context, did in fact serve a social function of sorts, consistent with the theatrical function of the court. While the elevation of love amounted to the establishment of a secular religion reinforcing the aristocracy's aloofness from the strictures of the Church by emphasizing the ideal of love, the courtiers presented a theoretical model to reinforce the Church's own seldom effective repression of the "brutality and license of the lower classes . . .".

If they did not altogether succeed,  
they at least created the appearance  
of an honourable life of courtly love.  
For, in reality, the sexual life of  
the higher classes remained surprising  
rude.<sup>43</sup>

But this function remained purely theoretical, a rationale for the elevation of the aristocracy above the social codes of its time and above the spiritual government which set those codes.

Chaucer saw just as clearly as Chretien de Troyes and Andreas had before him that the teaching of Courtly Love was immoral and heretical in that it regarded man as a purely natural creature. As Christians, they looked upon man as a supernatural creature, and that quite inseparable from his status as a rational creature. 44

The theatrical function of the court was essential to its society, as important in its way, though on a considerably lower plane, as the Church or cathedral. It was a secular image of paradise, not to be achieved but to be fantasized about; the court was, in other words, a major form of popular entertainment.

The courtier, of course, would not have seen himself on a level with the humble stage actor, who clearly understood his social function and lived his life accordingly, as a contributing member of his society. It is not the function of the courtier but his self- and socially-imposed exile from the life of his society -- his unawareness of his function -- that underlies his decadence. His theatrical social function determines his over-emphatic and random concern for style; his presumed superiority to the social and religious convictions of his time, to the species-defining characteristic of social production, determines his debasement. Severed from his community, the courtier has no choice but to reach self-fulfillment, for he can reach no social fulfillment. The courtier has achieved Utopia.

Lorenzo de' Medici was a patron of the arts and a connoisseur of the arts of antiquity. But his poetry too has given him a lasting reputation as a man of Culture.

His poems combine the rigid formalism of the sonnet with the conventions of courtly love. The contrived nature of the form, necessitating the subservience of content to style when compared to the

free-flowing popular ballad format, results in an esoteric medium at odds with the general lyrical/narrative interests of the broader society -- as Dr. Johnson suggested, "sonnets are <sup>to</sup> poetry what carving heads in cherry-stones is to art."<sup>45</sup> Lorenzo's use of the vulgate does little to mitigate this quality, especially as he chose to write in Italian because he considered it less well-suited than Latin to the sonnet form, thereby requiring an even greater stylistic facility.<sup>46</sup>

Platonic concepts of love were, with some manipulation, well-suited to the courtly ideals that Lorenzo embraced. Plato saw love as being of two natures: the young, promiscuous Venus of the People, and the older Heavenly Venus, a cerebral incarnation reserved for the lust-less love of men for one another.<sup>47</sup>

Lorenzo ignored the venal brand altogether, as the good courtier should; he also ignored the men only clause in the second and set off to find the purely medieval courtly heroine.

She was of a just and proper height.  
Her complexion was extremely fair,  
but not pale; blooming but not  
ruddy . . . Her figure was so finely  
proportioned that among other women  
she appeared of superior dignity yet  
without the least degree of affect-  
tation. In walking, in dancing and in  
other exercises that display the person,<sup>48</sup>  
every motion was elegant and appropriate.

Nor did Lorenzo miss the point of the exercise -- he proved himself a pinner on a par with the best of the Middle Ages.

Moreover, it is the nature of such melancholy people as I have said lovers to be, to seek no remedy for their grief. They hate and flee from anything soothing and consoling. Therefore, when at times death presented itself to me as a remedy

for the very bitter sorrow I felt,  
I hated it, since it meant the end  
of my dolorous passion.<sup>49</sup>

This demonstrates the courtier's heightened, refined emotional sensitivity -- his connoisseurship of the Deep human feelings -- compared to which the common man's passion is simply carnal. But, perhaps characteristically, this is not Lorenzo's emotion at all. He is, in this selection, reacting hypothetically to the death of a woman he never knew. He is pretending, as any artist does -- but the social artist presents consolation or a rationale for suffering. Lorenzo presents pain as an object to be savored. These are the emotions of the stage, the pathos of the actor -- the actor whose role is his life.

As a Fine Art develops, as it progressively eliminates universal human elements, it will eventually require the development of other supportive institutions as well -- particularly in a democratic social structure where the unquestioned privilege of class has been eliminated. Under these conditions complex governmental structures will be required to support Artists incapable of finding their own livelihoods. But at the very least, the Fine Artist must find himself a Fine Art critic, someone to explain, and in so doing legitimize an otherwise incomprehensible, useless production. To Lorenzo, born in a simpler age, fell the somewhat humiliating task of explaining his own work. The result was The Commentary of Lorenzo de'Medici on some of his own sonnets.<sup>50</sup>

Lorenzo devoted this book to an explanation of four love sonnets, a total of sixty-four lines of verse. Clearly he was engaged in the most beloved of intellectual sports -- Finding the Hidden Meaning. This is a game played with the whole of history, of course, and often with good reason. It is necessary to find the esoteric meaning of a Byzantine mosaic or of the Ghent altarpiece before it becomes comprehensible in its own social context -- but the point is, the meanings of these works have only become lost by the passage of time and of

the societies in which they functioned. The most intricate medieval symbolism, like that drawn from at the end of the tradition by Hieronymus Bosch,<sup>51</sup> was without question well understood by the whole society.

But the practice is liable to become academic gamesmanship when applied to the Fine Arts. It presupposes the existence of an esoteric meaning, and so it is a matter of professional pride that one be found -- and one will be found, whether or not it exists. Lorenzo, for example, wrote his Comento some twenty years after writing the poetry, into which he reads far loftier meanings than those which, in all probability, he had originally intended.<sup>52</sup>

Lorenzo the critic, then, adds another dimension to Lorenzo the courtly Fine Artist: that of mystification. Consequently, the Comento is comprised of chapters like the "Esoteric meaning of Sonnet I" and the "Esoteric meaning of the Month of April", and Angelo Lipardi, the commentator/translator of the work, thoughtfully appends a chapter of his own on the esoteric meaning of Lorenzo's esoteric meanings.<sup>53</sup>

The esoteric quality embodied in the poetry is, according to Lorenzo, 'gentilezza': the excellence of an object accompanied by Divine Grace.<sup>54</sup> He was, however, convinced that this quality was "not 'nobilita di sangue' -- not an inheritable quality . . .".<sup>55</sup> This aristocratic, gentile quality, then, was not the possession of a noble class; any enlightened Man could aspire to it -- an extremely convenient discovery in light of the Curse of the Medici, their common birth.

If Lorenzo's overt concern for Hidden Meanings take Fine Art a step beyond the medieval Art of love, it is because he carried the added burden of self-justification within the aristocratic tradition -- a legitimization expressed as 'gentilezza'.

This need for legitimization is one of the most common motivations in the history of art. The usurper must demonstrate his right to rule publically -- he must prove that his power is more than brute force, that his qualities within the structure of traditionally

accepted values are greater than those of his predecessor. He must prove, if he is to rule effectively, that he is more agreeable to the gods, that he more piously serves the dominant social conviction. He may, furthermore, feel a need to express that worthiness on a more personal level.

"Humanism grafted classical tastes upon the old chivalric values",<sup>56</sup> but classical taste had been cultivated by Charlemagne seven centuries before, at the beginning of the northern courtly tradition, for the same reason and in much the same way.

Charlemagne's grandfather, Charles Martel, had usurped power from the Merovingians. His son, Pippin, in order to redeem his dubious ancestry and provide himself with "charisma of grace", was anointed in 751 by St. Boniface, acting as papal legate, "and was thus created king of the Franks."<sup>57</sup> But despite Charlemagne's subsequent legitimacy as the Frankish monarch, upon his elevation in 800 to Holy Roman Emperor, he found himself the possessor of a largely illusory imperial crown. He was not considered the sole Roman Emperor (he shared that distinction with the Byzantine leader), nor was he emperor of the Franks (his own domains were outside his empire), nor was his crown hereditary.<sup>58</sup>

His 'renovatio', launched (with the considerable aid of the Roman Church) to legitimize his precarious rule, took two forms. The first was a public revival of the "Golden Age" of the Catholic Church -- that of Constantine I -- with the iconographic equation of the ultimately respectable Constantine with Charlemagne. The clearest representation of this equation is the copy of Leo III's Triclinium arch from the old Lateran Palace. A scene depicting Christ presenting the keys to St. Peter and the banner of Christianity to Constantine is flanked by another in which St. Peter presents the Papal Stole to (the then) Pope Leo III and the banner to Charlemagne,<sup>59</sup> -- who is thus given by implication a far more illustrious lineage than any other contender could (or needed to) claim.

But his scriptoria presented elements of a second, purely

private 'renovatio'. Apart from their didactic function of instructing a largely illiterate clergy and standardizing Christian doctrine in light of the legitimizing focus on early Christian Rome, these scholars, and Charlemagne, developed a taste for purely pagan works culminating, at the court of Charles the Bald, in a revival of neo-Platonism under John Scotus Erigena (d. c.877).<sup>60</sup> Charlemagne at the same time retained, like Lorenzo, a strong interest in the vernacular, starting a book on Frankish grammar, and he "refused to wear any save Frankish costume."<sup>61</sup>

Charlemagne felt compelled to legitimize himself not only publically, but to himself as well. His concern for the general culture of antiquity beyond the specific requirements of his public programme suggests his desire to see himself as a man of Culture -- or, as it was seen in the debate that crossed the whole of Europe before and during the Renaissance, a man of nobility through refinement and innate merit rather than through lineage.<sup>62</sup> His concentration on the vulgate and national dress legitimized the humbler aspects of his birth by uniting them with his classical pre-occupation. Yet at the same time, far from heralding a rebirth of an individualistic social ethic, Charlemagne was taking the first steps toward creating a stable theocratic society that would survive in the north for eight centuries.

Clearly the individualism of self-aggrandizement, of self-elevation beyond social norms, while it consistently exists in traditional societies, exists as consistently only among the ruling classes -- and most pointedly among members of that class whose right to rule is suspect.

The Medici, in the first period of their rule ending in 1494, were not the lawful leaders of Florence; they had assumed power to protect their wealth and ruled unofficially with its influence.<sup>63</sup> Like Charlemagne (like virtually all rulers), they mounted large-scale public construction projects to demonstrate their piety, power and, by implication, their right to rule. They too sought the unimpeachable intellectual association with the Ancients and sought, in

the Academy, to reconcile that paganism with the dominant social belief. Lorenzo also cultivated the vulgate to elevate his common ancestry to the noble level of 'gentilezza'.

Lorenzo's courtly Fine Art and his assumed superiority to business affairs were in part attempts to convince himself of his right to rule, of his personal superiority within the traditional courtly ethic. All of his Cultural efforts, and those of his Academic circle, seem to look back to this traditional concept, not to the future. The Academy's elevation of Man is a very restricted notion -- Lorenzo was concerned with elevating himself, and was only able to achieve this and at the same time rationalize not taking the whole of his caste with him through this concept of 'gentilezza'. Hence the esoteric gamesmanship of his poetry and the need for a commentary to explain (or to mystify) it. 'Gentilezza' is the gift to make the mundane extraordinary, to see what others (who don't know the rules of the game) cannot; to be, in other words, not an artisan but an Artist, not a reader but a connoisseur. Lorenzo wanted to be sure that the new Men formed as elite a club as did the old aristocracy. And if Lorenzo, the usurer, pushed the ideal of Fine Art further than did Charlemagne, the grandson of a court official, perhaps it was because the former's more dubious ancestry and income gave him more to prove.

Lorenzo's interests seem to have been limited to these purely reactionary concerns. It is perhaps significant to note that the only forward-looking elements of the Comento are expressed not by Lorenzo but by his twentieth century commentator, in his esoteric interpretation of Lorenzo's esoteric interpretations: "the principle of 'gentillesse' making for human progress toward human perfection in any of its ramifications and manifold manifestations."<sup>64</sup>

If Lorenzo and his Academy had not been so concerned with the reconciliation of the "new" creed within Church doctrine (and, as that attempt implies, had he not been fully aware that a celestial Utopia already existed within that tradition); if he had not sought

an aristocratic model that, if officially frowned upon was at least consistent with the traditional make-up of the society of the Church (whose own courts had always rivalled and usually surpassed the decadence of the Catholic princes ); if his son Giovanni had not sought the ultimate role of Pope; even if Lorenzo's use of the vulgate had been an attempt to broadly disseminate the ideals of humanism rather than a means to mystify them still further -- then perhaps it would be reasonable to speak of his concern for human Progress leading to an earthly Utopia. As it is, these conclusions were not reached by the Italians, but by northern humanists -- men practising within the context of a markedly different class structure that must qualify the significance of the ideas coming out of Italy.

There the ideas would be given some popular impetus through the technique of printing. Yet, even though the medium was developing in Lorenzo's Florence, he had not a single printed work and refused to have anything to do with its encouragement.<sup>65</sup>

Lipardi's conclusion imparts a mode of conduct to Lorenzo, based on the hindsight of subsequent events leading to this century, completely at odds with Lorenzo's evident intent. The Medici's sole claim to social and political prominence was their wealth, the product of their, and particularly Cosimo's, unbridled economic individualism. To ascribe to them individualistic Utopian aims is uncalled for. Lorenzo sought the decadence of the Old Order, not decadence of the New.

His Academic comrades were, if anything, less progressive than he was. Lorenzo's philosophy was a product of their tutelage and like many pupils he was prepared to move beyond them.

Leonardo Bruni [a key Academician under Cosimo] refused to translate the Republic because, he said, "there are many things in these books that, to our ways, are loathsome", and for the honor of Plato it was better to leave them alone.

There were parts of the Republic that ran flatly counter to ordinary Christian moral practice, that could not readily be theologized, metaphysicized, or sublimated into expressions of divine love or mystical experience. In fact, the political Plato became a handicap to defenders of the theological or cosmological Plato.<sup>66</sup>

Marsilio Ficino (d.1499) founded the Academy under Cosimo and considered him his "intellectual father".<sup>67</sup> He taught Lorenzo the Renaissance strain of Platonic philosophy,<sup>68</sup> and viewed Platonism in traditional scholastic terms, praising the virtues of the contemplative life. (The two eventually fell out, less, apparently, over Ficino's rebukes to Lorenzo's princely frivolity, to which the latter meekly assented, than over the former's obsequiousness.)<sup>69</sup>

The influence of the Academics was directed by their dependence upon Lorenzo's patronage, and adopting a philosophical line that curried favour was extremely important to them. Lorenzo was, moreover, an Academic force in his own right: he "surrounded himself with able people and could afford to do so because he was the intellectual equal or superior to almost all of them."<sup>70</sup> It is perhaps not stretching a point, then, to suggest that Lorenzo de'Medici was the Academy of his day and that its Renaissance humanism is inseparable from the private interests of its patron.

\*

You have set painting among the mechanical arts! . . . If you call it mechanical because it is by manual work that the hands represent what the imagination creates, your writers are setting down with the pen by manual work what originates in the mind.<sup>71</sup>

. . . The very broad walls in particular . . . on which are to be seen very beautiful carved images, the whole comprising the holy fathers, the four virtues, the signs of the zodiac, the moveable stars, the sibyls and muses and very many other very noble things, which can attract experts who admire literary study and who are almost wholly detached from the ordinary, not only through the very brilliant craftsmanship of stonecutter and sculptor, but also through knowledge of the forms, in designs picked by you, who are the most keen and indubitably the most brilliant prince of this century, from the innermost secrets of philosophy.<sup>72</sup>

A cult of one isn't liable to do anyone any good, particularly not the cultist. The great contribution of the Renaissance (and of the Medici in particular) to western decadence -- perhaps the only contribution -- was the invention of the Artist. For the first time since antiquity, visual Artists were allowed into the Fine Art club.

It would, however, be misleading and too convenient to suggest that artists became Artists 'en masse', just as it is wrong to say that men became Men all at once. Only a handful of high artists became Fine Artists. But for these precious few, and for the precious few who patronized them, the cult of genius found dilettante adherents to rival the best, before or since.

For the artist who aspired to the courtly cult, who wished to express his "regal spirit and tremendous breadth of mind" and become a "marvellous and divinely inspired"<sup>73</sup> Artist, a number of major obstacles determining the status of the artist had to be overcome.

The aristocratic bans on manual labour were still a consideration. But even more inhibiting than the manual artisanal elements of the painter's work, was his association with middle-class work: "Painters kept shops and sold their works for money; so they must

have the same status as cobblers and grocers. Nobles would be ashamed to work for money.<sup>74</sup> Finally, the status of the artist was generally restricted by his ignorance of letters,<sup>75</sup> for the cult of 'gentilezza' amounted to superiority by intellect, and Fine Art, as it has remained ever since, a passion of the intelligensia.

For the few who overcame these hurdles -- the Renaissance Men whose range of quasi-intellectual concerns elevated them above the herd, who scorned money (like Leonardo)<sup>76</sup> and worked only under direct patronage -- who became members of the court -- artistic freedom was further dependent upon the nature of the patron. Michelangelo, for example, whose monumental style made him invaluable for Church arts of social conviction, was not permitted the luxury of self-expression until the last years of his life, much to his well-known chagrin. The result was one of the largest bodies of masterfully executed works of social conviction produced by a Renaissance artist. Botticelli, on the other hand, was among the first visual artists allowed some level of participation in the elite Academic circle.

Botticelli learned his craft in the traditional artisanal manner. Dissatisfied in his apprenticeship to a goldsmith, he studied painting under Fra Filippo Lippi.<sup>77</sup> The bulk of his work serves traditional functions -- primarily religious themes and portraits -- but a number of works commissioned by the Medici (likely by Lorenzo's cousin, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco)<sup>78</sup> deserve some attention.

The 'Birth of Venus' and the 'Primavera' were painted to illustrate Platonic philosophy. The latter work in particular was meant to demonstrate the reconciliation of pagan and Christian belief, focussing on the idea of the Trinity -- Venus, the One, contemplating the three Graces. Like Lorenzo's poetry, the scene, removed from accepted social iconography and function, "is unintelligible without a knowledge of the doctrine",<sup>79</sup> a doctrine that was the exclusive property of the court dilettanti.<sup>80</sup>

Once again then, these works serve no social function. Their function is self-aggrandizement through esoteric insidership, the elevation of the individual -- in this case Lorenzo and his

Academicians -- not through social conventions of lineage but through the personal Genius to see what others could not.

To attain the aura of connoisseurship -- the 'transcendence' of normal human understanding -- it is necessary to mystify subject matter (and, perhaps by default, to elevate style), for the intricacies of medieval iconography demonstrate that the 'masses' are not fools incapable of comprehension. It was the function of medieval iconography to visually teach a semi-literate people; to reinforce and illustrate with the specific message of content and with the spirituality of form the social doctrines handed down from the pulpit. It would be incredibly arrogant and pompous of us to suggest that these common peasants and artisans were not taught and were not moved by the art of their day, that they did not really understand the significance of what they saw.

The connoisseur achieves his self-aggrandizement through belittlement -- he intellectually belittles other men, he belittles the social convictions that bind them together. Like the courtier, the connoisseur places himself above the social conventions of his day. And, to fulfill his private function, he creates the Fine Artist in, as it were, his own image.

Botticelli's style was well-suited to the new functionless ideal. The pastel clarity and linearity, the attention to minutiae, the lack of atmospheric or architectural depth in the 'Venus' and 'Primavera' produce a surface preciousness that goes well with the simple devotional themes of Lippi, Fra Angelico, back to Duccio and Byzantine prototypes. But by removing that social devotional function, all that remains in these works by Botticelli is preciousness. The expressionless faces that characterize all these artists' works passes in their devotional context for spirituality (as in Fra Lippi's 'Madonna and Child with Angels', 1453) -- with that context removed, 'vacant' seems the more fitting adjective. Botticelli's Graces in the 'Primavera' pose like zombies -- a static artificiality even more pronounced in the same artist's 'Calumny of Apelles' -- a picture that reaches such heights

of esoterica that even its connoisseur owner Fabis Segni felt the need to add an explanatory verse beneath it.<sup>81</sup>

Botticelli's 'Calumny' and 'Birth of Venus' are attempts to reconstruct lost paintings by Apelles. The literary criticism of the ancients was pressed into service to provide criteria for good paintings on the principle 'as is poetry so is painting'.<sup>82</sup>

The guiding principle for both Fine Arts media -- and the basis of Botticelli's success among Fine Arts patrons -- is flatness; psychological flatness of emotion, as in Botticelli's faces and Lorenzo's pining; flatness of content, the meaning hidden below the surface in both instances, but above all, flatness of form. Only a connoisseur could appreciate beer without any bubbles in it, or a poem drained of its sparkle by Lorenzo's artificially rigid adaption of the sonnet format. Only a connoisseur would suspect that anything is going on behind the vacant facades of Botticelli's elegant ladies, or could appreciate the peculiar pictorial flatness -- in an age of pictorial illusionism -- of the 'Venus'. Here there is little hint of atmospheric or perspective depth; the background of water comes to the very surface of the painting; the depiction of waves produces an overall patterning more akin to International Gothic manuscript illumination than to Renaissance painting. The figures, too, are disproportioned, with the elongated forearms characteristic of Botticelli's Fine Art work. Tree trunks are featureless cylinders, producing a bar-like patterned background on the right of the panel, there is no indication of form beneath the robes. Some medieval elements persist in his religious works as well, as the retention of the traditional hierarchy of size in his Convertite Altarpiece, but works like the 'Punishment of Corah and the Sons of Aaron' from the Sistine Chapel demonstrate a convincing mastery of dramatic action and expression of figural proportion, and of atmospheric and perspective depth.

These then are consciously archaic elements, references to Byzantine-style icon painting that dominated Italian art until Giotto. But unlike the medieval icons and Byzantine mosaics which present universally intelligible statements of theocratic power, the Fine Art icon only mystifies. Venus was not a god of Christian Italy, although she is presented as one. Had anyone not initiated into the Platonic cult ever seen the picture, she would have been a mystery.

The cult Artist, severed from the life of his own society, will be forced into an eclectic search for forms. The archaic elements of Botticelli's Art pieces reinforces this supposition, but a much more pointed example is found in Lorenzo's own public patronage and in his love of the medium of mosaic.

He not only collected portable Byzantine examples, but commissioned



fig. 1

the creation of a number of new ones in Florence Cathedral; including a surviving panel [fig. 1] from the St. Zenobius chapel.<sup>83</sup> Mosaic is seldom considered among the arts of the Renaissance, for a good reason -- it was the medium that had been rendered obsolete in Italian high art with the realization of the naturalistic potential of painting in the "proto"-Renaissance.

The static quality of mosaic was well-suited to the static nature of medieval theocracies, but had no function in the progressive life of the towns. When a medium ceases to serve a social function, if it is not granted the decency of a natural death, it naturally becomes the object of connoisseurship. No one else could take pride in attempting to revive an art form that can no longer serve a social function, in seeing the point of the imposition on popular taste of a medium made esoteric through disuse.

This mosaic -- a rather bizarre attempt to combine the naturalism of painting with the richness of mosaic which can achieve neither -- must have seemed at least as anachronistic and forced to its own time as it does today.

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## CHAPTER III: The Middle-Class Revolution I

## 1. The middle-class rise to power

Religious individualism is traceable to the beginnings of Christianity in one form or another, and to the late medieval Church in general, "but its modern forms characteristically date from the Reformation, when it was expressed in terms of the 'inner light', justification by faith and the universal priesthood of the believers".<sup>1</sup>

The Reformation was perceived primarily in terms of social revision: "of a total of 1,510 specific grievances [presented by the peasantry] in 90 statements, only 73 (or less than five percent) have to do with religion or exhibit religious terminology." The reformers saw the Church and the large banking families for what they were -- partners in creating a broad social malaise.

Since the rising led by Hans Boheim in 1476, hardly a decade had passed without a peasants' revolt. Usury, long a grievance with craftsman and peasant, had become a battle-cry . . . Calvin wrote a famous letter on usury and delivered sermons on the same subject . . . Luther preached and pamphleteered against extortioners and said that it was time "to put a bit in the mouth of the holy company of the Fuggers."<sup>3</sup>

The extremes to which the social rebellion went -- the Peasant's War -- alarmed Luther into an alliance with the courts of Germany, Denmark and Sweden, "who were glad to destroy the authority of the Church, and to annex its wealth."<sup>4</sup> But Luther was also frightened into conservatism by the logical conclusions to which his own religious theories led. If the personal communion with God by a universal brotherhood were strictly followed, good works, the sacraments, "divinely commissioned hierarchy, systematized activities, corporate

institutions" -- the Church itself -- would become not only unnecessary but heretical to the word of God as presented in the gospels.<sup>5</sup>

While Luther was reluctant to take that final step, Calvin was not.<sup>6</sup> And Calvinism, with Puritanism, is for three reasons the archetype of Protestant belief, despite the extreme anti-traditionalism of these sects. Firstly, for all the authoritarianism of the church, the Calvinists' belief that they were among the elect, their intense self-scrutiny and spiritual isolation made the faith perhaps the most individualistic of all the Protestant beliefs.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, Calvin's Reformed Church possessed "a form of government more democratic than anything, lay or ecclesiastical, that had yet been seen in the modern world."<sup>8</sup> Finally, Calvinism and Puritanism were the religions of the middle-classes.

In Switzerland, the Netherlands, and some northern towns, everywhere that the middle-class was especially strong or the nobility extraordinarily weak, [the reform of the Church] took the form of Calvinism . . . Calvinism and the forms of religion related to it were essentially of the towns, bourgeois forms of religion . . . The conscious and emphatic simplicity of the Calvinists, the sharp rejection of magnificent living quarters and luxurious garb, of excessive joy in life and exaggerated intellectual freedom, their constant emphasis upon the necessity for hard work and a thrifty life were in tune with the economic needs of the advanced urban middle-class.<sup>9</sup>

It is the association of the radical Protestant faiths with the middle-class, a class drawn by the individualism and democratic levelling of the sects, that points to the future and to the eventual destruction of all religious systems in the West. Democracy is the self-styled image of the middle-classes, the theoretical

vehicle by which they gained power time and again -- in Britain, the United States and France -- and, afterwards, the battlecry for acts of humanitarianism and imperialism alike. It is the political aspect of 'laissez-faire', the scripture which justifies and condones the actions, however aggressive and self-seeking, of the middle-class state.

While the more moderate sects, like Luther's, called in effect for the return to a medieval social ethic of just price, insisted upon a simple rural structure within which Lutheranism functioned in the place of medieval Catholicism, Calvin created a faith that more clearly and consistently than any other demonstrates the merger, and the complete compatibility, of economic and religious individualism. "Its ideal is a society which seeks wealth with the sober gravity of men who are conscious at once of disciplining their own characters by patient labour, and by devoting themselves to a service acceptable to God."<sup>10</sup>

Luther had made some moves in this direction. His doctrine of justification by faith alone, a doctrine based on late medieval mysticism, had as its effect the elimination of the medieval believer's dilemma of eventual salvation -- the idea of Purgatory. "In the order of salvation to which Luther was heir, the Christian must, in this life, remain existentially suspended between God's future judgement and a past and present exhibition of God's mercy and goodness."<sup>11</sup>

This uncertainty of judgement is indicative of the control exerted by religion over medieval society, and is a major reason for the successful suppression of perceived antisocial traits like usury and materialism and of the merchant classes that exhibited those characteristics. For Luther all that was required for salvation was faith; the true believer was guaranteed union with Christ whatever other negative or even, for that matter, criminal traits he may possess: "Luther's 'sola fides' unites the believer with God in Christ while still leaving him sinful in himself."<sup>12</sup>

In practice, of course, this doctrinal concession appears no different to the concessions already made by the Catholic Church to the changing social conditions through the sale of indulgences, the spark that ostensibly ignited the Reformation. But the purchase of indulgence implied a recognition of sin, an acknowledgement of guilt through obeisance: the appeal of predestination lay in the awareness that sin no longer mattered. Luther continued, however, to promote his vision of rural society completely at odds with middle-class life but entirely agreeable to the princes who later patronized him -- themselves under pressure not only from Rome but from the rising merchant classes as well.

The differences between Luther's and Calvin's creeds are not slight ones: they amount to the difference between reform and revolution. The sides taken by the various factions should be emphasized in this context. The politically and economically backward nobility of Germany, more closely tied to a feudal social structure than their western neighbours, sided with Lutheran reform as a means of gaining political power from the Church in Rome and economic power from Italy in general<sup>13</sup> -- without altering that feudal structure. As continued allegiance to Rome meant a continued minor social status, and as adopting the extremist stance spelled the end of their class as a significant socioeconomic entity, Luther's mild reformism offered the ideal compromise.

The capitalist families, however, like the Fuggers, remained Catholic in spite of the theoretical restrictions imposed upon their livelihood by their faith. And theoretical they had become, in Medici Florence as in Fugger Augsburg: by the seventeenth century the practice of usury had been officially sanctioned by the Church,<sup>14</sup> but that amounted to little more than blessing an activity that had been tacitly accepted for more than two hundred years.

A separation from Italy would have  
had disastrous consequences for their  
trade and whole economic life . . .

[It] is said of Fugger that at the height of the Protestant Catholic conflict, when due to lack of funds Charles V threatened him with concessions to the Protestants, he tore up and threw into the fire the bill for the huge amount that the Emperor had borrowed from him.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly the capitalist families -- and both the Fuggers and the Medici were capitalists in the purest sense, dealing almost exclusively in the accumulation of capital through the loan of capital -- far from being the revolutionary class that they are often depicted to be, were aligned with the most 'reactionary' elements of the old order. They showed no interest in re-ordering societies. If the Catholic courts could pay, there was no reason to shift the focus of business to the fledgling middle-classes, who were neither the political nor the economic power that the traditional system was.

It was the middle-class, and more particularly the lower and middle ranks of that class -- those with nothing or less to lose -- that was the revolutionary force in Europe, the class that not only required the social dynamism of urban life over rural simplicity but also, as the commodities ethic and the power of the merchants grew, would eventually require the complete restructuring of the social scale. "Indeed, the new spirit of the Puritans can be defined as a kind of military and political work ethic . . . oriented not toward acquisition so much as toward contention, struggle, destruction and rebuilding . . .".<sup>16</sup>

While Calvin was the first theologian to justify usury,<sup>17</sup> this was not accompanied by a migration of usurers to his camp: the restrictive elements of his creed, the retention of the ideal of 'just price' that coincided in Calvin's theology with the acceptance of usury, prevented that movement.

What was preached was in truth no free-for-all capitalism of the kind that came to hold sway of the industrializing nations of the later 18th and 19th centuries, but the business activity of a world of small traders and handicrafts, hedged around with moralistic precepts and dogmas.<sup>18</sup>

The specific course that Calvinist and Puritan theology took will be examined in Chapter V. Suffice to say for now that it seems to have had only a secondary relationship to Max Weber's economic thesis (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism). This was, in the first place, a truly religious movement: Calvin was as deeply committed to belief in God as Luther -- and considerably more so than the circles of European humanists.<sup>19</sup> The validity of Weber's claim that "rational conduct on the basis of the idea of the calling, was born . . . from the spirit of Christian aesceticism"<sup>20</sup> is probably true enough<sup>21</sup> but what needs emphasis in this respect is that rational conduct on the basis of calling -- whether middle-class or industrial working class "callings" -- is the foundation of all modern ideologies. Calvinism was not just the birth of modern capitalism (a fact of rather dubious significance, since the current trend of economic thought suggests that capitalism no longer exists)<sup>22</sup> -- it was as well the birth of socialism. The problem with economic theories of history, then, is not that they are wrong, they are simply too narrow. They not only rob history of its fire but by aligning themselves with progressive ideology (conservative, liberal or socialist), they view only one side of the issue.

Certainly the idea of the calling was essential to Calvinists and Puritans, as is clearly demonstrable in any of their writings on business:

A Christian should be able to give  
 this Account, that he hath an  
 Occupation. Every Christian  
 ordinarily should have a Calling . . .  
 A Christian should follow his  
 Occupation with INDUSTRY . . . It  
 seems a man Slothful in Business,  
 is not a man Serving the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

There is no doubt that Cotton Mather, in this work from 1701, refers at least as much to trade when he speaks of calling, occupation or business, as to a generalized notion of work. He demonstrates the complete compatibility, by this time, of ideas that in an earlier age would have been deemed irreconcilable, the ideas of commerce and righteousness.

A Christian should imitate his Lord;  
 . . . Don't conceal from any Customer,  
 that which you ought in Equity or Charity,  
 to acquaint him withal; . . . Don't  
 exceed the Truth, either in Commendations  
 or Disparagements of Commodities . . .  
 If you fear, that Stollen Goods are  
 offered you, never touch those Burning  
 Coals . . . The Bible directs the  
 Merchant, unto this desire, May I be  
 a Wise Merchant, and find the Pearl of  
 Great Price!<sup>24</sup>

The Puritan calling was two-sided: the faithful had, in addition to his specific occupation, a general calling, "to Serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and Save his own Soul, in the Services of Religion, that are incumbent on the Children of men."<sup>25</sup> The occupation was thus restricted by a stress on more social elements. "We expect Benefits from Humane Society. It is but equal, that Human Society should Receive Benefits from Us."<sup>26</sup> The calling meant a general vocation of saintliness, not only a secular function,

and the restraints of the first controlled the spirit of the second. Prosperity was for the good Puritan even a source of anxiety, for he could find in adversity a more bracing tonic to sustain him in the stance his creed required. Not until Puritanism had lost its edge did the sins of pride and avarice give way to the sins of sensuality and idleness, as the stress of the relevance of work to the common good gave way to the enthusiasm for the possibilities of self-advancement in the New World.<sup>27</sup>

Weber suggests that the Calvinist re-evaluation of the Catholic concept of "good works" as a means of attaining salvation ("For assuredly, the justice of faith and workes are so opposite that they cannot be coupled together: but admit one ye must necessarily reject th'other.")<sup>28</sup> was a method "not of purchasing salvation, but of getting rid of the fear of damnation."<sup>29</sup> Perhaps it is not unreasonable to apply this motivation to the whole of radical urban Protestantism, and suggest that the emergent northern middle-class, a class whose social and economic status in no way forced an allegiance to the Church or to Italy, whose numbers precluded the pretention (at first) to an aristocratic role, had nothing to lose in creating a faith that not only reflected its view of the world but endowed its occupations -- forms of work earlier considered questionable -- with a dignity and a respectability denied them for over a millenium.

The class with which the merchants sought to associate themselves was not, as it was for the capitalists, the governing elite. Rather, they sought only the status of artisans. The work of the middle-class is now presented in the language of the craft-guilds. "Let every man have the Discretion to be well instructed in, and well-acquainted with, all the Mysteries of his Occupation. Be a master of your Trade; count it a Disgrace to be no Workman."<sup>30</sup> This gives a fairly clear indication of the comparative statuses of merchants and craftsmen, but also reinforces the idea that the reformers were fully conscious of the

sociability of the artisanal system of production.

Calvin's extreme religious individualism wedded the notion of calling to Luther's conceptions of salvation by faith alone to produce a creed remarkable for its zeal in glorifying rather than merely justifying the work of the merchant and artisanal classes, for whom prosperity was seen as a proof of election;<sup>31</sup> poverty, proof of damnation.

Therefore we say that the Scripture shows that God, by His eternal and immutable counsel once for all determined both those whom He desired one day to admit to salvation and those whom He would give back to destruction. We affirm that this counsel as to the elect is founded upon His gratuitous mercy, without any respect to human merit; but to those whom He desired one day to admit to salvation and those He has handed over to damnation . . . the way of life is closed.

In the case of the elect, we regard calling as an evidence of election, and justification another token of its manifestation, until they arrive in glory, where its fulness shall be found. Just as God seals His elect by calling and justification, so by shutting out the rejected ones . . . He makes known to them the judgement that awaits them.<sup>32</sup>

Radical reformism reflects the need of the middle-class -- not of capitalism -- for wide-ranging social revolution. It is the first class in history to experience such a need. If capital was supportive of the needs of the middle-class in later centuries, it is indicative more of the success of the latter's social restructuring than of a spirit of capitalism. Individualism found its first expression in capitalism, but found its way to the future in the religious individualism of the middle-class: the same austerity that

may have, for the active life of the radical sects, hindered full-blown 'laissez-faire', at the same time permitted, indeed insisted upon, a clean break with the traditions of the past. The era of class action justified in a restatement of Catholic/courtly precedent was dead in the bourgeois Protestant nations -- in Holland, in England and, more thoroughly than anywhere else, in the British colonies of North America. A new courtly ethic would emerge, it is true, but it would become much broader in its social scope and be based not on historical precedent but on anti-traditional modernism. New religions would emerge as well from the destruction of traditional religious structures, but they would all be secular, based on the same spirit of modernism; and they would all be secessionist, rather than social in nature.

## 2. Dutch art and the Protestant bourgeoisie

Florentine Mannerism and schools influenced by it reflects the sixteenth century spread of the Fine Art ethic. For centuries connoisseurs brushed it aside as no more than decadent classicism. "Mannerism" was a derogatory reference, the art produced was, until this century, seen as hackneyed and formulaic.<sup>33</sup> The criticisms were modified somewhat when historical research discovered that the Mannerists were in fact 'expressing themselves', but, except perhaps among the most hard core connoisseurs, the works of Bronzino, Pontormo, Parmigianino, Florentino, Correggio, Veronese, Bellini and Giorgione, have not gained anything like the status of the works of the masters who preceded them.<sup>34</sup>

Yet a glance at Mannerist painting should inform the connoisseur that these works were meant above all to be "meaningful". The violent colour distortion and flatness of Pontormo's 'Descent from the Cross' (c.1525), the physical distortion of Parmigianino's 'Madonna with the Long Neck' (c.1535), the physical and chromatic distortion

of Bronzino's 'Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time' (c.1550), or the stilted self-centredness of his 'Portrait of a Young Man' (c.1550) -- all these are elements entirely divorced from the stated meanings of the works. Their incongruity demands a shift of focus from the work alone toward the personality of the Artist.

The great high artists of the period -- Titian, El Greco and Tintoretto -- can scarcely be compared to their Florentine Fine Art counterparts. For these "provincials", relatively isolated from the heart of high fashion, art retains its traditional functions. Distortion is incorporated, particularly into El Greco's and Tintoretto's works, like the latter's 'Last Supper' (1592-94), but the intent is always to regain the shared emotion of Christianity, the transcendence of reason -- not, as for the Mannerists, to focus on the purely personal indulgence in the incongruous. For the Mannerist painters, a madonna has become merely a foil through which style is manipulated. The subject is no longer a madonna, the expression of a communal belief, it is now an expression of the Artist's uniqueness. This de-emphasis of content in favour of style is naturally baffling to the uninformed viewer who feels, rightly enough, that he is missing the point.

But the connoisseur doesn't miss the point (even if the point is only that there is no point). Sharing the Fine Artists' contempt for popular beliefs, he too believes that genuine Meaning comes from within and not from without; that learned esoteric references, the more convoluted the better, are superior to mass belief. He claims, too, that the appreciation of Art is not just a matter of learning the secret language of a clique, that the revelation of personal psychology is in fact more universal, more Real, than abstract social belief. Yet the connoisseurs of later ages, fully cognizant of the idea that self-expression is the only Truth, lacking only the secret language of the particular clique, have written off Mannerism for what it was -- shallow, hackneyed, formulaic and mannered.

Mannerism spread north during the sixteenth century. Its

practitioners have fared even less favourably than their Italian counterparts. Compared with the lasting fame attached to their fifteenth century predecessors, working entirely within a traditional social context -- Campin, van Eyck, van der Weyden, Bosch, Grünewald -- the names of the sixteenth century Fine Artists ring less familiar -- van Haarlem, Goltzius, Bloemaert, Jacques de Gheyn II, Bramer, Pieter Lastman, Engelbrechtsz, van Heemskerck. Yet these are the Artists who grasped the potential of Fine Art to grant its practitioners aristocratic individuality, or as van Mander called it, "the Noble and Free Art".<sup>35</sup> For all their inspiration, their work remains little more than a gap between two significant periods in northern art history.

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For the Dutch in the seventeenth century, art functioned as a social cement, reinforcing the shared beliefs and aspirations that helped to unite and shape the evolving nation. Innovations in painting responded to new communal concerns . . . Most significant of the new developments that ensued was an unprecedented humanization of art.<sup>36</sup>

The Reformers expected art to serve a traditional function -- to express the buoyant social conviction of the age. That the art produced looks different from the arts of conviction preceding it should hardly be surprising. A living social art is necessarily in a state of continual flux, adapting old forms, developing new ones to suit the needs of an evolving society. Seventeenth century Dutch art looks different from earlier high arts, not because, as with the development of Fine Art, the underlying conception of what art is had changed, nor because the social functions it served had changed -- all that was altered was the specific focus of social conviction. There was no room in the severe Calvinist ethic for the dilettante self-

aggrandizement of Fine Art. The Dutch bourgeoisie did not, at first, seek the status of aristocrats.

For fifteenth and early sixteenth century northern painters like Bosch, landscape had evolved as a means of enforcing and illuminating the basic didactic function of a work -- as in the 'Garden of Earthly Delights' (c.1505-1510), where landscape serves to dramatize the differences between heaven and hell. The mannerists changed that, as witnessed in Bloemaert's 'John the Baptist Preaching' (c.1660) and van Haarlem's 'The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis' (c.1593), where the subject of the work receives secondary significance. "In both these paintings the central subject is almost hidden, to make room for complex groups of figures showing off the artist's power of invention".<sup>37</sup> What this "power of invention" or Genius manages to contribute is negligible. The ponderous, massed nudes are an unfortunate echo of Bosch's spontaneity; their landscape setting is merely incongruous.

The seventeenth century Protestant triumph reacted to this courtly indulgence, but it reacted as well to the aristocratic opulence of Catholic art and to Catholic iconography. It revived art's traditional didactic function,<sup>38</sup> but was forced to do so within genres that had become secularized during the sixteenth century -- landscape, still life and genre. The problem faced by artists was to spiritually charge scenes heretofore lacking spirituality, to create a new (universally comprehensible) iconography.

To achieve this, artists began to use popular emblematical literature. These emblems combined scenes with apparently unrelated captions. The relationship was made clear by an accompanying verse or address. "Generally the meaning of the emblem is a moral, and the game of its decipherment was designed to make morality more attractive."<sup>39</sup> One such emblem, by Johan de Brune (1624), shows a mother sitting by her fire and wiping her child's buttocks.

If we encountered it outside this context, what else could it be than a realistic anecdote? Here, the image is moralized, in a general way, by the motto which reads: 'This body, what else is it but stench and shit?' The significance of this moral is further explained in the address, directed at a lover, saying that his beloved, even if she were a princess and extremely beautiful, is but a body, 'conceived in shame . . . and delivered in unclean blood'.<sup>40</sup>

Scenes of lechery were given similar moral bases; landscapes and still lifes, with their implications of death and decay served as *momento mori*, reminders of the transience of life. Growing from popular faith, aimed at popular consumption in the open market, the Dutch art of the seventeenth century, (hopelessly chained to the pedestrian needs of its lower class society, or so the mannerists and modernists would conceive of it), remains unparalleled in Western art history for its scope, richness and prolificness.

But Calvinism, with its conception of individualized religion, was for that reason inherently contradictory, a transition from the social vision of the world to a private one. While Dutch realism charged the commonplace with a spiritual association, in so doing it elevated the everyday world of things to a position of unprecedented significance. Jan van Eyck, with his fastidious rendering of objects could, in the still relatively spiritual Catholic ethic, present the minute perfection of objects as representing the cosmic perfection of God. With the victory of mercantilism, the depictions of objects necessarily implies the depiction of commodities. So in still lifes, those done in the first half of the century by, for example, Pieter Claesz, reveal a simplicity approaching austerity, clearly conscious of their basic didactic function. In the second half of the century, however, as in the work of Willem Kalf, the plain utensils are replaced by gold, silver and crystal; the simple food by more aristocratic

fare -- lobsters, peaches and wine. The same growing concern for art as a depiction of personal prestige continues through all of the categories of Dutch painting.<sup>41</sup>

Paintings themselves, now made small enough to fit into more modest bourgeois homes and still imbued with an inherent preciousness, the result of their high religious function, rapidly became commodities in their own right. The elimination of court and church patronage -- institutions which, like their modern governmental and corporate counterparts, had begun patronizing art in the sixteenth century as a noble and not a functional thing -- had virtually wiped out the phenomenon of Fine Art. Artists were thrown on to a commodities-minded market. As early as 1641, John Evelyn noted both the extent of the pictures trade and a major motivation behind it.

The reason of this store of pictures and their cheapnesse proceede from their want of Land, to employ their Stock; so as 'tis an ordinary thing to find, a common Farmer lay out two, or 3000 pounds in this Commodity, their houses are full of them, and they vend them at their Kermas'es to very greate gaines.<sup>42</sup>

But the works produced at this time still exhibit the simple Calvinist conviction. While that conviction held, the artists, or at least their art, directly benefitted from the open market system. They were in direct contact with their buyers (albeit increasingly through dealers). If demand was high so was the level of production, forcing artists into a competitive lowering of prices, thus keeping them at a humbler artisan-bourgeois social level.<sup>43</sup> While artists themselves saw this as no great advantage, it removed any illusions of privilege and therefore any dilettante behaviour, and also kept the level of craftsmanship extremely high.

As the Calvinist ethic broke down after about 1650 under the increasing material success of mercantilism, a more traditional class

structure began to reassert itself. Artists, inspired by the success of their Renaissance and mannerist predecessors, expected to join the cultural elite once again. The new Delft Guild of St. Luke (the painters' guild) building, begun in 1661, sported a classicizing facade and was "surmounted by a bust of Apelles, the most famous painter of antiquity. The interior was decorated with allegorical representations of Painting, Architecture and Sculpture."<sup>44</sup>

The following year Vermeer began work on the Allegory, 'The Art of Painting' (1662-1665), reviving the claims made by Mannerists like van Heemskerck ('Saint Luke Painting the Madonna', 1532 [fig. 2] )



fig. 2

for the god-like stature of the creative Genius. Vermeer does not manage to achieve the level of stilted pomposity that van Heemskerck achieves, but the sentiments are all there. Vermeer's 'Studio' represents Clio, the Muse of History with a book, laurel wreath and trumpet. While one writer suggests that this expresses "the idea that history

painting was an artist's noblest calling",<sup>45</sup> the complete absence of the genre in the work of Vermeer, and in the period generally, suggests another solution. The painter does not serve the traditional social function of illustrating his country's history -- it is rather the function of history to immortalize the Artist.

The Calvinist ethic, while it initially suppressed the Fine Art ideology of uselessness, did so only briefly. Compared to Catholicism's millenium-long avoidance of a Fine Art ideology, within fifty years the Dutch Protestants were losing sight of their original goals. Their individualism, at first only a desire for status comparable to that of the lower social orders, led, when that status was achieved, to a desire for grander things -- things made attainable through their destruction of the traditional class system. From 1648 onwards aristocratic French taste had already begun to influence Dutch

literature and classical studies; in the last quarter of the century "French style conquered the Dutch Republic".

The native tradition, undervalued by the tastemakers, lost support and prestige. Reflecting French art theory, Samuel van Hoogstraten in his book published in 1678 stressed . . . that only the charming and elegant are worthy subjects for painting . . .

The striving for a more aristocratic style and more pretentious subjects in painting led to arid academicism. The vigor and vitality<sup>46</sup> of earlier Dutch painting were lost.

To historians of style, the most reasonable explanation for the sudden qualitative collapse of Dutch art is that realism had been completely explored by masters who could not be surpassed by later generations.<sup>47</sup> There are, however, problems resulting from this thesis. The most obvious illustration is that of photography. If a medium can explore all of its possibilities in half a century, then the photograph necessarily experienced the same fate in 1889. Obviously it has not -- not because of any considerations of style, but because it remains intimately tied to a productive social function. Therefore, even though it has been somewhat superceded by other media, photography continues to evolve new forms and ways of seeing as social need dictates -- just as the Dutch high art of painting evolved from, and, in its productive years remained focussed on, popular social needs.

The history of style is a history by and for connoisseurs -- people who see themselves as superior to their times, who use Taste as the arbitrary proof of that superiority, and who therefore can hardly be expected to see art as inevitably linked to its social milieu. The connoisseur of history will not understand either that the qualitative decline in Dutch painting was the inevitable result

of connoisseurship itself, the phenomenon that, like the history of style, isolates art from its social function.

The process had begun with the rise to prominence of art dealers. If the open market contributed to a growing awareness of art as a commodity, the mechanics of dealership added another critical element -- art as Precious Object. Valued, like any object turned commodity, not for its social value but for its arbitrary monetary value, the Precious Object is further prized for its uniqueness: "The dealers prefer to advertise the art of previous ages, for the simple reason that . . . the products of this art cannot multiply and, therefore, cannot depreciate -- they are the object of the least risky speculation".<sup>48</sup>

This situation was, of course, entirely agreeable to connoisseurs as well, who could do little to enhance their legitimizing mystique by admiring a vital, functional art of social conviction that everyone else admired, too. So it was the Fine Art ethic that in good part ended the most productive years of Dutch high art.

Turning their backs on functional native art, those in the know turned their backs as well on Rembrandt, as capable an artist as has ever lived. Rembrandt is invariably brought up (by Fine Art apologists) as proof positive of the myth of Genius -- a painter ignored by his time, whose inspiration spoke to the future, not to the common folk who surrounded him, a man condemned by his Genius to a life of destitution, just like (and this is of course the thrust of the argument) the avant-garde of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the first place, Rembrandt was not ignored by his time, only by the intellectual elite and the wealthy merchant patrons, men with their own private reasons for wishing to disavow their society -- men isolated in intellectual humanist abstraction or who saw the 'others' as equally abstracted simple-minded consumers rather than as fellow citizens: those who wished to reinforce a rather dubious social supremacy by associating themselves with High Class culture. Rembrandt was ignored, in other words, by the connoisseurs of his

day, the same sort who now drag up Rembrandt's "modernist" status (the Great Artist recognized only after his death) as proof of the validity of connoisseurship.

His patrons were those unwilling or unable, because of their own well-defined social function, to disassociate themselves from their society, primarily preachers and medical doctors,<sup>49</sup> and even worse (from the avant-garde/connoisseur point of view) thoroughly bourgeois shop keepers.<sup>50</sup> Rembrandt's poverty, then, did not stem from any social uselessness imposed by his inspired Genius, and even less from a bohemian impulse on his part. If he was worse off than other painters serving a similar clientele, it is likely the result of the failure of his own speculations on the art market.<sup>51</sup>

Linked as he was to the market, through painting and more directly commercial illustrating, (much of his income was derived from etchings, many of them Biblical illustrations), Rembrandt had considerably less freedom of self-expression than did his court-subsidized Fine Art predecessors and successors. Nor is there any question of his work being only superficially compatible with the desires of his clientele. While he worked within several genres -- portraiture, biblical and classical subjects, courtly baroque -- virtually all of his works remain primarily illustrations of the Calvinist social conviction: man guided by an 'inner light', but at the same time, man made profoundly insular by Protestant individualism. The two themes are obvious and inseparable; his patrons could hardly have been duped.

How could the cream of the art world overlook such a master? Obviously because it no longer shared his social conviction. Once the blunder was discovered, however, Art Lovers promptly made up for lost time.

The task that I have set myself  
is to try to show that Rembrandt,  
man and superman, had a life and  
output . . . of admirable richness

and esoteric depth; that his life and work -- like those of all great creative geniuses -- were lived and performed by virtue of an unknown higher dictate, operating beyond the law that normally directs the earthly destiny of man.<sup>52</sup>

Canonized in retrospect, Rembrandt now stands detached from his time, listening to some 'higher dictate' beyond the ken of mere mortals. If the Dutch petty bourgeoisie bought his works, they bought only the trifles of content, for they could not plumb the 'esoteric depths' open to the connoisseur. And if the connoisseurs of the seventeenth century preferred courtly fluff to Rembrandt? The only thing more ludicrous to a connoisseur than the popular art of his own time is the Taste of connoisseurs of the past. Each generation of Art Lovers sets its own standards of Taste (which, linked to the vagaries of stylistic change is necessarily random), and proceeds to proclaim them absolute, to all times. Rembrandt, then, did not paint for his own time, but for us. So the modern connoisseur, sharing the master's Genius, can laugh along with him at the pomposity



fig. 3

of Art Lovers of the past, as revealed in a sketch of 1644 [fig. 3] -- a pontificating critic with ass's ears -- absolutely certain that there is no link to himself. The Fine Artist dredges up Rembrandt's 'failure' as proof of his inspired genius, thereby explaining the Fine Artist's own failure to arouse popular interest in his work -- which of course is proof of the Artist's own inspired Genius.

## FOOTNOTES (Chapter III)

1. Steven Lukes, Individualism (Oxford 1973), p. 95.
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3. R.H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism (Gloucester, Mass. 1972; rpt. 1926 ed.).
4. Ramsay Muir, Civilization and Liberty (London 1940), p. 89.
5. R.H. Tawney, op. cit., p. 97.
6. Albert Guerard, The Life and Death of an Ideal (New York 1956), p. 107.
7. Steven Lukes, op. cit., pp. 95-96.
8. Ramsay Muir, op. cit., p. 90.
9. Eva Priester, "A Socio-Economic Phenomenon", The Reformation: Revival or Revolution?, ed. W. Stanford Reid (New York 1968), pp. 100-105, esp. pp. 102-103.
10. R.H. Tawney, op. cit., p. 105.
11. Steven E. Ozment, "'Homo Viator': Luther and Late Medieval Theology", The Reformation in Medieval Perspective, ed. S.E. Ozment (Chicago 1971), pp. 142-154, esp. p. 143.
12. Ibid., p. 151.
13. Eva Priester, op. cit., p. 104.
14. Christopher Hollis, Christianity and Economics (New York 1961), p. 25.
15. Eva Priester, op. cit., p. 104.
16. Michael Walzer, The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics (Cambridge, Mass. 1965), p. 13.
17. John Calvin, "Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses", C.W. Bingham, trans., quoted in M.J. Kitch, ed., Capitalism and the Reformation, op. cit., p. 130.
18. Kurt Samuelson, Religion and Economic Action, E.G. French, trans. (New York 1964; orig. ed. 1957), p. 34.

19. Friedrich Heer, The Intellectual History of Europe, trans. J. Steinberg (London 1966; orig. ed. 1953), p. 316.
20. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons, (New York, London 1952; rpt. 1930 ed.; orig. ed. German 1904-05), p. 180.
21. Rule XLVIII of the Benedictines states: "Idleness is the enemy of the soul and therefore, at fixed times, the brothers ought to be occupied in manual labour . . .", quoted in Walter S. Neff, Work and Human Behaviour, op. cit., p. 85.
22. "Not the rationalization of commerce -- now resting on the utterly irrational foundations of the stock market and advertising -- but the rationalization of bureaucracy is the real 'organizational revolution'."  
  
-- I. Robert Sinai, The Decadence of the Modern World (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), p. 101.
23. Cotton Mather, "A Christian at his Calling" (1701), The American Gospel of Success, Moses Rischin, ed. (Chicago 1965), pp. 23-30, esp. pp. 24-25. Italics omitted.
24. Ibid., p. 27, p. 30.
25. Ibid., p. 23.
26. Ibid.
27. Cushing Strout, The New Heavens and New Earth (New York 1974), p. 6.
28. John Calvin, Aphorismes of Christian Religion, (London 1596, trans. H. Holland; facs. rpt. New York 1973), pp. 68-9.
29. Max Weber, op. cit., p. 115.
30. Cotton Mather, op. cit., p. 26.
31. Manuel and Manuel, Utopian Thought in the Western World, op. cit., p. 189.
32. John Calvin, "Institutio Religionis Christianae", (pp. 7-8), from M. Whitcomb, ed., "Vol. III: Period of the Later Reformation", Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History, Vol. II (New York 1971; rpt. 1907 ed.).
33. Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, Vol. II, op. cit., p. 88.

34. That the mannerists are popularly unknown compared with artists like Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, Rembrandt and Rubens goes without saying. But the acid test of connoisseurship, the market, places them on a far lower level as well.

Major works by Titian have consistently (1929, 1931, 1932) sold for prices in excess of £100,000. Of the Renaissance masters, Botticelli's 'Adoration of the Kings' fetched £173,600 in 1931; and Raphael's 'Alba Madonna' sold in 1931 for £240,800. Overvalued by scarcity, Leonardo's 'Portrait of a Lady' sold for £714,000 in 1956. El Greco's 'Christ Leading the Blind' went in 1958 for "well over" £100,000. A minor Dutch work, Pieter de Hooch's interior of the Amsterdam town hall sold in 1960 for £17,485, and major Dutch masters, Hals and Rembrandt fetched £182,000 and £128,000 respectively in 1960.

The Mannerists have fared poorly. A Bronzino fetched £700 in 1957. Works by Annibale Carracci, one of the last of the inspired Fine Artists of the early Baroque, was valued by collectors in 1953, 1954 and 1955 at £120, £168 and £625. Parmigianinos sold in 1950 and 1958 for £500 and £2205. Salvator Rosa (1615-1673), virtually alone in the Rome of his day in demanding artistic freedom, was worth £1,536 in 1960. A painting by Rubens, an artist more content with serving his society, was sold in 1959 for £275,000. A sheet of studies by the mannerist Correggio sold in 1953 for £550; two small oil sketches by Rubens fetched £35,000 and £50,000 in 1959-60; a Rembrandt copy (sketch) of a Persian Miniature sold for £135,000 in 1961; a portrait sketch only attributed to Leonardo sold for £3,400 in 1954.

More recent Fine Artists have done little better. Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836-1913) and Rosa Bonheur (1822-1899) were academic Fine Artists overlooked in twentieth century concerns for avant-garde Fine Art. Alma-Tadema's 'Roses of Elogabalus', commissioned in 1888 for £4,000 sold in 1960 for £105. Bonheur's cattle scenes were fetching up to £2100 in 1865; one sold in 1954 for £63. (The prices of the nineteenth century academics have subsequently re-risen, as they have become the object of a campy vogue.)

-- figures from Gerald Reitlinger, The Economics of Taste, V.I (London 1961), pp. 244, 251-252, 256, 262, 269, 283, 334, 338, 344, 367, 407, 420, 425-426, 438, 445-446, 463, 466-467.

35. Jakob Rosenburg, Seymour Slive, E.H. Ter Kuile, Dutch Art and Architecture, 1600-1800 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1966), p. 13.
36. Madlyn Millner Kahr, Dutch Painting in the Seventeenth Century (New York 1978), p. ix.
37. R.H. Fuchs, Dutch Painting (London 1978), p. 23.

38. M.M. Kahr, op. cit., p. 9.
39. Ibid., pp. 8-9.
40. R.H. Fuchs, op. cit., p. 39.
41. Julius S. Held, Donald Posner, 17th and 18th Century Art (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; New York, 2nd ed.), p. 229.
42. Jakob Rosenberg et. al., op. cit., p. 9.
43. Arnold Hauser, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 204-205.
44. Albert Blankert, Vermeer of Delft (Oxford 1978), p. 46.
45. Ibid., p. 48.
46. M.M. Kahr, op. cit., p. 51.
47. Albert Blankert, op. cit., p. 51.
48. Arnold Hauser, op. cit., p. 204.
49. Christopher White, Rembrandt (London 1964), p. 92.
50. Nicos Hadjinicolaou, Art History and Class Struggle, trans. Louise Asmal (London 1978; rpt. 1973 ed.), p. 132.
51. M.M. Kahr, op. cit., p. 139.
52. Maurice Lalau, 1933; quoted in N. Hadjinicolaou, op. cit., p. 124.

## CHAPTER IV: Connoisseurs and Literati

## 1. Public Baroque

## Rules for Thinking with the Church:

1. We must put aside all judgement of our own, and keep the mind ever ready and prompt to obey in all things the true Spouse of Jesus Christ, our holy Mother, the hierarchical Church . . .
8. We ought to praise not only the building and adornment of churches, but also images and veneration of them according to the subject they represent.<sup>1</sup>

Ignatius Loyola's Rules, issued in 1540 (six years after the institution of the Jesuit Order) read like a blueprint for the traditional European theocracy: the interests of the individual are subject to those of the society, as embodied by the Church. It is, of course, less a reflection of what that society was becoming than an image of what the Church Militant felt had to be regained.

Yet for all the high-pressure tactics of the Church, and for a number of reasons, the period was not a return to a medieval social structure: that had been impossible for Savonarola and it was impossible for the reformed popes. Urbanism could not be undone, and the progressiveness of town life could only be checked, not destroyed. The Counter-Reformation was, moreover, only possible with the economic aid of international capital, from the Fuggers and others, and with the military assistance of the Catholic absolute monarchs who, as was demonstrated most clearly by the later French kings, used the movement to achieve ends independent of the ideals of the Church.

The Counter-Reformation was an artificial society, imposed from above. While there is nothing particularly unique in that, what is significant is the shallowness of the political overlay and the

aloofness of the ruling class from those governed. The Spanish in particular "erected structures of government which, like the Gothic cathedrals, seemed to be built from above. Their regimes were imposed from on top and never penetrated the soil or struck roots."<sup>2</sup>

The specific nature of Spanish rule may be put down to a system in which virtually every pure-blooded Christian was a member of the nobility, with the resultant self-absorption characteristic of that class,<sup>3</sup> (it is also a concept of government closely aligned to Muslim practice) -- but it reflects a process that continued to develop over all of Europe, regardless of religious ideology, from the Renaissance onward: the complete isolation of elite culture from popular culture.

In 1500, popular culture was everyone's culture; a second culture for the educated, and the only culture for everyone else. By 1800 however, in most parts of Europe, the clergy, the nobility, the merchants, the professional men -- and their wives -- had abandoned popular culture to the lower classes, from whom they were now separated as never before, by profound differences in world view.<sup>4</sup>

The rejection of popular culture, in all its aspects -- its art, entertainment, beliefs, often even its language -- would have profound influences on both cultures involved. High culture, and particularly high art, would be replaced by Fine Art and elitist culture, slowly strangling in its own pointlessness until today it is nothing but a crumbling, baseless facade; popular culture, on the other hand, and especially with the development of universal literacy and increasingly efficient distribution systems, would flourish as never before.

This, perhaps more graphically than anything else, should demonstrate the source of social vitality: not in the decadent ruling

classes, isolated from and superior to social production; but rather in the peasant and artisanal classes, where society can flourish isolated from the extremes of court life.

The middle-class aligned itself with elite culture where it could and where, as in Holland, it did not already form the sole focus of that culture. Individualism, the universal, indeed the defining characteristic of decadent social classes continued to flourish within elite culture, as it always had; the difference is that as the power of the middle-class spread, even within the Catholic countries, so the social bases for individualistic attitudes broadened accordingly. In Italy and Spain the middle-class remained ineffectual (although, as noted above, individualism of another sort was built into the Spanish system); this was not so elsewhere.

In France and in other northern areas Roman Catholicism came to have an entirely different meaning from its meaning in the more reactionary countries of the Mediterranean. As a result, middle class individualism came to be tolerated within the formal structure of the Roman Catholic Church wherever such individualism was strong enough to insist upon such toleration.<sup>5</sup>

This is not to suggest that the middle-class was any more decadent than the aristocrat/courtiers -- indeed, Calvinist attempts to equate middle-class and artisanal work, as noted in the last chapter, suggest that among the middle and lower ranks of that class, some awareness of the value of social production remained. But middle-class labour was not productive; it was, like the work of the court, focussed on different, less socially-determined ends: personal profit through the stimulation of consumption.

The Catholic Reform movement, like Protestantism, did not auger well for the producers of Fine Art. The art demanded by the reformers,

as spelled out above in Loyola's Rules, and in the Council of Trent (1545-1563), was public, shorn of the niceties of Taste and esoteric intellectualization. If Baroque art is intentionally theatrical,<sup>6</sup> it is so because overstatement was required by a Church that had, with the steady dissolution of its basis of power, found itself in serious trouble.

By mobilizing artists for the propagation of the faith once more, the Church reintegrated them in society. They lost their freedom, but until the advent of romanticism there was to be no bohemian living, no maladjustment, no living outside the law. Artists were no longer gods or demi-gods.<sup>7</sup>

But neither were they what they had once been -- artisans, of the community, working for the community. Elevated to the court during the Renaissance, the finest artists of the Counter-Reformation, like Rubens, Bernini and Watteau, remained there. They lost their status as Genius dilettantes, dabbling in the courtier's esoterica -- they were, rather, professionals; no longer, like Leonardo, scornful of a material success that mirrored their artistic abilities.

As the gap between popular and elite culture broadened throughout the Baroque period, the court professional artists moved correspondingly further from the theoretical ideals of the Counter-Reformation. A comparison of almost any artists from the early and late stages of the period would serve to reinforce this growing aloofness -- Bernini and Fragonard provide particularly dramatic examples.

Despite the grumblings of his rivals about papal nepotism<sup>8</sup> Bernini, (a playwright, set-designer, producer and part-time actor,<sup>9</sup> as well as a sculptor) became the leading artist of the early Baroque because he, better than any of his contemporaries, understood the underlying theatrical concept of the Counter-Reformation:

that salvation was acted out "in the world theatre of the Roman Baroque. . .".<sup>10</sup> Bernini's art in general, and particular scenes like those from his Cornaro Chapel (where St. Theresa's ecstasy is watched by a sculpted Roman crowd from flanking theatre boxes) may seem Tasteless to modern Art Lovers -- but that is their problem, not Bernini's. The body of commissions given him testifies to his success in embodying the Baroque political ideal.

Yet, perhaps in this basic theatrical conception, and in the methods of transmitting it that resemble less the early Christian miracle-play than modern advertising techniques, the Catholic reformers were already displaying some of the condescension for 'the masses' that the ad-man feels. Baroque was hard-sell, with none of the sense of communal expression that permeates Gothic -- it was less an art of social conviction than one of persuasion; an attempt to draw with spectacle, to use that spectacle to gloss over a product that was no longer in great demand, particularly among the steadily growing ranks of the decadent. The Counter-Reformation worked, it is true, keeping millions of Christians within the Church, but advertising works as well, keeping many more millions bound to a bankrupt utopian consumer ethic.

Be that as it may, by the eighteenth century, in the works of Fragonard, all elements of condescension toward the lower classes have vanished -- as has all awareness of the lower classes. Fragonard's courtly idylls have, in retrospect, an ominous edge, the image of an aristocracy so utterly divorced from the world beyond the court that it marches gladly to an unrecognized annihilation.

## 2. Private Baroque in the court of Urban VIII (1623-1644)

If the cult of uselessness depended for its existence only on the Fine Artist, this paper could safely avoid the Baroque period altogether. As was suggested in Chapter II, however, the Fine Artist

does not create himself. He is created by specific social circumstances, and by the Fine Art connoisseur in particular.

In this context, it is necessary to distinguish between public and private Baroque. The hostility of the Catholic reformers to Fine Art was not, after a short period following the Council of Trent, applied within the Catholic courts themselves. As Venetian Mannerism reached its peak toward the end of the sixteenth century, Fine Art, under the pontificate of Pius V (1566-72), had been eliminated entirely from the papal court. There was no place in Pius' strict asceticism for any courtly excess.<sup>11</sup>

There was, perhaps significantly, no correspondingly ascetic visual art produced during this period -- in fact, little high art of any sort was produced in Rome. The first major Baroque monument, Il Gesù, the mother church of the Jesuit Order and the first Baroque monument, was not begun until 1575. Only in music, like that by Palestrina, is the ascetic message of the early Counter-Reformation in evidence.<sup>12</sup>

The ideals of the cult of uselessness were attacked at Trent and elsewhere. It was fully understood that the failure of Fine Art lay in its mania for style over content: it was seen as painting "that puts art before decency, . . . that considers it a great thing to twist a head, the arms, the legs, . . . that seems to prefer figures that do exotic dances and strike poses . . . rather than figures in contemplation."<sup>13</sup>

It was nearly six decades after the founding of the Jesuits before painting re-emerged as a high art with a distinct social role to perform. Clearly the concepts of the cult of uselessness had so thoroughly penetrated and stigmatized sixteenth century thought that the distinctions between high and Fine Art had already begun to blur (as they have completely vanished today). A medium so closely identified with foppish self-aggrandizement could hardly be pressed into a social duty. Three generations were required for the stigma to fade -- yet, perhaps it was less the fading of the Fine Art ethic than the return to the papacy of a more traditional courtly structure

that really accounts for the seventeenth century rebirth of painting.

As the ambitious young prelate walked past the scaffolding and the gangs of workmen employed by [Pope] Sixtus' energetic architect Domenico Fontana, he was thus able to see for himself what could be achieved by power, money and ruthlessness. Only one thing was missing -- Taste. And of that Maffeo Barberini had plenty.<sup>14</sup>

The Catholic Reformation's focus on Rome placed on that city a greater burden of secular government -- both social and economic -- than it had yet experienced. The result was that the city acted as a magnet, drawing to it (and to its prestige and patronage) much of the European feudal aristocracy.<sup>15</sup> The courtly ethic broadened accordingly as the aristocratic population grew. Connoisseurship on an unprecedented level flourished, pushed still further by the competitive air of what had become Christendom's focus of courtly individualism. But ahead of them all was Maffeo Barberini, who became Pope Urban VIII in 1623.

His story is so close to Lorenzo de'Medici's that it needs little elaboration here. Urban also saw his greatest Cultural achievement to be his poetry, he also surrounded himself with intellectuals, also cultivated a taste for the antique. Once again, a select number of painters were admitted into the intellectual club.

Scholars and men of letters were equally honoured and were frequently entertained in the garden of the Belvedere, at the Villa Borghese, or at Castel Gandolfo. Here, they came in contact with painters, sculptors, and architects in a very

free atmosphere, and something very like the ambience of the High Renaissance courts of Julius II and Leo X was re-created . . . [There] was a return to elaborate visual allegory with recondite, allusions and hidden meanings.<sup>16</sup>

Out of this hot house of Fine Art ideology came such memorable works as Domenichino's 'Hunt of Diana', complete with Giorgione-esque naughtiness, pagan symbolism and incomprehensible in-crowd allusions. It is perhaps this preponderance of classical symbolism, in the most consciously Christian period since Constantine's, that marks the court's intellectual aloofness from the programmes which it had itself instituted. While the public Rome was being transformed into a massive Christian spectacle, Urban was commissioning purely classical works like Pietro da Cortona's 'Rape of the Sabines' and 'Rape of Helen'. Then there is Vouet's 'Apotheosis of Cardinal Francesco Barberini' (Urban's nephew), which is "notable for containing no Christian allusions whatever"<sup>17</sup> . . . -- apparently the Cardinal wanted no part of the Christian heaven whose image the Church was dramatically presenting to the masses.

But these Baroque artists, like Botticelli before them, were operating on a rather basic level of the Fine Arts ideal. What they painted was determined by the patron's wishes: they could paint public devotional images (as Pietro da Cortona was frequently called upon to do)<sup>18</sup> with the same facility with which they produced trivial Fine Art ego-gratification. The Baroque was the age of the connoisseur, not the Fine Artist.

The major thrust of late sixteenth century connoisseurship had been archaeological. By the seventeenth century, the soil of Rome had been so carefully sifted over to fill the collections of the Medici, Borghese, Ludovisi and Farnesi families that the subsequent lengthy reign of Urban VIII produced only one significant classical work, a sleeping 'Faun'.<sup>19</sup> The sudden shortage of classical pieces

alarmed most of the European courts -- the well had apparently run dry, and the rules of the game were substantially altered. Collectors now started watching each other, hoping for a spendthrift heir who might be forced to break up the family collection.

Thus the leading collectors of the time lived in a state of constant excitement. The King of France . . . was very attentive to stories about the forthcoming dispersal of the [Ludovisi] sculptures and was determined not to miss any chance that might come his way . . .<sup>20</sup>

The awareness that the treasures beneath Rome were finite set into motion a number of significant developments that would, by the eighteenth century, shape the mechanics of international connoisseurship that remain virtually unchanged today. Antique artworks became steadily more expensive, a preciousness based now as much on simple rarity as on perceived quality. As collectors began more and more to deal with one another, the importance of intermediaries -- art dealers -- steadily grew. And, as was experienced in the twentieth century with the drying up of the Old Masters market, collectors began to broaden their horizons. It was decided that the ancients did not, after all, have a monopoly on Taste -- that many of the great high artists of the more recent past, like Raphael, had Taste, too. But it was generally agreed, in London, Brussels, Florence and Rome, that those with the best Taste were the sixteenth century Venetian Mannerists<sup>21</sup> -- Fine Artists like Correggio, whose work was recent enough to form part of a cultural continuum with courtly Baroque, yet revealing a good measure of Fine Art mystification.

The greatest artists of the day, like Rubens and Bernini, had Taste, too, and the manner in which their talents were employed within the courts suggests the basic motivation, and the basic fallacy, of

the collecting mania. Bernini's portrait busts, like those of Cardinal Borghese or Louis XIV, or Rubens' paintings, like his series for Marie de'Medici or the 'Apotheosis of James I' in the Whitehall Banqueting House, serve traditional high art functions: substitute images, beautification and political conviction resulting, in these examples made primarily for private use, in blatant self-glorification. But this is not the same ego gratification pandered to by Fine Art esoterica -- it is rather a generally accurate depiction of the individual's position within the entire social structure. While private, it is still entirely comprehensible to any who saw it. This is a primarily political art, meant to impress foreign courts and courtiers with the military strength, the piety and subsequent ideological strength, the economic strength of the man (or woman) concerned. This show of power necessarily implies a broad social conviction behind it (whether it existed or not is a minor point): it necessarily implies an awareness of community, however distasteful or oppressive the particular relationship of ruler to ruled may seem today. It is expressed in the visual 'vernacular' of its time.

The cultivation of courtly esoterica, the self-styled ability to find Meaning in the meaningless, and the cultivation of a Taste for the art of dead civilizations, while still glorifying the patron, does so in a dramatically different way. By professing a Taste for and an understanding of what is incomprehensible to the society at large, even to other connoisseurs not versed in the particular artificial philosophical structure (like Platonism, or today, formalism, nihilism, existentialism, surrealism) upon which esoteric interpretation is based, the connoisseur isolates himself from any social context. The focus is no longer the man as apex of a social pyramid -- the focus is only the Man. Visual 'vernacular' -- socially determined ways of expressing an idea -- is shunned. The new language is mysterious, unapproachable, unknowable to all but a few. By denying the common denominator of current language -- verbal or

visual -- by focussing entirely on self, on personality, on personal genius, the connoisseur detaches himself from all awareness of human society. He becomes in his own mind a member of a distinctly separate species, alien to those below, no longer the apex of a great social pyramid but, like the great eye on the American dollar bill, floating entirely detached from it.

Poussin became one of the leading painters in Rome. Yet he never worked in fresco, was hardly ever employed by the Pope, only once or twice painted an altarpiece. Such was now the power of the independent patron to make the reputation of an artist and to guide his development. Deliberately confining himself to a restricted circle of scholars and humanists, he soon moved from . . . generalised battle pictures . . . to more and more complex interpretations of religion and mythology, often as difficult to understand as the great paintings of the Florentine Renaissance produced in somewhat similar circumstances nearly two hundred years earlier. The times were favourable. Never was Rome so closely aligned to French policy and culture as during the twenty-odd years of Urban VIII's pontificate. Not for many generations had there been such a circle of intellectually minded connoisseurs, interested in all the latest developments in science and aesthetics, ready to encourage complex imagery and a more aristocratically restrained form of artistic expression than that which filled the churches and palaces of the great. Yet independent patrons of this kind were not the only ones who broke down the monopoly of Church and aristocracy in early seventeenth century Rome. With the increasing attraction of the city

to tourists and growing economic uncertainties conditions of patronage gradually loosened and we come across an ever larger number of professional art dealers in direct contact with living painters.<sup>22</sup>

Of greater significance than the continuation of the courtly Fine Art ethic in Baroque Italy, and especially in France, is the new depth to which that concept penetrates the lower social classes. As the divisions between popular and elite culture broadened, the ranks of those attracted to, and able to pay for the latter grew. In Rome, the most important collectors were the Cardinals,<sup>23</sup> using conspicuous connoisseurship to bolster both their status and visibility and so their opportunities for advancement. Of the rise of art dealers noted above, most can be discounted, for the purposes of this paper, for they were of insignificant social standing for the most part, selling essentially popular painting, serving traditional devotional functions, to middle- and lower-middle-class buyers<sup>24</sup> -- much the same situation as that noted above in Holland. The trend is significant to later developments, however, as it establishes the basic mechanisms for later Fine Art patronage.

Of more immediate significance was the gradual appearance throughout the seventeenth century of a totally new class involved in collecting and patronizing art: the 'marchands-amateurs'. They were men like Ferrante Carlo, a lawyer and poet employed as a secretary by Cardinal Borghese, who not only collected for the usual reasons of supporting an upward social mobility, but who had in addition a shrewd understanding of what the art boom was worth in purely economic terms.<sup>25</sup> The rise of dealership in general, and of the professional 'marchands-amateurs', brought, besides the middle-class view of social production as simple commodities production, "a growing appreciation of pictures as pictures rather than as exclusively the records of some higher truth; a body of connoisseurs was coming into being prepared to judge pictures on their aesthetic

merits, and consequently the subject-matter of painting was losing its old primaeval importance."<sup>26</sup>

With the spread of connoisseurship came the stratification of connoisseurs according to social background. The great Italian families, many of whose ancestors had fought to have themselves recognized as possessing 'gentilezza', or innate nobility, now for the first time began hurling charges of ignorance at "those who were not wellborn or true connoisseurs", more frequently and more violently "as the numbers of such patrons increased."<sup>27</sup> A level of cattiness had crept into the relations of connoisseurs, and has remained ever since -- a divisive one-upmanship that becomes more viciousness as all even quasi-plausible bases for artistic quality vanish.

The growth of connoisseurship, with the subsequent trivialization of content and glorification of style, is one element reflecting the separation of popular and elite culture. Content or function is an element so universally paramount in the history of art (and, even after two centuries of attempted mass conversion to the cult of uselessness, it still retains that importance in the minds of the uninformed) that it must be considered the defining characteristic of art. By denying the significance of content, the decadent classes were in effect denying any links with the general community.

These changes had their social function. As their military role declined, the nobility had to find other ways of justifying their privileges: they had to show they were different from other people. The polished manners of the nobility were imitated by officials, lawyers and merchants who wanted to pass for noblemen.<sup>28</sup>

Yet at the same time that popular culture was being denied in reality, among the intelligensia a process of 'discovering', or

more accurately, 'inventing' popular culture was beginning: "educated men began to see popular songs, beliefs and festivals as exotic, quaint, fascinating, worthy of collection and record."<sup>29</sup> This literary evaluation of folk customs began in the eighteenth century, but it started in earnest in visual art in seventeenth century Spain, France, Holland and Italy with the numerous schools practising peasant painting. In Rome, the 'bamboccianti' school led by Pieter van Laer was initially supported by middle- and lower-middle-class open market patrons, but appreciation for the style eventually spread to the top of the connoisseurship structure. They reveal a romanticised and often condescending attitude toward 'the people'. "The characters are a satisfied and lively peasantry, hard working and sober, merging almost imperceptibly into an urban proletariat of reasonable prosperity."<sup>30</sup> 'The people' are no longer an integral part of society, they are rather a curiosity, a specimen, adding grist to the connoisseur's contemplative mill. They are removed from their context, placed in an idyllic Rome of peasant dwellings tastefully surrounded by fragments of classical sculpture and architecture. Having lost the real thing, the process of the creation of the world had begun.

The secularization of art with the de-emphasis of subject matter also reflects the secularization of European society. Religious fervour declined throughout the seventeenth century -- this, coupled with the permanent establishment of Protestant nations and the rise of absolute monarchs made the Church "predominantly an Italian institution."<sup>31</sup> With the secularization of Christendom, the centre of Fine Art production made a corresponding shift, to France,<sup>32</sup> where it would remain for two and a half centuries.

### 3. The art market in the eighteenth century

The bourgeoisie gradually took possession of all the instruments of culture -- it not only wrote the books, it also read them, it not only painted the pictures, it also bought them. In the [seventeenth] century it had still formed only a comparatively modest section of the art and reading public, but now it is the cultured class par excellence and becomes the real upholder of culture.<sup>33</sup>

As in Antwerp and Amsterdam, people in Paris looked upon works of art as capital investments. 'Pictures are like bars of gold; you sell them at any time for double the price you gave for them', wrote a collector in 1675 to Madame de Sevigne.<sup>34</sup>

The trivialization of art with the rise of mercantilism, its degradation from the record of a higher truth reflecting the system of social conviction to a precious object or commodity reflecting only its own arbitrary market value is the peculiar contribution of the middle-class to the Fine Art ethic.

This is of course not meant to suggest that the middle-classes stopped buying art as an indication of their upward mobility -- as traditional class lines began to disappear, random qualities like Taste became ever more important in establishing new ones. Rather, they simply appended the idea of art-as-commodity, the inevitable consequence of a mercenary world-view, to the earlier notion of art-as-prestige, thus giving added spice to the art trade.

The art market boomed during the eighteenth century. Centred first in pre-Revolution Paris, then on a fledgling London Market ill-prepared to accept the onslaught of smuggled French collections, it was active throughout Europe -- in Amsterdam, Antwerp, Dresden, Venice, St. Petersburg, Leipzig, Frankfurt and Hamburg. The market created

a uniformity of Taste everywhere, and everywhere both Taste and market reflected the interests and attitudes of a particular class: "the cultural life of the leading countries of Europe had more and more tended to conform to bourgeois standards."<sup>35</sup>

This uniformity of Taste has two major implications. It is of course intrinsic to the idea of connoisseurship -- after all, if Taste is absolute, based on the refined ability to perceive a greatness to which the masses are blind, then everyone with Taste had better have the same Taste, if the whole affair isn't to degenerate into a ludicrous joke. But as a passing glance at the history of connoisseurship clearly demonstrates, this absolute Taste changes virtually from year to year -- the Venetians dropped for the mannerists, who fall against Raphael, in turn ousted by Rembrandt -- and so on. So that in effect, while the Art Lover claims to be 'broadening his mind' through his passion for Art, he is in fact rigidly restricting and channelling it to the simple-minded aping of this year's fashion -- a fashion set more and more by the random machinations of the market.

It is on this concern for fashion that the market preyed -- and continues to prey. Taste would now be determined only by the dealer's supply. As the market grew in power, the last vestiges of any qualitative bases for Taste were in danger of being swept away. But there was one last safety-valve: as noted above, the dealer's major interest lies in controlling his market; to do so he must control supply. The surest way to achieve this is, of course, to deal in the works of dead artists -- and the eighteenth century saw the appearance in earnest of the myth that great artists are recognized only after they die.

It is a well-known melancholy truth  
that the tribe of auctioneers,  
connoisseurs, picture-dealers, brokers,  
menders, etc., etc., have monopolised  
the trade of pictures, and . . . have

made it a matter of ridicule to purchase any modern production, or encourage an English artist. By this craft the leaders of taste of these kingdoms acquire fortunes and credit, whilst many of our painters, men of genius and industry, are absolutely starving.<sup>36</sup>

Those who suffered most, of course, were those Genius diletantes like Blake who refused to lower themselves to meet public needs -- and Progressive Fine Artists continued to suffer until this century when, as shall be examined later, the well of dead masters finally ran dry and collectors were forced to turn to the art of their own time.

Bourgeois mercantile interests triumphed also in the apparatus of selling. Seventeenth century Dutch and Paresian marketing was severely hampered by guild controls over sales;<sup>37</sup> by the eighteenth, the auction had become the major sales organ. For a class priding itself on its rationalization and ordering of trade, the auction, like the stock market, is probably the least orderly way of moving a commodity. But it is the most rational -- the hysteria of the auction guarantees better than any other method an inflated price, it brings the often subtle gamesmanship between collectors to a physical, emotional confrontation and moreover, the auction makes that confrontation public. The sales became popular events. "The auction sales of the eighteenth century, therefore, served both as powerful popularizers of art collecting, and as the means by which the mania could spread in the most practical and immediate way."<sup>38</sup>

The ideals of the cult of uselessness, once only the perverse vision of a decadent social elite, were finding acceptance among a steadily growing proportion of the society. Once the idea had been established that art is not valuable for what it does but for what it is, the subsequent elimination of qualitative functional concerns was not only desirable but inevitable.

## FOOTNOTES (Chapter IV)

1. St. Ignatius Loyola, "Rules for Thinking with the Church", The Catholic Reformation: Savonarola to Ignatius Loyola, ed. John C. Olin, op. cit., pp. 209-211, esp. pp. 209-210.
2. Friedrich Heer, The Intellectual History of Europe, trans. Jonathan Steinberg (London 1966; [orig. German ed. 1953]), pp. 255-256.
3. Ibid., p. 256.
4. Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe (London 1978), p. 270.
5. Henry Grayson, The Crisis of the Middle Class (New York 1956; rpt. 1955 ed.), p. 69.
6. Baroque art was not just 'dramatic', like Hellenistic art was dramatic -- Baroque was drama, as the whole reform movement was. The medieval drama evolved from the Catholic ritual of the Mass; it is only logical that the seventeenth century Church, in attempting to circumvent the preceding three centuries of humanistic development, would attempt to re-capture the element of mystery and irrationality inherent in this earlier expression. This is clearly seen in the Church's move away from the centrally-planned churches of the Renaissance, back to the original basilical format: "for sanctuary we can read stage; for sanctuary arch we can read proscenium arch; . . . for nave we can read auditorium . . ."  
 -- F. Edwards, Ritual and Drama (London 1976), pp. 20-21.  
 For an indication of how thoroughly this concept was assimilated and how rapidly it spread, see H. Wotton, The Elements of Architecture (London 1624; facsimile rpt. Amsterdam and New York 1970), pp. 86-87: ". . . Affectation is the Lively Representment, of any Passion whatsoever, as if the figures stood not upon a Cloth or Boorde, but as if they were acting upon a Stage . . .".
7. Jean Gimpel, The Cult of Art (New York 1969; trans. of 1968 ed. by author), p. 61.
8. Francis Haskell, Patrons and Painters (London 1963), p. 34.
9. Aubrey Menen, Art and Money (New York 1980), p. 123.
10. Friederich Heer, The Intellectual History . . ., op. cit., p. 291.

11. G.W. Searle, The Counter Reformation, op. cit., p. 99.
12. G.W. Searle, Ibid., p. 172.
13. Sixteenth century source (Gilio da Fabriano), quoted in Julius Held and Donald Posner, 17th and 18th Century Art (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.; New York, no pub. date), p. 70.
14. Francis Haskell, op. cit., p. 24.
15. Judith A. Hook, "Urban VIII", The Courts of Europe, op. cit., pp. 213-231, esp. pp. 215-216.
16. Ibid., p. 220.
17. Ibid., p. 220.
18. Francis Haskell, op. cit., p. 39.
19. Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, Taste and the Antique (New Haven 1981), p. 28.
20. Ibid.
21. Niels von Holst, Creators Collectors and Connoisseurs (London 1967), p. 151.
22. Francis Haskell, op. cit., p. 120.
23. Niels von Holst, op. cit., p. 152.
24. Francis Haskell, op. cit., p. 130.
25. Ibid., p. 123.
26. Ibid., p. 130.
27. Ibid., p. 132.
28. Peter Burke, Popular Culture . . . , op. cit., pp. 271-272.
29. Ibid., p. 281.
30. Francis Haskell, op. cit., p. 133.
31. G.W. Searle, op. cit., pp. 107-108.
32. Niels von Holst, op. cit., p. 154.

33. Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, Vol. III, op. cit., p. 9.
34. Niels von Holst, op. cit., p. 158.
35. Ibid., p. 183.
36. From the St. James' Chronicle, April 25, 1761; quoted in John Russell Taylor and Brian Brooke, The Art Dealers (London 1969), p. 25.
37. Germain Bazin, The Museum Age, trans. Jane van Nuis Cahill (Brussels 1967), p. 107.
38. J.R. Taylor and B. Brooke, op. cit., p. 24.

CHAPTER V: The Middle-Class Revolution II: freedom,  
equality and heaven on earth

1. The Protestants: More, Calvin and Diggers

By sapping the foundations of the traditional culture, the expansion of commerce helped create an atmosphere in which man began to think that other forms of society were conceivable. Thus the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries were above all characterized by the revival of utopian thought. When well-established ways of governance decline, men feel compelled to speculate about alternatives.<sup>1</sup>

The gentry are all round, stand up now, stand up now,  
The gentry are all round, stand up now.  
The gentry are all round, on each side they are found,  
This wisdom's so profound, to cheat us of our ground.

STAND UP NOW, STAND UP NOW.

The clergy they come in, stand up now, stand up now,  
The clergy they come in, stand up now.  
The clergy they come in, and say it is a sin  
That we should now begin, our freedom for to win.  
STAND UP NOW, DIGGERS ALL.

— The Diggers' Song<sup>2</sup>

Visions of paradise, of worlds without evil (or work), are constant phenomena in human experience, from primitive tribes to the higher forms of religious culture -- Taoism, Theravada Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity.<sup>3</sup> But paradise is not utopia.

Paradise is achieved after death: after a life of resignation to the struggle of existence and to the political and economic power of the state. Of course the lure of paradise is a vehicle of oppression, but less often pointed out, it is a powerful means of

socialization. With no prospect for self-improvement on earth, the individual is, through religion and through concepts of paradise, forced to behave as a social creature. As the events following the death of religion suggest, man forces himself to behave as a social animal not solely as a manifestation of the oppression of social classes by other decadent classes -- far more significantly, man normally behaves as a social rather than an individual animal in order to ensure the survival of the species.

Utopianism makes only one major modification to the idea of paradise: it makes the sin-less, work-less state attainable on earth. In doing so it reflects the complete reversal of traditional human behaviour. The utopian ideal is the theological arm of the birth of liberty and equality, social and industrial revolution, of totalitarianism and of the consumer heaven of advertising's content-less society. It is the death of high art and birth of the cult of uselessness as it appears today.

The same social decadence that gives birth to utopianism continues to promote it as the vehicle of social salvation. Utopianism is the cult that replaced Catholicism in the West, and has gradually become a world cult. Its basis is epistemological; utopia will be gained if only enough things can be changed, and included among those 'things' are human beings. Its high priesthood is nebulous but drawn almost exclusively from a single social group. Utopia is, and has always been, the vision of the intelligensia: of scientists, therapists, historians, philosophers, economists and Fine Artists.

Utopianism was the peculiar northern manifestation of neo-Platonic doctrines spreading from Italy,<sup>4</sup> yet there was no serious utopianism in the Italian courts. Throughout the period so far considered, the Italian middle-classes remained weak. In England, Holland, Geneva and France they were not. Utopia seems to be, at this formative period, the peculiar vision of the middle- and lower-middle-classes. The vision was not radically different from that held by Lorenzo de'Medici; the class involved was simply much larger. Lorenzo could

aspire to the princely life without radically altering the established power structures; the northern burghers, professionals and intellectuals could not. As the vision of a decadent social class rather than of decadent individuals, the courtly paradise-for-all demanded a massive artificial social restructuring and a subsequent restructuring of human behaviour.

But I am of a contrary opinion,  
 quoth I, for me thinketh that men shall  
 never there live wealthily where all  
 things be common. For how can there be  
 abundance of goods or of anything where  
 every man withdraweth his hand from  
 labour? . . .

I marvel not, quoth he, that you  
 be of this opinion . . . But if you  
 had been with me in Utopia and had  
 presently seen their fashions and laws,  
 . . . and would never have come thence  
 but only to make that new land known  
 here, then doubtless you would grant  
 that you never saw people well ordered  
 but only there.<sup>5</sup>

Thomas More's Utopia was published in 1516. Like Luther's reform, it rests in good measure on the desire for a return to a simpler, essentially Christian moral social ethic. As such it was partly a reaction to the social abuses being brought about by the secularization of power. More "protested against the new princely absolutism and against the predatory activity of the nobility, who seized the land from the peasants in order to turn it into vast sheep-breeding grounds".<sup>6</sup> In this respect, it might be safely argued that his complaints were justified, for this state capitalism and subsequent dispossession of social classes is symptomatic of the decay of one of the major currents of medieval society, where the fact of land ownership was rendered insignificant through the peasantry's historical perception of the right to land possession.

In this sense, More's Utopia is a society where the specific legal ownership of land is also not an issue -- not through historical rights of familial possession but through the abolishment of private property. Similarly, the basic unifying activity is social production. "Besides husbandry, which (as I said) is common to them all, every one of them learneth one or other several and particular science as his own proper craft. That is most commonly either clothworking in wool or flax, or masonry, or the smith's craft, or the carpenter's science."<sup>7</sup>

More's allusions to the traditional Christian theocracy are more direct than are his general notions of production.

The Utopians are pre-Christians; the absolute truth of Christ had not been revealed to them before the arrival of Hythloday and his companions. But many of the Utopians are quick to grasp the Christian message, which has already been prefigured in their own beliefs. Their views about social behaviour are at one with the teachings of Christ, Plato, Epicurus, and the Stoics . . . Their contempt for gold parallels Christ's driving the money changers from the Temple, their family order is Biblical in character . . .<sup>8</sup>

But More also went beyond a mere call for a return to traditional culture, and in so doing acts as a bridge between Luther and Calvin. Believing that the "original paradise had survived somewhere on earth"<sup>9</sup> and that with the effective abolishment of private property crimes of property like theft would inevitably disappear,<sup>10</sup> he embarked on a scheme for the perfection of mankind.

This perfection of the species was based above all on the triumph of Reason over superstition, of Freedom and Equality over oppression. These are concepts antithetical to the traditional social structure.

And even in More's theoretical model, "Utopia was a modern military state".<sup>11</sup>

Whether More's praise of Utopia was genuine or cynical<sup>12</sup> is of little consequence, for the genuineness of later Utopians, most of whom follow More's basic attitudes towards mankind, cannot be doubted. Basic to all mainstream utopian propositions is a system of social regulation, theoretically benevolent, that amounts to a state monolith whose functions are two-fold: the enforced perfection of mankind and the removal of each individual's social responsibility.

Because a major role of the state is enforced perfection, crime in Utopia is seen as treason -- an act against the state more than as antisocial behaviour. For criminals -- "Because they being so godly brought up to virtue, could not for all that be refrained from mis-doing" -- the punishment is enslavement.<sup>13</sup> Idleness is forbidden by law enforced by the magistrates or Syphogrants, whose major responsibility is to see "that everyone apply his own craft with earnest diligence".<sup>14</sup> Play is virtually forbidden, except in the hour allotted to it after dinner, and only mind-broadening games are permitted. "Dice-play and such other foolish and pernicious games they know not; but they use two games not much unlike the chess."<sup>15</sup>

More decried the prevailing practice of warfare -- random petty squabbings between princes satisfying only their personal greed and hunger for glory and in the process bankrupting kingdoms and further oppressing their populations.<sup>16</sup> Yet war in Utopia is not avoided. It is, rather, rationalized, taken from the level of personal princely rivalry to that of the ideological basis of the state's international policy, as it is in modern utopian states like the United States and the Soviet Union.

The Utopians waged war only in defence of their country, of their friends, or on behalf of humanity, for example, to free an oppressed people from a tyrant ('*humanitatis gratia*'). They also defended their trade and monetary interests with

arms (here More foresaw the colonialism and imperialism of the Elizabethan and Cromwellian age). Wars were waged by the whole people, including the women. Wars were prepared in advance by bribing and corrupting the enemy, and were waged with the support of mercenary troops. They could be brought to an end by acts of terror which he regarded as<sup>17</sup> useful means to intimidate a future enemy.

Warfare is perhaps the least rational of all man's activities. For a creature whose existence depends upon his society and his social production, the destruction of war amounts to madness. So through the Middle-Ages the conventions of chivalry evolved. Warfare was formalized into rigid codes of conduct to control to as great a degree as was possible the insanity of war.<sup>18</sup> It of course met with only limited success -- unless it is compared with the ideological slaughter that has occurred since.

By rationalizing this madness, by giving it a noble humanitarian goal, by presenting it as an economic necessity to the function of commerce, by involving whole populations directly and by advocating any actions, however violent, that resulted in victory, the Utopians foreshadowed the ultimate insanity of modern warfare.

For More, and for all subsequent utopians, the perfection of man was to be achieved through universal education.<sup>19</sup> The chief aim of learning was the avoidance of pain through the application of reason. "For they judge it extreme madness to follow sharp and painful virtue, and not only to banish the pleasure of life, but also willingly to suffer grief, without any hope of profit thereof ensuing."<sup>20</sup> This points out the underlying individualism of all utopian thought; the ultimate goal of any ideal world is self-fulfillment, personal pleasure. The social selflessness inherent in concepts of virtue are given lower priority. Of course the pleasures of the perfected man are very high class, not the "lewd and dishonest desires" of the common herd; they delight rather in the courtly pleasures of eating and bodily health, in physical beauty.<sup>21</sup>

The utopian pleasure principle of reason is one element of the absorption of individual social responsibility by the state. But obviously, with that basic human constituent removed from within, the state must somehow re-impose it from above. This is the ultimate function of education in Utopia.

Because the utopian author imagines himself in the role of supreme and all-powerful lawgiver, any spontaneous thought or action on the part of his imaginary citizens would upset his calculations, twist the threads which meet in his hands . . . the utopian planner must simplify his problems by eliminating individual differences and by reducing to absolute uniformity all beliefs and interests. This can be achieved only by education and propaganda until that ideal moment comes when the interests, the beliefs and thoughts of all will be identical.<sup>22</sup>

This is the basic paradox of all societies based on individualism, whether the self-fulfillment of communism or the more blatant brand practised by the middle-class; the more the individual resigns his social responsibility to the state, the more his goals become self-oriented. The more decadent he becomes, the more robot-like he becomes. So More's Utopia is filled with de-humanized automatons, sacrificing their basic humanity to the state in order to seek their refined personal pleasures.

Their cities ("whoso knoweth one of them knoweth them all"<sup>23</sup>) are perfectly symmetrical,<sup>24</sup> as are the days of those who inhabit them. All work six hours before noon, take a two hour rest, work three more hours; then all have supper and go to bed, for eight hours, at eight o'clock. The Utopians all wear uniforms, designating sex and marital status.<sup>25</sup> The "void time" is theirs to do with as they like, up to a well-defined point. "Not to the intent that they should misspend this time in riot or slothfulness, but . . . to bestow the time well and

thriftily upon some other science as shall please them."<sup>26</sup> Most of them attend lectures before work in the morning, although they have a choice of applying themselves to their trades instead. One hour after supper is allotted to play which, as noted above, is invariably mind-broadening and, of course, Good for them.<sup>27</sup>

The Utopians, in other words, behave in many ways exactly as the contemporary intelligensia and aspiring intelligensia does -- scorning popular pleasures for high-brow self-improvement programmes: seasons tickets to the opera, ballet and symphony, appearances at avant-garde poetry readings, evenings at obscure (foreign) films. And best of all, there is the weekly expedition through the unknowable (but known) maze of Modern Art -- brandishing the Word of Greenberg, Steinberg, Warhol or Judy Chicago, the literary keys to the neutred riddles on the walls.

This is all Fine Art, isolated from the prevailing cultural milieu by time, as with opera, dance and classical music, by space, as with the cult of foreign is Good, and, in the case of avant-gardism, by self-exile. This is the Culture of the Cultural Elite -- whose vision is to impose this dead art on the whole of society, for its own Good. Curators dream of hordes of work-booted, lunch-bucketed men pawing at the gallery door; government Fine Arts' agencies dream of the mass popular support that will make them obsolete -- and they wonder why it never happens!

St. Thomas' Utopians, like the modern intelligensia, freely and spontaneously choose their self-improvement. Utopia, therefore, unlike the modern world, is remarkably free of laws, "for to people so instruct and institute very few do suffice."<sup>28</sup> As a result, there are no lawyers; when the rare occasion arises that a Utopian must face the law he is forced to argue his own case. But as each of them is a first-rate intellectual and "a cunning lawyer" no problems arise -- absolute fairness is the hallmark of the intellectual state, the fairness of absolute uniformity.

The system works, not because it removes the possibilities for choice, as the class system does, but because it provides them, and in

so doing permits the essential goodness of man, as instilled through proper education, to shine through. Social stability is achieved through unlimited personal growth permitted by the removal of class barriers. The inherent contradiction in the scheme -- or the leap of faith -- is that somehow unlimited prospects for self-gratification will be interpreted by those perfected in social terms. The Utopians achieve the luxury of a six-hour work day because all classes diligently apply themselves, of their own free will, to the good of the whole.<sup>29</sup> Even the magistrates, the only class legally exempt from social production, recognize through their intellectual enlightenment the necessity to work beside the rest for the common (and therefore for their own) good.<sup>30</sup>

In practice, however, the belief that all men are created equal must be reinforced by the state, just as the liberty resulting from that unprovable conception must be curtailed.

. . . a system of liberty supreme tends to degenerate into a regime of liberty for the strong -- individuals, classes, and races -- . . . If all are given liberty to seek their private well-being, it is the strong who can best take advantage of this right and who establish themselves in control . . . If man is supposed to build the community as the means to his private ends, then exploitation rather than mutuality is his rational policy. The question that remains is: how safe can be the existence of a society thus constituted, and is not force rather than a contract for mutual service its 'raison d'etre'.<sup>31</sup>

There are, then, a number of inevitabilities built into the basic philosophy of utopian engineering, although they are not quite those foreseen by the engineers. The idea of Liberty, because it is fundamentally antisocial, will equal not equality, but oppression by the strong. Equality, because even the social planners recognized that

it must be state enforced, through arms and education, will equal not liberty, but oppression by the state. Because human beings are individuals, the egalitarian collectivism that assumes that one is no different from all will result in a dehumanized, robot society of interchangeable components. Because human beings are as well social creatures, libertarian doctrine will result in a dehumanized, anti-social, narcissistic and antagonistic accumulation of people.

In other words, the individual in society forms an extremely complex inter-relationship involving give and take on both sides. The process of achieving a satisfactory balance is a centuries-long series of trials and errors resulting in the traditional society in a complex, organic and ultimately social structure functioning in the best interests of the individuals involved. The necessity in social planning for simplification, for smoothing out the rough edges of human behaviour, must result in a product that serves neither the interests of the individual nor of his community.

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Calvinism disenchanting the cosmos. It dissolved the conditions of archaic society and in their place set spirit and matter. The world became a battlefield that must be conquered. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it isolated the human ego. The individual human being was torn from his fellow creatures and the world of things, which was degraded to mere matter. Calvinism developed a new, matter-of-fact way of treating things, weapons, commodities and men, which was unthinkable both in the magical cosmos of archaic society and in the sacramentally linked world order of Catholicism. 'This self-estrangement from fellow creatures is part of the nature of capitalism. Capitalism does not exist in its pure form when hierarchical,

neighbourly, feudal or familial considerations prevail between buyer and seller, or employer and employee.' Whereas men in archaic society had always regarded animals and things as fellow creatures and equal participants in the drama of salvation, the new men of Calvinist society put aside such collaborative ideas.<sup>32</sup>

While More assumed the basic goodness of Man, Calvin assumed his basic perversity. Basing the rule of his city on the pessimism of his creed, "Calvin concluded that any society of men must be governed with mailed fists".<sup>33</sup> Yet Geneva embodied, if not entirely the theoretical basis at least the pragmatic implementation of More's ideal. Geneva was ordered, controlled and, under its police state tactics, harmonious. The consciousness of Geneva as "a great utopian revelation" was present at the time; later utopian works like Johann Andreae's Christianopolis (1619) drew from the social control achieved there.<sup>34</sup>

The relationship of the population to God and so to the state was one of fear. Children spied on their teachers and parents; at age eight they were sent to work in the mines. Sexuality and sensuality, love of the natural world and of man-made beauty were repressed. Charity was excluded as corrupting -- poverty was the punishment of God and was dealt with as such: Calvinists saw no differences between poor houses and jails; they had made it a crime to be poor. Life expectancy for society's less privileged strata dropped to fifteen years. In the place of medieval social virtues, the Calvinist bourgeoisie set the one sure sign of election -- the accumulation of wealth.<sup>35</sup>

In the nihilist Calvinist world-view, the medieval submergence of the individual into his society was replaced by the absorption of the individual by the state. Man became a commodity, an object producing profit or loss. The Calvinist lost the normal human state of being a part of nature. His extreme pessimism caused him to fear

all of nature, including that within himself; his fanatical individualism caused him to shut himself off not only from nature, but from other men as well.

But Calvin's social vision was clearly not prompted by blind personal greed, by a desire for absolute personal power or by an instinct to social oppression. It was, rather, motivated by humanitarian concerns, primary among which was Liberty.

Calvin took his early humanistic training (in Seneca and Erasmus, among others) with him when he converted to Protestantism at the age of 24, in 1533.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the most important humanist element embodied in the society of Geneva was a respect for logic -- Calvin founded the Geneva Academy in 1558, with specific emphasis on arts and letters.<sup>37</sup> His concern for rationality gives rise to what are perhaps the major contributions of Calvinism to modern political thought. The rationalization of theology stemming from the rationalization of society accelerated in Calvinism the process of secularization that had been halted, at least temporarily, in the Catholic and Lutheran nations. "The great contributions of Calvinism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to natural science, jurisprudence, philology, the critical arts, medicine and mathematics were the accomplishments of a disintegrating theology."<sup>38</sup>

Faith in reason may also be seen as the underlying motivation behind the sternness of Calvinist society. If Calvin had believed absolutely in the baseness of man, the police state would have been unnecessary. But he held out some hope, the product of his humanism.

Some sparks continue to shine in the nature of man, even in its corrupt and degenerate state, which prove him to be a rational creature; and yet this light is smothered by so much ignorance that it cannot act with any degree of efficacy . . . Let us . . . examine the power of understanding. To condemn it to perpetual blindness, so as to leave it no intelligence in anything

is repugnant not only to the Divine word, but also to the experience of common sense.<sup>39</sup>

It was the attempt to fan this innate spark of human goodness that caused an increase in the "restrictive and disciplinary elements of the theocracy" as the state achieved increasing political stability.<sup>40</sup> And only superficially paradoxical to Calvinist pessimism and social control, the spark of perfection when translated into the doctrine of "common grace", gives to the common man the right to determine a better world through revolutionary activity.

And although it appears at the first sight a great disorder, that the people should take unto them the punishment of transgression, yet, when the magistrates and other officers cease to do their duty, they are, as it were, without officers, yea, worse than if they had none at all, and then God giveth the sword into the people's hand. And He Himself becomes immediately their head (if they would seek the accomplishment of His laws) and hath promised to defend them and bless them.<sup>41</sup>

Democratic notions of Liberty and totalitarian social control are born of the same utopian, humanist, intellectual vision -- the perfectibility of man. In this sense there is little difference between Thomas More's ideal and Calvin's implementation; both conceive of an inherent "goodness" in man that will bloom in the proper environment, even though the degree of faith in that concept varies, and both ideal and working model possess, covertly or explicitly, an undercurrent of totalitarian control to provide that environment.

Unlike More, Calvin still places this ultimate achievement in the celestial sphere. But this distinction is no longer as significant as it was in traditional European society. In that structure, celestial paradise was a means of preventing social upheaval; in Calvinism,

based upon and reflecting above all that very phenomenon, the celestial paradise becomes almost an incongruity, an incidental factor to what is at heart a utopian vision.

Shall we say that those who by the art of logic have taught us to speak in a manner consistent with reason, were destitute of understanding themselves? Shall we accuse those of insanity, who by the study of medicine have been exercising their industry for our advantage? And what shall we say of the mathematics? Shall we esteem them the delirious ravings of madmen? On the contrary . . . we shall admire them because . . . they are truly excellent.<sup>42</sup>

This faith in reason and science had no part to play in a traditional culture that had carefully shielded itself from the secularizing effects of over-belief in the rational. Calvin's belief in Progress, as stated here, only makes sense in terms of its relationship to the mainstream development of utopianism.

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The English Civil War of 1642-1650 took Protestant utopianism a step further. English Puritanism, strongly influenced by Scottish Calvinism, had developed by the 1620's a clearly defined utopian basis -- the belief held, particularly among intellectuals like John Mede, that Christ was about to begin a millennial rule on earth.<sup>43</sup> This chiliasm had, by 1640, spread beyond the Puritan middle-classes to infect elements of the artisanal classes and the army -- popular reform movements that became known as the Levellers and the Agitators respectively.<sup>44</sup>

In common with Thomas More, the complaints of these groups and of a third, the rural Diggers, were seemingly legitimate enough; the enclosure of common lands, usury, the end of the ideal of just price,

the beginnings of increased efficiency of production<sup>45</sup> -- all the elements in the breakdown of feudalism and the rise of the middle-class -- had left the peasant and artisanal classes with many of the traditional foundations of their culture swept away.

And, like More, the intellectual leadership of these lower class movements saw this social debasement as an opportunity to satisfy their own messianic individualism in their desire to eliminate the evils of the whole, not just of the recent, past.

Messianic is perhaps not too strong a word -- Gerard Winstanly, like so many revolutionary leaders an educated member of the middle-class,<sup>46</sup> wrote in a pamphlet that "The Creator Reason made the earth a common treasury for beasts and man."<sup>47</sup> The social conception of God had been reduced to the individual capacity for rationality; those most qualified to wield that weapon were, of course, the intellectuals.

Cromwell was at first seen as the forerunner of the messiah,<sup>48</sup> but by the 1650's it had become clear that his revolution was a limited bourgeois revolt, his utopia similarly bourgeois.<sup>49</sup> The revolutionaries who came to oppose him then, while essentially bourgeois themselves, were for one reason or another disaffected -- outsiders and unsuccessful academics often with a personal axe to grind. Of the three key Levellers' leaders, none was from the artisanal classes that they led. Richard Overton grew up in Calvinist Holland, and became a printer in London; William Walwyn was the son of landed Worcestershire nobility and joined the radicals after a stint with the Merchant Adventurers Company; John Lilburne, the most powerful figure of the three, was the black sheep son of a distressed landowner "instinctively a rebel, defying authority without thought of personal consequences."<sup>50</sup> Winstanly, the leading figure in the Diggers' movement evolved a utopian philosophy after he was bankrupted by the economic crisis that sparked the civil war: "the experiment in Digger communism appears to have come between failure as a merchant tailor and some success as a corn dealer."<sup>51</sup>

It was resentment of authority and, it may be assumed, the subsequent desire to place the explicitly messianic intellectual individualist in the corresponding vanguard of the new order, that has turned out time after time to be the fatal flaw in, and the source of the individualism of, egalitarian politics. Of the numerous anti-authoritarian groups active during the Civil War (and there were, according to one contemporary, nearly 200 of them),<sup>52</sup> all condemned lawyers, university scholars, kings, aristocrats and church prelates.<sup>53</sup> While none of the groups, with the exception of a tangential reference by Winstanly, considered the possibility of an increasing standard of living resulting from the levelling of British society, the assumption is implicit and seems to have been taken for granted.<sup>54</sup>

The only non-militarist actions taken by the radical group were those of the Diggers, who moved into and cultivated crown lands -- the perhaps legitimate act of a disenfranchised peasantry claiming their medieval right to work the land. It was only after the occupations had begun that Winstanly joined the sect,<sup>55</sup> bringing with him his own chiliastic theories.<sup>56</sup> It may be useful to compare Winstanly's egalitarian utopianism with this anonymous declaration, c.1649, from the Diggers at Wellingborough, Northamptonshire.

God never gave it [the land] to any sort of people, that they should have it all to themselves and shut out all the rest . . . Divers of the poor are starved to death already, and it were better for us that are living to die by the Sword than by the Famine; And now we consider that Earth is our Mother, and that God hath given it to the children of men, and that the common and waste grounds belong to the poor, . . . and therefore we have begun to bestow our righteous labor upon it, and we shall trust the Spirit for a blessing upon our labor, resolving not to dig up any man's propriety, until they freely give us.<sup>57</sup>

These complaints are aimed less at the ownership of land than at its social misuse. There is no plea for the dissolution of class structures, rather they are respected. The only claims made are for the centuries-old right to common land, claims prompted by extreme hardship. There are elements present suggestive of the decay of traditional society -- a reference, unquoted, to Reason, possibly elements of the pantheism that presages the final collapse of a sophisticated religious structure<sup>58</sup> in the reference to Mother Earth -- but these are elements almost incidental to the main thrust of the document, the reclamation of traditional rights to work within the context of social production.

Building from this basic action, Winstanly would eventually, after the collapse of the experiment, add the crucial decadent elements of utopianism: the denunciation of all ruling classes, and of the basic overriding social conception embodied in religion as hindrances to the equality of man, the exaltation of reason, and science in particular, as the means to achieve the ultimate liberation of the individual.<sup>59</sup> "Why," he asked, "may not we have our Heaven here, and Heaven hereafter too?"<sup>60</sup> Winstanly recognized far more clearly than More the means by which this perfection of man was to be achieved: "There must be suitable laws for every occasion and almost for every action that men do."<sup>61</sup> The creation of the perfect man

meant a willingness to accept the disruption of the family as a kinship group, a system of unfree labour, a rigidly organized and centralized state, and the elevation of common human failings, hypocrisy, gossip and idleness, to the level of civil offences.<sup>62</sup>

For all the egalitarian rhetoric, moreover, Winstanly's call for the destruction of the traditional safety valves of class, which restricted the decadence of non-productive classes to a small elite, is purely individualistic, as is his condemnation of religion, the

basic statement of a society's social conviction.

The egalitarian aspiration to the decadence of the rich is as anti-social an impulse as the ideal of liberty. Both depend upon the fundamental renunciation of social responsibility -- in evolved egalitarianism that responsibility is ceded to the state; in libertarianism it is considered repressive. The two notions are the product of the same anti-social tendency, and as such they cannot be separated.

. . . the notions of freedom and equality must be taken together in the idea of the equal value of individuals as free or self-determining beings, and yet . . . this necessary combination of equality and freedom cannot be elaborated into a coherent system of ethical thought. The principles of freedom and equality are as much opposed to each other as they require each other. From this I conclude that they cannot be the fundamental principles in terms of which we can account adequately for our ethical experience.<sup>63</sup>

The inherent contradiction between the two ideas has not prevented them from forming the basis of modern culture -- a flawed sub-structure which must infect the whole edifice, no matter how soundly reasoned the subsequent ideology may be. Utopian theory is every bit as improbable as religious theory -- the differences are that utopianism promotes a continual social upheaval and sense of dissatisfaction with life, and eventually an almost fatalistic pessimism about the human condition; and, resting as it does upon reason rather than faith, the basic fallacies of utopianism are readily disproved, further shaking social foundations and thus accelerating social change as new solutions are sought.

Gerard Winstanly should not be seen as an isolated instance. His radicalism stems not from his utopianism but from his inclusion

within that concept of social classes otherwise excluded. Cromwell's suppression of the Digger communities in 1646<sup>64</sup> was only the refusal to permit that vision to extend beyond the middle-class. By the seventeenth century, the concept of utopia among the Protestant bourgeoisie had lost its negative connotations and was being positively viewed as a social goal,<sup>65</sup> although it was more generally seen, as in Francis Bacon's "New Atlantis", as a technological and scientific rather than as a social utopia.<sup>66</sup> Utopia was, at its inception, the decadent vision of a debased class, and it has remained so ever since.

## 2. Secular bourgeois utopianism

The eighteenth century saw the addition of two new forms of individualism to the already established economic and religious varieties.

Political individualism may be translated as the ideal of Democracy embracing, firstly, a conception of government as the product of individually given consent; secondly, it sees political representation as serving individual interests rather than class interests or social functions; and finally, it views the function of government as protecting the individual's rights, while opposing the idea "that it might legitimately influence and alter their wants, interpret their interests for them or invade or abrogate their rights."<sup>67</sup>

The second major individualistic impulse evolving at this time was ethical individualism, evolving out of Protestant religious individualism via Thomas Hobbes. By the end of the eighteenth century it had emerged in the philosophies of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill as utilitarianism, the idea that the morality of an act is determined only by its positive or negative consequences.<sup>68</sup> Utilitarianism added a number of elements to libertarian doctrines: "1) A conception of value closely tied to the interests of individuals as they themselves

perceive them; 2) . . . an especially strong conception of the value of personal freedom of choice; 3) a principled objection to interference with self-regarding conduct."<sup>69</sup>

Political individualism is simply the transferral of 'laissez-faire' economics to the political life -- the economic theory itself was formalized around mid-century by theorists like David Ricardo and Adam Smith into a near-utopian scheme: "the unfettered self-interest of individuals . . . conduces to the maximum satisfaction of individuals and to (individual and social) progress."<sup>70</sup>

But for middle-class economics ultimately to triumph, the last vestiges of an absolute moral/social code -- Christianity -- had also to be eliminated; this need was embodied in ethical individualism. Perhaps not surprisingly, the upshot of the moral isolation of man was his alienation and, finally, the nihilism of existentialism.

The existentialist . . . finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There can no longer be any good 'a priori', since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. . . . Dostoevsky once wrote 'If God did not exist everything would be permitted'; and that, for existentialism, is the starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself.<sup>71</sup>

While even an existentialist like Sartre recognizes the nihilism of his own theory, he of course doesn't leave the interpretation there, for this is decadence in the service of utopia. The next step is not annihilation, but liberation. The perfected Man will depend solely upon himself, he will create his own private morality -- "Man

must constitute himself as God and thus be his own highest good."<sup>72</sup> The nihilistic aspects of libertarian doctrine have been repeatedly demonstrated over the last two hundred years, the theory of the perfectibility of man has shown itself to be totally chimerical -- it is a leap of faith, in a religion based upon empirical reason that can tolerate no such leaps.

The absolute isolation of the individual is of course not unprecedented in human history -- it is the signal for the collapse of civilizations. The Greek utopianism that grew out of Ionian philosophy and the dismissal of traditional mythic and class structures, adopted in 507 B.C. history's first democratic constitution. With the destruction of his gods, Man assumed their role, becoming "the self-determining and self-sufficient epitomy of an intelligible harmony which governs the universe as a whole."<sup>73</sup> The delusion lasted a century, when it was decisively crushed by the Peloponnesian War, "and in the fourth century we see a turning away from public to private affairs, a retreat from the world of political activity to the inner world of the imagination and emotions, an increasing individualism".<sup>74</sup> This social fragmentation is paralleled by the sectarianism of later Roman culture. These were not decadent societies which both happened to die. Social decadence -- the fragmentation of a society into personal interests -- is what killed them. There is no reason to suspect that the utopianism of our own culture does not herald the same outcome.

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Man has been forced to vegetate in his primitive stupidity; nothing has been offered to his mind, but stories of invisible powers, upon whom his happiness was supposed to depend. Occupied solely by his fears, and unintelligible reveries, he has always been at the mercy of his priests, who have reserved to

themselves the right of thinking  
for him, and directing his actions.<sup>75</sup>

Happy are men of letters if they  
recognize at last that the surest  
way of making themselves respectable  
is to live united and almost shut up  
among themselves; that by this union  
they will come, without any trouble,  
to give the law to the rest of the  
nation in all affairs of taste and  
philosophy. . . . As if the art of  
instructing and enlightening men  
were not, after the too rare art of  
good government, the noblest portion  
and gift within human reach.<sup>76</sup>

Not only the merchant classes found it desirable to move away from traditional conceptions of Christian morality. The intelligensia had moved from a position of being a social accoutrement or seal of legitimacy for a dominant social class -- as it had remained during the Renaissance -- to a position of independence in the Enlightenment. From this point onwards, intellectuals saw themselves as, and were in practice, a distinct social class;<sup>77</sup> or, more precisely, as non-productive users of excess social production, yet of neither the aristocratic nor clerical classes, the intellectuals had joined the ranks of the middle-class.

The new self image of intellectuals emerges at the moment that the cultural split between popular and elite culture becomes complete. Needless to say, the literati sided in fact with elite culture, but equally as significant, they sided in theory with popular culture -- not as it was, but as it would be with their guidance.

The result was an ambivalent reaction to "the people". The 'philosophes' combined the courtier's scorn for the "multitude of brutal, drunk, thieving little men"<sup>78</sup> with a romanticism of human nature (expressed most blatantly in the idea of the "noble savage") that could only come from a class almost entirely isolated from the

broader social context. Both views are utter distortions of reality, of course, but then the reality of common life has never much bothered the decadent elite. For them, the common man has always been an object to be molded to the ruling ethic. But the 'philosophes' go a step beyond that; for them, the common man is to be taken away from his basic human nature, to an ideal of perfection based, naturally enough, on the molder's image of his own perceived perfection.

What then is a good man? A good man is a man of finely cultivated tastes, in morals as well as in art, whose personality is so harmoniously developed that the unfolding of it reveals the good that is naturally in his nature. This is the way of true philosophy.<sup>79</sup>

The good man, then, exhibits a knowledge of the proper style, in social behaviour and in Culture. The good man has evolved his individuality to a fine degree -- because he has lost the capacity to constructively merge it into his society; the good man is not a social creature, finding his personal fulfillment in that profound merger of individual and whole, he is isolated, individualized, and alienated from his social content. The new Good Man and the old courtier have a great deal in common.

Two basic questions arise out of Enlightenment philosophy: why did the literati wish to include the whole of humanity in their own decadent world, and how?

For creatures of style, fashion may be expected to play a role in the intellectuals' discovery of the masses, and indeed, "Humanitarianism was in vogue in the eighteenth century".<sup>80</sup> This still does not explain why the phenomenon developed, but it does begin to explain the evolution of humanitarian concerns "from something that had been largely a personal affair, lackadaisical, sporadic, and accidental, into a cultural and political process that could be organized and controlled."<sup>81</sup>

Like all stylish concerns, humanitarianism was at heart less a requisite social function, as medieval charity had been, aimed primarily at the recipient of the benefice, than a mirror of the goodness of the Good Person who practised it -- a personal justification for and reinforcement of an otherwise nebulous social superiority. The distinction may seem slight, but in a culture where social status is perceived as absolute, a culture governed by scriptural codes of virtue, charity will be less a political than a moral concern -- with the added benefit to the elite of reinforcing the social order. Charity responded to the fact of need, humanitarianism created an abstraction of the populace, a generalized attribution of specific virtue or failings applied to all alike. This approach provides at best an ephemeral basis from which to evolve a social philosophy. It reflects the individualism of the intelligensia who, isolated from any social context misinterpret the facts of life, yet still presume the right and ability to tamper with human behaviour. At the same time, the fact that intelligent men schooled in reason could make such fundamental errors of observation indicates the degree to which they had already become "shut up among themselves", isolated from the popular culture which they presumed to study.

Humanitarianism replaced the forthright act of giving with the utopian ideal of improving. For the aristocracy, it provided a new basis for nobility in an age which had seriously threatened their right to that claim. To the clergy, it provided a suitably secular means of performing religious work in a secular age; but to the intellectuals, humanitarianism "provided a high-minded cause with which to associate their new stature and nerve".<sup>82</sup> It effectively installed them as the priesthood of the new secular religion, providing them with the raw materials out of which they would form the new order.

The expression of human behaviour in terms of 'good' and 'evil' rather than 'social' and 'anti-social' -- a usage consistent in the works of the philosophes -- suggests the continuation of Biblical bases for judgement until well into the nineteenth century. The issue is perhaps more than merely semantic, for in the moral universe of

Christendom the terms did indeed boil down to a matter of social and antisocial behaviour. With the breakdown of that culture, terms made relative in the context of social interaction necessarily became absolute when they were removed from that context and applied to the individual. Good, in the absence of relative social models, becomes a quality intrinsic to the individual.

[Is] the human race destined to improve itself, whether by new discoveries in the sciences and arts, and consequently in the means of securing individual well-being and general prosperity; or by progress in the principles of conduct and in practical morality; or, lastly, by the actual perfecting of the intellectual, moral, and physical faculties, which can be just as well the result either of the perfecting of the instruments which increase the intensity or direct the use of these faculties, or the perfecting of our natural organization itself?<sup>83</sup>

Man was to be perfected by Progress -- and while Condorcet outlines the three modes theoretically available to the intelligensia to achieve this outcome, it was science that proved the most pragmatic and long-lasting means of implementing it. Technology is measurable; once the basic philosophic ideal of Progress has been agreed upon, an objective analysis of technological Progress is easily reached. The complexity of social behaviour obviously necessitates a sliding scale to measure moral perfection, compromising between real "improvement" and the necessity of increasingly intrusive state laws and mechanisms to enforce it.

The idea of technological Progress was formalized into a "manifesto of scientific utopianism" by an Englishman, Thomas Sprat, in his History of the Royal-Society of London (1667).<sup>84</sup> It was a crucial concept in making plausible the ideal of utopia for all -- since the traditional pyramidal construct of society evolved with its tiny elite because of the limitations of traditional production. Sprat's vision of the "Instrument whereby Mankind may obtain a Dominion

over Things" was the basis of the workless utopia. It lead to Marx' social vision, "wherein the 'mechanical hands' (of workers, or engineers, or scientific technocrats, or self-sufficient participators) take over the philosophical task of determining the perfect arrangements of men in society".<sup>85</sup> But more immediately, the fusion of humanism and science produced the first systematic revolutionary programme of middle-class action. Humanism acquired its utopian means; science acquired a focus and a "conscience".<sup>86</sup>

Henceforth the bourgeois, in contrast to the defenders of feudalism and ecclesiasticism, no longer regarded the state as an immutable product of divine dispensation . . . but as an institution that allowed him to change the hitherto stagnating human society into a community of enterprising citizens.<sup>87</sup>

It was technology -- physical rather than moral science -- that was the most readily adaptable to the enterprising citizen's requirements. The machine-image -- the Newtonian world machine -- became for many 'philosophes' a model that they "longed to imitate" in their reconstituted societies.<sup>88</sup> This is the image that forms the basis of the bourgeois view of mankind, a mechanistic view that bears a close compatability to the individualistic ideals of 'laissez-faire' economic policies.

. . . the American Constitution. . . was based on Newtonian physics: the American doctrine that each power is separated and related to the others by a series of checks and balances is entirely mechanical. Its whole phraseology and conception have been taken from mechanics, from the metaphor of the machine which equals the sum of its parts, and not at all from the biological metaphor of the organism which is more than the sum

of its parts. Correspondingly, too, the American conception of democratic society, insofar as it continued to emphasize the individual -- and thus the 'multitude of voices' rather than the people-as-mass -- tended to remain atomistic and therefore more mechanical than organismic.<sup>89</sup>

What has proven in retrospect to be the logical outcome of this society-as-machine philosophy -- and it is not possible to satisfactorily separate the mechanistic social view from the function of technology (or industry) in bringing it about -- was explicit in the theories of Robert Jacques Turgot, a conservative 'philosophe'.

His interests were those of his employer, Louis XVI, whom he hoped to convince that the survival of the French monarchy rested upon its submission to what he considered man's basic impulse to innovation -- an impulse which had been heretofore stifled by the state, producing a "rut of sameness". Turgot did not advocate a traditional technological innovation -- the functional response to a social need -- he advocated instead a sort of technology as fashion, changing for the sake of change, and for the sake of perpetuating the status quo; he raised "the spirit of novelty to the level of a major passion of human nature".<sup>90</sup>

Turgot encapsulates the whole spirit of modernism -- society as revolutionary rather than static, perpetually seeking the new that is better. Once again, as an underlying assumption of both libertarian and egalitarian thought, the concept tends to reinforce the idea that both streams of revolutionary development differ only superficially. Both ideologies deal with the improvement of man through the improvement of his material conditions; both promised much more than mere material Progress, but neither has delivered more.

The emphasis on novelty rather than utility -- a typically aristocratic concern -- was prophetic. Taken to its logical conclusion when applied to a whole social structure, the courtier's concern for novelty (in the absence of the isolation of court life from the life

of social production) implies a society geared to production, rather than a production geared to society. When industry ceases to perform a social function, when it becomes an end in itself and is permitted to satisfy the instinct, not for social innovation but for simple material well-being and novelty, the decadence of court life will necessarily spread throughout the social structure. The "liberation" of man by the machine has resulted only in man's absolute dependence on it.

This is the net measurable result of scientific utopianism. The history of utopianism may just as well be the history of consumerism. Technology exists to serve industry; man exists to serve industry; industry exists to serve itself. "The Beautiful Bosom of Nature", as Thomas Sprat dreamt in 1667, has indeed been "Expos'd to our view". We have "enter[ed] its Garden, and taste[d] of its Fruits, and satisf[ied] our selves with its plenty . . .".<sup>91</sup> He failed to speculate on the state of Nature after the party was over, or for that matter on the state of the guests themselves.

The buoyant optimism of the messiahs of the material utopia was balanced by strains of resistance and pessimism running through the Enlightenment.

In Rousseau, the abstraction of Man reaches a peak. His doctrine of the State of Nature is a valuable illustration of the individualism of a crumbling social structure. Natural man is pre-social and pre-moral, and in this condition his natural goodness comes to the fore.<sup>92</sup>

Natural man is an isolated being, who is rarely in conflict with other members of his species, and even in such rare cases conflicts are temporary and of no moral significance. He is dependent on others neither materially nor mentally, but lives entirely in and for himself. In this sense his life can be said to be ordered wholly around himself.<sup>93</sup>

This is hardly the definition of a social animal -- and for Rousseau, it was precisely human society that brought about the corruption of natural man. His solution is not the return to a state of nature, which he recognized as impossible,<sup>94</sup> but the creation of a 'monde ideal'.

The inhabitants of this ideal world, while primarily animated by love of self, have expansive souls and can embrace many persons. Unmoved by appearances, "they pass their lives in enjoyment, doing each day what seems good for themselves and right for their fellows . . .".<sup>95</sup>

Science and reason were called upon in the creation of the ideal world -- but they were defined according to moral function. The creation of the proper state would automatically result in the perfected man.<sup>96</sup> Rousseau, then, rejects the ideals of the scientific utopians only inasmuch as they foresaw individual liberation through the autonomous functioning of reason and science. The difference in theory is that between libertarianism and egalitarianism, but again the differences are minimal. The goal of Rousseau's Social Contract is not the creation of an organic society -- like the traditional society that still continued outside Europe's urban industrial centres -- but the liberation of the individual. Men are equal in their equal right to self-interest.<sup>97</sup>

But Rousseau was not entirely optimistic about his new scheme. He recognized that on any but the political level self-interest would produce discord, and his solution was the social isolation inherent in individualism.

If citizens can in respect of their particular life be kept apart as much as possible (they should be, he says, as little dependent on each other as possible), and if they can be brought

together only in the political realm in which nothing but common interests are noted and celebrated, the inherent disunity . . . can be to a certain extent neglected or ignored.<sup>98</sup>

Man will reach his social paradise, then, by renouncing his social nature altogether, except on those carefully orchestrated occasions when the State demonstrates a non-existent unity. And yet, this frigid totalitarianism had as its intent the liberation of emotion, and its messiah became an idol of anarcho-syndicalism,<sup>99</sup> generally acknowledged to be the extreme left of the political spectrum.

### 3. The realization of bourgeois utopia -- The United States

The philosophes' great hopes for the embodiment of the monde ideal lay not in Europe, where the tyrannies of class structure were considered too deeply rooted to ever be entirely overcome. They looked rather to the new world, and the chance for a completely fresh start.

It is difficult in retrospect to appreciate fully that the great expansion in exploration and colonization -- that opened North America and the world to European enterprise in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and with the industrial revolution transformed Europe itself -- had as its motive not only simple mercantilism, but the ideological vision of a heavenly world controlled and ordered by reason. Yet to overlook this basic and genuine utopian impulse -- as we in the West today, now that that belief has died, tend to do -- is to misconstrue the underlying same-ness of the two ideologies now vying for global domination. Socialism seeks liberty through equality, but democracy also sought equality -- as the end result of liberty.<sup>100</sup> And in practice as in theory, science was seen as the most concrete way to bring both about.

It is impossible to imagine the Height to which may be carried, in a thousand years, the Power of Man over Matter. We may perhaps learn to deprive large Masses of their Gravity, and give them absolute Levity, for the sake of easy Transport. Agriculture may diminish its Labour and double its Produce; all Diseases may by sure means be prevented or cured, not excepting even that of Old Age, and our Lives lengthened at pleasure even beyond the antedeluvian Standard. O that moral Science were in as fair a way of Improvement, that Men would cease to be Wolves to one another, and that human Beings would at length learn what they now improperly call Humanity!<sup>101</sup>

Equality, or Benjamin Franklin's vision of it as expressed in his Poor Richard Improved, lay in the prosperity open to all through the exercise of individual virtues. "He that hath a trade hath an estate; . . . Then plough deep while sluggards sleep, and you shall have corn to sell and to keep."<sup>102</sup>

The equality proposed for the United States meant more than the simple political equality of an electorate. As with Rousseau, equality meant the equal right to self-interest; but recognizing the inevitable abuses of this idea -- a sort of monarchy through ownership -- the Americans held in theory to Locke's liberal theory of equality, which required that "enough and as good [be] left in common for others."<sup>103</sup>

In the American utopia all men were created equal; the preservation of that equality was, as in all utopias, the function of the State. "The body politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals; it is a social compact by which the whole people covenants with each citizen and each citizen with the whole people, that all shall be governed . . . for the common good."<sup>104</sup> Working from the assumption that man was naturally "good", it was assumed that the state's function would be relatively unobtrusive ("It would be thought

a hard government, that should tax its people one-tenth part of their time, to be employed in its service").<sup>105</sup> The massive incursion of government into the common life today -- for education, public welfare, warfare, for the protection of the public from industry and from government -- suggests a basic flaw in the notion.

The ideals of liberal equality remained plausible in the United States for a couple of reasons long after they had vanished in Britain. America had, in the first place, a vast untapped resource which permitted the development of a general entrepreneurial spirit, but equally important, Puritanism continued to exert a direct political influence in the country for a long time after religion had been safely compartmentalized elsewhere.

While the American Revolution was primarily economic rather than social -- a fact which accounts for the lack, for a considerable length of time, of an art of social conviction accompanying the Revolution<sup>106</sup> -- it was the economic rebellion of the middle and lower bourgeoisie, and not a "capitalist" insurrection at all. The interests of the revolutionaries, then, continued to be served by the religion that their class had created, and that religion continued to place its distinctive stamp on the revolution.

No rebels have been more saturated with respect for traditional morality and civic order, yet without calling for dictatorship or terror; and no enthusiasts for the millennial prospects of the revolutionary future can ever have been as troubled as the Americans were by the special guilts of those who considered themselves a chosen people, addicted to declaring occasions for public fasts and national humiliation. Calvinism, originally elitist and authoritarian, offered themes of constitutional limitations and collective redemption that could be redefined in a post-Puritan world of greater toleration and wider popular

participation in government so as  
to lend the energy of moral passion  
to the republican cause.<sup>107</sup>

The distinctiveness of the American Revolution, then, arises from its combination of the two current streams of utopian ideology. It is the intellectual and the chiliastic religious vision brought down to the the level of the common man -- to all common men to a greater or lesser degree, with the significant exception of slaves,<sup>108</sup> who did not share in the enthusiasm for perhaps obvious reasons. But it was the Protestant element which, in contradiction of Weber's theory, curbed the growth of capitalism. The continued influence of the religious sects "dramatized the limitation on individual private judgement by a dogmatic Christianity that found social expression in a rigorous discipline of church members."<sup>109</sup>

It was the remnants of the social impulses of religion that produced in America a relative social cohesiveness lacking from the beginning in revolutionary France, and achieved only by the development of the police state in fascist Germany and the Soviet Union. However tattered those remnants had become under Puritan individualism and however contradictory the social philosophy that emerged, the restraining influence is indisputable.

Yet contradictory the ethic certainly was. While Franklin hoped that "the Luxury of a few Merchants on the Seacoast will not be the Ruin of America," he added in the same letter this purely pragmatic mercantile sentiment: "Is not the Hope of one day being able to purchase and enjoy luxuries a great Spur to Labour and Industry?". To a traditional view of the value of social production -- "The People of the Trading Towns may be rich and luxurious, while the Country possesses all the Virtues, that tend to private Happiness and publick Prosperity" -- he appends the typical utopian longing to abolish work: "if every Man and Woman would work for four Hours each Day on something useful, that Labour would produce sufficient to procure all the Necessaries and Comforts of Life."<sup>110</sup>

If, as was suggested in Chapter III, the radical Protestant Reform was a means of elevating the non-productive and individualistic -- decadent -- middle-class to a level of social respectability already granted urban artisans, then this would account for Franklin's seemingly legitimate concern for social production. But, as the French and Russian revolutions demonstrated, the glorification of the debased classes produces only legitimacy; it cannot replace the social bases required for the recreation of a homogenous society.

The elements that Protestantism contributed to early American social cohesion -- the philosophical denial of luxury and a code of morality -- were vestiges of traditional society that Protestantism had, to a degree, retained. It is debatable how much the Puritan virtues of diligence and thrift contributed to the growth of American capitalism. The degree of influence aside, these are elements that stem from the materialistic self-centredness of a decadent class; they are not the creation of Protestantism. As a faith created by the middle-class, it was inevitable that it embrace those qualities.

#### 4. The Radical Left: individualism and equality

The capitalist system sows the seeds of its own destruction by unleashing vast irrational appetites and ambitions which it cannot fulfill. Labor and life lose all creative purpose and meaning and as a result it produces discontent, alienation and an indictment against its whole system. Socialism is the penalty it pays. But socialism carries on the work . . . and reflects [Progressive civilization's] bourgeois principles; it aims to develop civilization still further without infusing it with new values. Thus, industrial civilization manufactures fictions, inevitably undermines the discipline and motivating principle

of labour, violates the environment,  
disrupts the human personality and in  
these ways prepares its own downfall.<sup>111</sup>

The modern view of political relations as a spectrum with antithetical polarities flanking a central compromise is perhaps misleading (especially as the idea originated in the seating arrangement of the Hall of the Convention, the seat of France's revolutionary assembly).<sup>112</sup> A simple progression, from a single utopian impulse, seems to be more accurate.

If that vision is the product of the decay of a civilization -- the result of the breakdown of traditional structures and especially of traditional social beliefs -- if the basic underlying social conception of man has been superceded by a personal one on a mass scale, then proposed solutions to the problem must be examined for their own foundations in the dominant social malaise.

As a civilization loses its over-riding social conviction it fragments. In the absence of social points of reference, the importance of the individual is more and more esteemed. As the estimation of the individual's potential grows, he assumes the characteristics of the only superior creature he knows -- his gods, themselves the mythic representation of the society as a whole, and his lords, whose earthly paradise he desires for himself.

If a philosophy arises that views individualism as the source of social fragmentation, that sets itself against the class through which decadence has spread throughout the social structure, and that disavows utopianism as a credible outlook -- as socialism, and Marxism in particular, does -- then theoretically the major problems have been solved. But even the most fervent Marxist would have to agree that the problems have not yet been solved. Therefore either the perception of the problems is flawed, or the solution is itself a logical outgrowth of these problems.

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Early in nineteenth century Europe, the logical consequences of rational individualism -- liberty -- had already been realized. It was not the realization of Self, but alienation; not the social and moral cohesion and material paradise of healthy competition among liberated individuals, but the urban nightmare of a disenfranchised, dispirited urban proletariat. For the members of this class at least, freedom to reason meant only the complete standardization of thought through the requirements of industrial manufacture: collectivism was "the adequate organization of an already collectivized world."<sup>113</sup>

While condemning libertarian individualism, Marx failed to differentiate between individualism and individuality. He believed that in an unalienated state -- "the individual and the species-life of man are not different . . . However much he is a particular individual . . . man is just as much the totality, the ideal totality, the subjective existence of society as something thought and felt. . .".<sup>114</sup> Society is therefore not the subjective construct of its objective components -- as the traditional spiritual world-view would have it -- it is, ideally, society that is objective and the individual that is chimerical. In this ideal state, then, the interests of the individual cannot be separated from the interests of the whole.

By correctly defining those elements that create alienation and removing them -- by reinstating ideal social conditions through the destruction of social class and religion -- individuals will, as subjective components of that objective social construct, necessarily behave as social animals: each giving according to his ability and taking according to his needs. The logical outcome would be the withering away of the state: "it would have no institution of government separate and estranged from the people, and it would have no organized coercive force, for none would be needed."<sup>115</sup>

Attacking individualism and humanism<sup>116</sup> and the utopianism<sup>117</sup> that grows out of the abstraction of humanist thought, Marx in effect takes the latter's abstraction of human behaviour to its

logical conclusion. The complete separation of elite culture, and particularly that of the intelligensia, from popular culture had taken the 'common man' from beast through the idealized happy peasant and noble savage, through utopian perfection to, with Marx, the most convenient abstraction of all -- nonexistence: the collectivized industrial worker becomes the collectivized society.

If Marx had left his theory there, the regimentation of the Soviet police state (with the significant exception of the absence of the withering away of the state) would be the perfect embodiment of Marxist ideology. But of course, the liberation of the society was by definition to result in the basic utopian desire, the liberation of the individual. Marx, in his earlier philosophy, sees this liberation in purely romantic terms, as the encouragement of self-development producing unheard-of creative powers in man.<sup>118</sup> The liberated man is the archetypical inspired genius. If his behaviour is no longer antisocial, it is because society has degenerated to suit his needs.

Marx's view of man is of a being with a wide range of creative potentialities, whose "own self-realization exists as an inner necessity, a need". In the truly human society of communism there will be "a new manifestation of human powers and a new enrichment of the human being" . . .<sup>119</sup>

The utopian impulse here is obvious; man is naturally good and requires only the proper state to evoke that goodness. Like most utopian theorists, Protestant, bourgeois or leftist, the new goodness that man will assume is a princely one, where "a dynamic economy"<sup>120</sup> would replace the need for (as all of these princely aspirants have seen it) degrading work. Like the courtier, all of society would lead the decadent life in which social production was the responsibility of machinery; Marx "foresaw technological progress reaching so high a level -- virtual automation -- that man's relation

to the machine would become purely intellectual-scientific guidance. Total technology is the ineradicable signature of the Marxist utopia."<sup>121</sup>

For bourgeois and radical intellectuals alike, science and technology had by the nineteenth century become the decisive vehicles for achieving utopia -- they were Progress: no longer the nebulous Progress of improving human nature, but precise, demonstrable technological Progress, behind which human nature would meekly tag along, improving by necessity as technology improved its environment.

Science in modern society, in America as in Russia, thus carries a near-religious ethos of conviction and sacrifice. The new elites arising within these societies owe their ascendancy and their allegiance in large part to science. The scientific cadres proper, the social scientists, the government administrative personnel, even the military all look to science not merely as the vehicle of their expertise but "as the magnetic north of their compass of values".<sup>122</sup>

With Marx, theoretic science plays an unprecedented role. Not only is it the means of achieving heaven on earth, but the theories themselves were presented as 'scientific', and therefore, as inevitable. But if science, as the new hope for the salvation of mankind, forms the religious focus of western life, Marx' attack on utopianism amounts only to an exposure of earlier utopians' heretical refusal to properly understand technological predestination. For all its denial of utopianism, elements of prophesy and, therefore, of fate, form the backbone of Marxist thought. To Marx the prophetic fulfillment lay in a totally epistemological view of history -- that Progress is inevitable and good, that it will necessarily lead to the enlightenment of class consciousness, which in turn will produce an "historically determined freedom from history".<sup>123</sup>

In another version of the same idea, Georg Lukacs would say . . . that each class imposes on the society an artificial order of its own making, but presents it as nature; the proletariat would be no exception so far as the artificiality of its order is concerned, but it will be able to say it openly, since its artificiality is very much in line with the universal interests of men.<sup>124</sup>

Once again the prophecy is based on Platonic utopianism -- that an ideal exists that has only to be set in the proper environment to be "released" -- for the rule of the proletariat is itself transitory, bringing man inevitably to anarchy -- "the free, uncoerced cooperation of reason-guided men educated by the collective requirements of their industrial work."<sup>125</sup>

History, then, does not reveal human strength and achievement, but rather only the oppression of mankind through its inability to achieve class consciousness. When man has progressed sufficiently to achieve that goal, he will be able to eventually release his innate goodness and create a new history -- as it should be, and not as it was. The danger inherent in this view, which Marx himself recognized and reacted against,<sup>126</sup> but did not in the least retard, is the self-appointment of messianic leaders to aid the spread of the "natural" growth of class consciousness.

Nor is messianism intrinsic only to Marxism. The basic messianic impulse -- that man is not adequate as he is, that he must be led to perfection, and that that perfection is embodied in the person of the messiah -- is the hallmark of the nineteenth century. All of the nineteenth century reformers were fired by apocalyptic visions focussing primarily on their own achievement of Enlightenment. Saint-Simon believed that God spoke through his mouth.<sup>127</sup> Owen reverted in his old age "to Christian millenarianism, which he mixed with a hodgepodge of pseudo-scientific cosmological notions".<sup>128</sup> Fourier tried to entice the Rothschilds' economic backing by promising

them the Kingdom of Jerusalem.<sup>129</sup> "There were little churches around Feureback, Strauss, the young Hegelians, Wagner, the romantic materialists, . . . Nietzsche, Rilke and Gunther."<sup>130</sup> Marxism, too, produced its cult figures -- Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, Castro, Guevara -- but it has managed as well to redirect the focus of cult attention to include the proletariat -- the Chosen Class, a merely semantic variant of the Chosen People.

The proletariat, thus, became a kind of collective Messiah, and to it belonged the future as inevitably as predestination. Man was to be reborn and the genius of man resurrected, exploitation was the original sin; a new Adam was to come from the ranks of the poor and persecuted. It is almost as if every central idea in the history of religion had been plagiarized . . .<sup>131</sup>

But the vision is profoundly Calvinist in nature, with its roots firmly planted in the bourgeois millenarianism surrounding Cromwell and the egalitarianism of the equally bourgeois Levellers and bourgeois-led Diggers. Like Calvinism, the ultimate goal of Marxists and anarchists, the ultimate goal of Progress is self-liberation, to be achieved by an 'inner-light' or class-consciousness, the possession of which places the believer beyond the oppressive laws and moral codes of the old order.<sup>132</sup>

The Calvinists' Chosen People were the middle-classes -- decadent and individualistic because of their alienation from social production. Marx recognized that cause and effect, but created a new Chosen People equally alienated from truly social production by the atomistic nature of industrial manufacture. For Calvin and Marx, history was something to be overcome and running beneath it all, the idea that if that history were changed properly, the vistas spreading before the new man were limitless. Man was, through force of historical Progress, destined to become superman. Nor is the vision, born of the individualism of a decaying society, explicable in terms of political

polarizations. The vision was the same for the American and French Revolutionaries, for Marx, Bakunin and Hitler.

\*

We indulge ourselves in musick:  
 we meet with finer and more complex  
 compositions. In these we find a  
 pleasure much higher, and begin to  
 despise what formerly pleased us . . .  
 As we improve and correct a low  
 taste for harmony by enuring the ear  
 to finer compositions; a low taste  
 for beauty, by presenting the finer  
 works, which yield an higher pleasure;  
 so we improve our moral taste by  
 presenting larger systems to our mind . . . 133

One of the most striking elements in the history of utopianism is a complete absence of traditional arts of social conviction. The radical Protestants banned Catholicism's opulent displays of belief; their high arts -- those of seventeenth century Holland in particular -- reflect the buoyancy of their society as it was, with no references to a utopian future. When the society began to decay, so did its art. There is no high art of the Industrial Revolution nor of the American Revolution. <sup>134</sup>

The traditional arts that were pressed into the service of utopia were low arts of persuasion -- broadsheet attacks on the old order; the papacy, priesthood and aristocracy. It is perhaps significant that, even after the various revolutionary movements had triumphed, the function of their arts did not change from persuasion to social conviction. American advertising still attempts to convince the American people of the Truth of their revolution; Soviet and Nazi propaganda sought to depict the perfectibility that the masses held in their hands, and have consistently refused to grasp.

The absence of an art of social utopian conviction in any of the world's social revolutions should alone convince utopian planners of the fallacy of their basic precept: the intuitive, natural impulse

to self-perfection. This "perfection" has always been resisted by the societies upon which it has been inflicted because its attack on human society must invariably amount only to dehumanization.

But utopianism has not relied exclusively on low art polemicists for iconographic support. The cult of uselessness that emerged from the Enlightenment was and remains a purely utopian phenomenon. It could be nothing else. Fine Artists rejected the value of the traditional cultures that still surrounded them and chose to perfect man's "moral taste" through the "higher pleasure" of an ennobling Fine Art. Fine Artists did not join the utopians; they were utopian by definition.

Having rejected society as it was in favour of society as it could be, the nineteenth century academics from David onward found themselves with no source of legitimate "inspiration" (as the traditional arts had been inspired to respond to social need). So eclecticism -- the rummaging about through history for a "perfected" society upon which to base the New Jerusalem -- blossomed as never before. The late-century's vision of the Greco-Roman heaven-on-earth was about as decadent and bloodless as the real thing must have been.

The avant-garde rejected the antique utopia as it rejected the bourgeoisie as the Chosen Class. But all the modernist revolution amounted to was the replacement of one secessionist class with another, the industrial proletariat. Greco-Roman paradise was replaced by an array of other utopias -- of technology, of primitive man, of the subconscious mind; even purely epistemological utopias based only on the rejection of everything bourgeois in favour of anything "revolutionary". But the underlying basis of academic utopianism -- that Art is Good for us and contemplation of it will help to perfect us -- has remained entirely unaltered by modernism.

Modernism is simply more decadent than academic Fine Art, for it has moved further away from the sources of society's strength. In the arts, those strengths are reflected in the social focus and craftsmanship of the artisanal tradition. The academics had managed by the

end of the nineteenth century to destroy the social focus of art; the avant-garde had, by the 1940's, swept away everything that remained of the old order, and in so doing, eventually created the perfect, dehumanized Art.

## FOOTNOTES (Chapter V)

1. Mulford Q. Sibley, Nature and Civilization (Itasca, Illinois 1977), 36.
2. Quoted in Fenner Brockway, Britain's First Socialists (London 1980), 141.
3. F.E. Manuel and F.P. Manuel, Utopian Thought in the Western World, op. cit., 1.
4. Ibid., 119-121.
5. Saint Thomas More, Utopia (London 1974; rpt. 1910 ed.), 52.
6. Friedrich Heer, The Intellectual History of Europe, op. cit., 350.
7. Saint Thomas More, op. cit., 63.
8. F.E. Manuel and F.P. Manuel, op. cit., 126.
9. Ibid., 123.
10. E.E. Reynolds, Thomas More and Erasmus (London 1965), 114.
11. Friedrich Heer, op. cit., 351.
12. For conflicting views on More's tone, see Heer, op. cit., 352 and Thomas Molnar, Utopia, The Perennial Heresy (New York 1967), 187-188, who suggest that More was genuine in his vision of Utopia. E.E. Reynolds, op. cit., 113 and Manuel and Manuel, op. cit., 122, see it more as a critical reflection of contemporary society.
13. St. Thomas More, op. cit., 98.
14. Ibid., 64.
15. Ibid., 65.
16. Ibid., 41, 107.
17. Friedrich Heer, op. cit., 351; St. Thomas More, op. cit., 107-114.
18. The actual numbers involved in warfare is perhaps more significant than codes of conduct. While the great armies of antiquity numbered up to 35,000 men, medieval armies ranged between one and

ten thousand.

-- Richard Barber, The Knight and Chivalry (London, 1970), 189.

19. St. Thomas More, op. cit., 82.
20. Ibid., 84.
21. Ibid., 87, 90-93.
22. Thomas Molnar, op. cit., 188.
23. St. Thomas More, op. cit., 59.
24. Ibid., 70.
25. Ibid., 63.
26. Ibid., 64-65.
27. Ibid., 65.
28. Ibid., 102.
29. Ibid., 66.
30. Ibid., 67.
31. Eduard Heimann, Reason and Faith in Modern Society (Middletown, Connecticut 1961), 40.
32. Friedrich Heer, op. cit., 320.
33. Thomas Molnar, op. cit., 65.
34. F.E. and F.P. Manuel, op. cit., 295.
35. Friedrich Heer, op. cit., 321-322.
36. Quirinus Breen, John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism (Archon Books 1968; rpt. 1931 ed.), 146.
37. Ross W. Collins, Calvin and the Libertines of Geneva (Toronto 1968), 144.
38. Friedrich Heer, op. cit., 320.
39. John Calvin, "Institutes", quoted in Q. Breen, op. cit., 159-160.
40. John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (New York 1967), 188.

41. Christopher Goodman (1558), quoted in George L. Mosse, Calvinism (New York 1963), 18.
42. John Calvin quoted in Q. Breen, op. cit., 161.
43. Riedrich Heer, op. cit., 365.
44. Fenner Brockway, op. cit., 25, 36.
45. Henry Holorenschaw, The Levellers and the English Revolution, (New York 1971; rpt. 1939 ed.), 12-13.
46. Fenner Brockway, op. cit., 126.
47. Henry Holorenschaw, op. cit., 23.
48. Manuel and Manuel, op. cit., 335.
49. Henry Holorenschaw, op. cit., 14.
50. Fenner Brockway, op. cit., 25-26.
51. J.C. Davis, Utopia and the Ideal Society (Cambridge 1981), 176.
52. Manuel and Manuel, op. cit., 334.
53. Ibid., 337.
54. Henry Holorenschaw, op. cit., 83-86.
55. Fenner Brockway, op. cit., 129.
56. Friedrich Heer, op. cit., 366.
57. Fenner Brockway, op. cit., 131.
58. Thomas Molnar, Utopia . . ., op. cit., 60-61.  
 "Pantheists regard civilization as an arbitrary construct, arbitrary because men choose the values by which they live. 'Why these values rather than those?' asks the pantheist, and he concludes that values are mere illusions: either values do not exist or else any autonomous act, as the existentialists say, is a value."
59. Henry Holorenschaw, op. cit., 24-27.
60. Quoted in Melvin J. Laskey, Utopia and Revolution (Chicago 1976), 232.

61. G. Winstanley quoted in J.C. Davis, *op. cit.*, 169.
62. J.C. Davis, *Ibid.*, 203.
63. John Charvet, A Critique of Freedom and Equality (Cambridge 1981), 1.
64. Friedrich Heer, *op. cit.*, 366.
65. Manuel and Manuel, *op. cit.*, 336.
66. Eduard Bernstein, Cromwell and Communism, H.J. Stenning, trans., (New York, 1963; rpt. 1930 ed.; orig. ed. 1895), 32.
67. Steven Lukes, Individualism, *op. cit.*, 79-80.
68. *Ibid.*, 99.
69. Rolf E. Sartorius, Individual Conduct and Social Norms (Encino, California 1970), 157.
70. Steven Lukes, *op. cit.*, 89.
71. Jean Paul Sartre, quoted in *Ibid.*, 104.
72. J.M. Spier, Christianity and Existentialism, D.H. Freeman, trans., (Philadelphia 1953), 67.
73. Denys Haynes, Greek Art and the Idea of Freedom (London 1981), 53.
74. *Ibid.*, 71-72.
75. Baron d'Holback, "The Priestly Religion", The Enlightenment, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1965 [12th ed.]), 57-62, esp. 59.
76. D'Alembert, quoted in Charles Frankel, The Faith of Reason (New York 1969), 10.
77. Charles Frankel, *Ibid.*, 8-9.
78. Voltaire, quoted in Harry C. Payne, The Philosophes and the People (New Haven and London 1976), 19.
79. Lord Shaftsbury, paraphrased by Louis I. Bredvold, The Brave New World of the Enlightenment (Ann Arbor 1962; rpt. 1961 ed.), 71.
80. Harry C. Payne, *op. cit.*, 42.

81. Charles Frankel, op. cit., 8.
82. Harry C. Payne, op. cit., 42.
83. Marquis de Condorcet, "Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progres de l'esprit humain"; W. Warren Wagar, trans, and ed. The Idea of Progress Since the Renaissance, op. cit., 75-86, esp. 85.
84. Melvin J. Lasky, op. cit., 350.
85. Ibid., 351.
86. Charles Frankel, op. cit., 7.
87. Robert Ulich, Progress or Disaster? (New York 1971), 11.
88. Manuel and Manuel, op. cit., 465.
89. Donald Drew Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts, op. cit., 26.
90. Manuel and Manuel, op. cit., 464-465.
91. Melvin J. Lasky, op. cit., 351.
92. Henry Vyverberg, Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1958), 84.
93. John Charvet, A Critique of Freedom and Equality, op. cit., 58.
94. Mulford Q. Sibley, Nature and Civilization, op. cit., 53.
95. Manuel and Manuel, op. cit., 444, quoting Rousseau, Rousseau, juge de Jean-Jacques.
96. Charles Frankel, op. cit., 81.
97. John Charvet, op. cit., 68.
98. Ibid.
99. Manuel and Manuel, 444.
100. John Charvet, op. cit., 97.
101. Benjamin Franklin to Joseph Priestly, Feb., 1780; quoted in Adrienne Koch, ed. The American Enlightenment (New York 1965), 91.

102. Benjamin Franklin, "Poor Richard Improved" (1757), Moses Rischin, ed., The American Gospel of Success, op. cit., 33-38, esp. 34-35.
103. John Locke quoted in John Charvet, op. cit., 98.
104. John Adams, quoted in Henry Steele Commager, The Empire of Reason (Garden City, New York 1977), 220.
105. Benjamin Franklin, "Poor Richard . . .", op. cit., 34.
106. Donald Drew Egbert, op. cit., 23.
107. Cushing Strout, The New Heavens and New Earth, op. cit., 54.
108. George Rude, Ideology and Popular Protest (London 1980), 95.
109. Cushing Strout, op. cit., 103-104.
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111. I. Robert Sinai, The Decadence of the Modern World (Cambridge, Mass. 1978), 191.
112. D.D. Egbert, op. cit., 51-52.
113. Eduard Heimann, Reason and Faith in Modern Society, op. cit., 95-96.
114. Karl Marx, quoted in John Charvet, op. cit., 146.
115. Richard N. Hunt, The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels vol. I (Pittsburgh 1974), 130.
116. D.F.B. Tucker, Marxism and Individualism (Oxford 1980), 11.
117. Melvin J. Lasky, Utopia and Revolution, op. cit., 38.
118. Leonard P. Wessell, Jr., Karl Marx -- Romantic Irony and the Proletariat (Baton Rouge, Louisiana 1979), 203.
119. Steven Lukes, Individualism, op. cit., 70 (quoting Marx).
120. Manuel and Manuel, op. cit., 715.
121. Ibid.

122. I. Robert Sinaï, op. cit., 158.
123. Zygmunt Bauman, Socialism, The Active Utopia (London 1976), 62.
124. Ibid., 63.
125. Eduard Heimann, op. cit., 106.
126. Friedrich Heer, Europe, Mother of Revolutions; C. Kesaler and J. Adcock, trans. (London 1971; orig. ed. 1964), 111.
127. Manuel and Manuel, op. cit., 611.
128. Ibid., 692-693.
129. Ibid., 645.
130. Friedrich Heer, The Intellectual History of Europe, op. cit., 455.
131. Melvin J. Lasky, op. cit., 63.
132. Eduard Heimann, op. cit., 106.
133. Francis Hutcheson, "Concerning the Moral Sense" (1755), The Enlightenment, op. cit., 69-75, esp. 70-71.
134. The United States did, of course, evolve a strong high art of social conviction throughout the nineteenth century -- and managed to avoid the sterility of European Fine Art academicism through American resistance to Continental "foppishness". But, as with Dutch Protestant art, the Americans seem to have been fired less by chiliarism than by their immediate, seemingly limitless opportunity.

## CHAPTER VI: The Degradation of Work

## 1. The artisanal tradition

In learning to use tools we are  
secretly learning to use ourselves;  
as controls the tools merely mediate  
the relation, they objectify our  
skills.<sup>1</sup>

Art, once again, is material social production; the ability to produce crops and objects defines the human species. A history of art that separates an object from its social function cannot conceivably produce an accurate assessment of the history of objects -- no archaeologist or anthropologist could even think of biasing his discipline so absolutely on the whims of contemporary taste. Yet this is, of course, precisely what the history of style has done.

As material production, art is necessarily the product of work. In traditional societies, this work was carried out by social orders nearer the bottom than the top of the social scale -- by artisans, the makers of artifacts.

But the artisan, as he appears in the European guild system, represents a relatively late stage in the evolution of work -- the result of a highly refined and socially productive division of labour circumscribed by the universal social conviction of Christendom. In this society, as noted in Chapter II, 'art' meant essentially skill or craft -- primarily references to the quality of an object. In less refined social structures, like that of Egypt, qualitative concerns were somewhat overshadowed by more pragmatic ones: an imposing structure, for example, was defined as 'menekh' -- efficient work.<sup>2</sup>

S.H. Udy, in a study published in 1970,<sup>3</sup> presents a perhaps obvious breakdown of the approach to work in pre-industrial societies. He identifies five types of pre-industrial social structures, in 125 societies, contemporary and historical.<sup>4</sup> Among the most primitive cultures studied, work organization was almost exclusively production

determined -- the minimal environmental control exerted by peoples without even a sedentary agriculture obviously requires the effective manipulation of chance occurrences. The overkill of the Blackfoot buffalo jump was necessary to guarantee minimum food production.

With the development of sedentary agriculture, the focus of work swings dramatically away from being primarily production-oriented to being socially-oriented. With the development of a complex division of labour, work organization was, in the cases examined, entirely socially determined.<sup>5</sup> Efficiency of production fell as social complexity rose<sup>6</sup> -- it must be concluded that as pressing quantitative demands lessened, they were replaced by more socially-oriented qualitative interests.

Socially determined forms are the simplest [of the types examined] . . . and -- unfortunately for industrial development -- also the most stable. In a socially determined work organization the structure of the work organization is socially given. Implicit in this structure is some technology . . . This technology, in turn, results physically in the achievement of some production objective. In the course of pursuing this objective, the work organization is not concerned with the direct relationship of this objective as such to the social setting, nor with the direct relationship of the technology to the social setting. Rather, the organization itself is oriented primarily to the social setting directly, and it "automatically", as it were, performs work as a result of the general social functioning.<sup>7</sup>

Both middle-class line-of-progress methodology and Marxian dialectical notions of continual flux fail to adequately account for the traditional society's stability and resistance to technological change. Progress from primitive to traditional social structures is a process of overcoming natural impediments and the subsequent dependency

on purely efficiency-determined work. Marxist dialectics are seldom plausible when applied to a static class structure like that of the Middle-Ages. Both theories bring to the period their own Progressive biases and so see it primarily as a period of regression.

But if man is a social being, the achievement of a purely social determination of production is the highest possible realization of his social nature. If this is true, then of course these cultures will deny further progress, and if pressed, will change only in order to stay the same.

The reversal of that ideal stasis with the return to concerns for efficiency placed ahead of social functionalism amounts to a sort of neo-barbarism consistent with a decaying social system -- a system past its peak, not progressing toward it. Scientific socialism, bound as thoroughly as capitalism to a buoyant economic and industrial expansionism and trade-based economy does virtually nothing to deter the barbarism inherent in industrial production.

What Marx and modern communism after him really wanted was to restore the relationship of things in the archaic society by a consciously elaborated production of these relations. The 'plan' took the place of the increasingly declining functional system of archaic society. The positive abolition of private property, as a form of appropriation of human life, was therefore the positive abolition of all alienation.

This human society is the new  
church of man who redeems himself.<sup>8</sup>

For social engineers from Thomas More to Marx, the Middle Ages have consistently been the model upon which utopian visions were based. Occasionally, as with Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites, the period itself was seen as a utopia which could be regained. But for the most successful utopians, like Marx, it presented only a

model of sociability which the proper engineering could turn into an earthly paradise -- a social tinkering aimed at above all the institutions of social class and, related to that, private property. The result would be liberty and equality combined with the sociability of medieval life.

But, as noted above, the stages of social evolution from primitive production-based organization to traditional social-based organization involve the accumulation of social characteristics in an almost universally constant order: exclusive proprietorship, sedentary agriculture, centralized government and, determining the transition to the most advanced and most socially-oriented organization, complex social stratification.

As the only variable between cultures whose organizations are primarily socially-oriented and those organized exclusively so, a complex division of labour -- a severely defined class structure and associated sophisticated religious structures -- are precisely what determine the exclusive social focus of the highly evolved traditional culture. The purely social concerns of the evolved traditional society result from, not (as utopianism implies) in spite of its class structure.

To express sympathy for traditional society will inevitably, in an age accustomed to seeing the humane, fulfilling society in utopian terms of perfection, arouse charges of romanticism. The point is, utopias were precisely what these cultures were not.

The denial of Progress meant the denial of the positive as well as the negative associations that the concept carries. While the Middle Ages did not have instruments of mass annihilation and environmental destruction, social alienation and degraded, antisocial views of production, at the same time they lacked a sophisticated medicine, sophisticated education and the subsequent foundation for envisioning social change, an active voice in the affairs of state (equality), and upward social mobility (liberty). Natural disasters were far more extreme in their consequences. Antisocial behaviour was dealt with brutally, with no concern for the reform of deviance.

But to a people with an unshaken belief in salvation, death or disability clearly does not carry the same stigma that it does for a people without that faith. Religious faith and the future-oriented outlook of the extended family produced a far greater resignation to death. The lack of education, too, must be qualified, for education was, like production, socially-oriented, highly refined and focussed on the work process. It simply did not always take the form of literacy, and since social engineering was not considered desirable, neither was that particular means of achieving it. Nor is a society whose primary focus is social likely to have the sympathy for deviancy that a culture based upon social upheaval feels. In other words, modern criticism of medieval culture rests on the assumption that it was not like ours -- revolutionary -- and that the fatalistic resignation of the common man of traditional culture reflects his degradation. The Western libertarian -- individualistic, self-seeking, perpetually dissatisfied with his lot, alienated from his fellows with no sense at all of the numinous creature-feeling that marked medieval life -- can conceive of the lot of the traditional common man only in terms of the mind control of contemporary totalitarianism.

In terms of medieval social theory there are indeed elements of truth in this. Inequality before the law was built into Church theology, as is evident from the writings of Gregory the Great -- the common man was conceived of as no more than a vessel for receiving the law.<sup>9</sup> But while the lower classes, through this hierarchical theme of law and society, had no voice in the affairs of state -- and therefore, according to our modern criteria, no presence as human beings -- the very fact that their insignificance was built into the hierarchical structure gave them in practice a relatively high degree of self-determination in those matters that most directly influenced their lives.

What needs emphasis in this context is that the villagers themselves were held to be, and constituted themselves as, full members of the village community, a viewpoint which had at least two important consequences: first, the idea of equality, the idea that they as members of the community were equals, found some practical application entailing also some economic consequences; secondly, village self-government became a practical measure not suggested by any theory, not initiated "from above", not legislated by a "superior", but practised as a "natural" way of conducting the business of the village. It is not surprising, therefore, that the husbandry of the village was regulated by the village community itself, "by a set of rules binding upon all the villagers", because every villager had a means to express his views on matters which concerned him and in which he had a legitimate interest.<sup>10</sup>

What emerges then is a picture less of an all-powerful social elite controlling the actions and thoughts of an oppressed productive substructure, than of two spheres of social activity, interlocked yet with a distinct degree of autonomy from one another. The division of society into two distinct realms of concern -- the macro-cosmos of state and the micro-cosmos of production, linked by the unifying world-view of a humane religion -- produced in each sphere a level of self-determination that has been all but destroyed by the Progressive impulse to democratization.

The democratic integration of the two spheres replaces the physical and spiritual dependency that the lower classes had on themselves with a dependency on the decadent social elite. The political elite must, because it is in its turn dependent on the lower classes for its continued social status, increasingly intrude its own interests on those classes -- to satisfy needs that the lower classes can no longer satisfy themselves with the general atomization or individuation of culture, but also to instill within them the same decadent value

system -- particularly in terms of the dominant consumption ethic, the satisfaction of which is entirely controlled by the ruling elite. The elite thus makes itself indispensable to the basic functions of life on all social levels. Therefore, what was intended to be, in both major ideological systems, a lessening of state influence on the individual members of society, has proven to be a massive expansion of decadent elite influence.

Concepts of dehumanizing mind control, then, are much more applicable to the fruits of Progressiveness -- both in the obvious example of totalitarianism but equally in the democratic nations, where the consumer ethic creates man the servant of the needs of production rather than production the servant of the needs of man.

As was pointed out above, all societies take their social organization as an extension of their organization of work and subsequently from the focus which that work takes -- whether it is production- or socially-oriented. If traditional society was indeed more humane than Progressive democratic or egalitarian civilization, then that must be demonstrable in the objects that traditional socially-focussed culture produced, for attitudes and organizations of production not only reflect, they in fact produce the dominant approach to social life.

What the two Progressive ideological streams demonstrate above all else is that a demoralized, atomized and oppressed people cannot, by definition, create a profound expression of the social whole -- the numinous. The modern shopping centre, the International Style skyscraper, socialist realism and the annual parade of military hardware through Red Square -- the modern counterparts of that ideological conviction -- must seem to almost anyone rather poor substitutes for a Gothic cathedral or a van Eyck altarpiece. The products of a social belief that has been systematically discredited and ridiculed throughout the various stages of Progressive ideology, the products of the European artisanal system -- from cathedrals down through all of the spheres of artisanal production -- continue to exhibit a sense of quality and social orientation that is rarely

if ever achieved by the industrial system. Can this really be the work of a demoralized class, and if so, why have the various libertarian schemes been unable to approach this intensity and universality of social vision?

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For roughly a millenium -- from the tenth century until, in rural areas and smaller towns, the twentieth -- the guild system, or at least the attitudes which that system engendered, formed the basic approach to European material production. Before about 1800, all artisanal production, "save for exotic exceptions", was performed within the context of the guild.<sup>11</sup>

The guilds took three forms: the merchant guilds, through which the middle-classes achieved their rise to power, service guilds, and craft guilds, with which this section will concern itself. They arose as a product of town life, the "ebullient, raucous and quarrelsome"<sup>12</sup> manifestation of the peak of European traditional culture's evolution of a complex and stable division of labour.

In many respects, the life of the medieval craftsman -- and town life in general -- was the antithesis of the utopian's ideal vision. The towns of north-western Europe, when compared to their Mediterranean, Near Eastern and even central Russian counter-parts were inferior in "technology, hygiene, industrialization and general level of civilization".<sup>13</sup> The guilds themselves were hierarchical, rigid in discipline and repressive of individual initiative and spontaneity, secretive to the point of paranoia (a tradition which continues in organizations like the Masons, long after the parent guild and even the occupational requirements for membership have vanished). Every aspect of manufacture was scrutinized and regulated, almost any progressive change was seen as a threat. Hours were long, pay was often as not poor; entrance to a trade was extremely selective -- increasingly so as time went on.

To either Progressive school of thought, whether libertarian or egalitarian, these are unconscionable conditions that would have to be remedied were the system to have any merits applicable to life in Utopia -- yet it was precisely these factors that gave the system its strength, longevity and humane-ness.

Analogies between guilds and trades unions can have little value beyond the obvious fact that both represent groups of working men. For while the trades union exists to protect its membership from a potentially victimizing employer, the major function of the guild was to protect society at large from unscrupulous or incompetent craftsmen. This is the whole point of a socially-oriented work organization -- the practitioner is the servant of his craft, and through it, of his society. The 'Articles of the Spurriers of London' (1345) serve as well as any to illustrate this point, although the theme is constant to all the guilds.

In the first place, -- that no one of the trade of Spurriers shall work longer than from the beginning of the day until curfew rung out at the Church of St. Sepulchre, without Newgate; by reason that no man can work so neatly by night as by day.<sup>14</sup>

The selectivity of the trades -- aimed in large part at the exclusion of foreigners<sup>15</sup> -- and the strict codes of trade secrecy, were meant to keep tight control over production, both in quantity and quality, by discouraging a free-market competitiveness. Quality was further controlled by "searchers", trades inspectors functioning under the guilds and municipalities.<sup>16</sup> Both ideas, of course, along with other prohibitions like that above prohibiting night work, served as well to protect the craftsman, but the major focus of guild regulation is socially-directed rather than an inner-directed protectionism.

The idea of craft secrecy further links the trades to the religious milieu. It is perhaps more than a semantic accident that

trades were referred to as 'mysteries',<sup>17</sup> -- a corruption of 'mastery'.<sup>18</sup> The work process was locked into the religious system, as is evidenced from the cycles of passion plays at York, Wakefield, Canterbury and elsewhere, which were performed by the various local guilds. The spiritual, ritualistic aspects of craft production go beyond the simple fact that craftsmen made the objects that functioned in religious ceremony. To a culture unfamiliar with industrial society's trivialization of work and the concern for the attainment of random class status in unproductive service industries, the work of the craftsman amounted to the tangible embodiment of religion's social and spiritual view of mankind.

. . . it is an irrelevance whether we accept that material crafts developed out of transcendent ritual, or adopt the materialistic hypothesis that the ritual grew out of antecedent material needs. In the latter case it is simply the effectiveness of craft skill that constitutes its power; in the former, the power is non-material, but breathes life into material operations.<sup>19</sup>

If it can be assumed that religion was in fact metaphor for the society as a whole, the reasons for both the intimate links of craft with religion and the overtly social focus of production become obvious. In this context, the work of the craftsman -- the master -- carries a certain spiritual charge regardless of the specific social function, secular or holy, of the artifact he creates. If painters occasionally formed a guild with pinmakers, then, or glaziers with saddlers,<sup>20</sup> this does not reflect the degradation of professions which we today hold in particular esteem. Rather, it reflects the richness and spirituality of all production. "Art" was not a separate pastime, shunted aside into art palaces as the privileged specialization of knowing connoisseurs and critics. It was the living embodiment of the spiritual view of man carried in all of the things that he made.

Certainly all production did not carry the same spiritual impact -- the altarpiece was not viewed as being equatable with the inn sign. But hierarchies in production were produced by the social function that the object served, not by the intrinsic value of the Precious Objects. The perceived worth of an object was then relative to its function. Ideals of the spiritual aspects of work in traditional cultures can not be in any way interpreted in terms of our own views of Art as Precious Object -- because value was determined by social function, when that function ceased or changed, the object was discarded or, if possible, adapted accordingly, with no sense of the connoisseur's concerns for 'integrity' or 'purity'. Art was changed to suit its society; society was not changed to suit its art. Both art and the artisan were subject to the needs of the whole.

The very existence of craft guilds and their rigid rules that restricted as much as protected their members, points to the improbability of a spontaneous, harmonious evolution of fulfilling social production under the proper egalitarian state structure. For that matter, it seems clear that medieval town life did indeed possess something of that structure. Just as village life, through the inequality of the peasantry before the law, produced a largely self-determining popular culture autonomous from the greater affairs of state, so too with the guilds "there is exceedingly little to be detected which would smack of a descending form of government."<sup>21</sup>

It was the hierarchy of class structures that gave the guilds their autonomy, and the revolutionary movement away from those structures that destroyed the guild system. The guild did not "liberate" its membership in the modern sense, but rather bound it inextricably to a supposedly oppressive theocratic regime.

[The influence of the guilds] was in the maintenance of order, through the respect they evinced for the established law. The immense weight they must have had on the side of morality, by the importance they attached to the moral

character of their members must not be overlooked.<sup>22</sup>

The guilds began from the idea of forcing their members to accept individual social responsibility within the microcosm of town life. It was an end in itself, and progressive ideals were therefore intolerable. The guild system dealt with human relations on a tangible, practical, local level, making no pretense as to perfect states of affairs or universality. Humanist romantic abstraction of human nature sets as its first priority the restructuring of that nature, insisting upon a basis of revolutionary change. It begins by absorbing all individual social responsibility into the macrocosm of the state -- thereby depersonalizing charity and human relations as well as production. It attempts to impose the ruling elite's abstract macrocosmic view of life on the individual, and assumes that, freed from the bonds of class, a sociable man, much like that of the Middle Ages, will emerge. Yet it is clear that medieval man was the product of a system entirely antithetical to everything the new libertarians stand for.

The obvious rebuttal of this argument is that, while medieval man may have been sociable in the most complex sense of the word, he was so at the expense of all personal liberty through his oppression by a corrupt regime: there was no allowance made for self-fulfillment, creativity or the realization of personal goals. This is in a sense true, if the current inner-directed conception of these qualities is accepted. Personal goals were indeed subordinate to communal ones, creativity was subject to tradition -- yet there remains the paradox that what should be a demoralized and dehumanized society produced an overtly social art spanning the whole spectrum of production. The paradox can only be rationalized by assuming that self-fulfillment was not to be separated from the fulfillment of a social role. The life of the artisan must be considered in these terms.

Artisanal production was slow and inefficient. The working day covered as much as fourteen hours, from first light to dark. But the

artisan's time was permeated with both rest and social interaction. Mass was often attended daily, periods of recreation intermingled with periods of work.<sup>23</sup> The eventual organization of the towns into occupational divisions, and the performance of the work process within or near the artisan's living quarters further intertwined work and leisure: "awareness of belonging to an occupational community dominated social relations off the job."<sup>24</sup>

The mixing of work and private spheres ("private" is another modern concept entirely alien to medieval thought)<sup>25</sup> made the existence of poverty much more noticeable -- not only that of distressed craftsmen within the guild quarters but that of others in the community as a whole. Charity then was much more direct and personal, the responsibility not only of the clergy and courts but of the guilds as well.

Also, if by chance any of the said trade shall fall into poverty . . . he shall have every week from the said box seven pence for his support, if he be a man of good repute. And after his decease, if he have a wife, a woman of good repute, she shall have weekly for her support seven pence from the said box.<sup>26</sup>

The aldermen and skevins of the said Gild are, by duty obliged to visit, four times a year, all the infirm, all that are in want, need or poverty, and to minister to and relieve all such, out of the alms of the said Gild.<sup>27</sup>

Three essential characteristics are evident in the work process itself: the artisans' attitudes toward work, the creativity permitted him, and his conception of his role.

The long hours spent working were the result of simple economic necessity growing out of the inefficiency of production. The artisan was then, from one point of view, the slave of his own refusal to accept a Progressive attitude. But to medieval holistic thinking, the

the value of work lay not in rewards, but in the opportunity it offered workers "to fulfill the principal social role the surrounding community had assigned to them . . .

The cabinetmaker spent his life turning out furniture in order to answer the question "Who am I?" not "Why do I work?" So in the bad old days doing work for its own sake was not a means of embarking on a voyage of self-exploration, as such phrases tend to suggest for modern people, but rather of mooring oneself to a fixed way of life.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the key idea here is that of resignation. But while the concept is, to revolutionary man, inseparable from notions of debasement and servility, resignation was seen in traditional society as above all a source of strength -- the drawing from a communal pool based not only on the combined strength of present society, but of the strength of those who went before. It should perhaps not be surprising then that the etymological source of the word 'craft' is the word 'power',<sup>29</sup> or that the trade was traditionally referred to as the 'freedom'.<sup>30</sup>

The factor that embodied the power and freedom of the artisan was his control over the work process, paralleling on the individual level the autonomy enjoyed by the guilds within the medieval hierarchy. The artisan controlled all of the phases of manufacture, from beginning preparatory work to the end product. Even in the larger shops, where preparatory work (grinding pigments or mixing colours, for example, in the case of painters) was performed by apprentices, the rigid guild regulations ensured that at each successive stage of development -- journeyman to master -- the craftsman was in complete control of all phases of production. In some cases, more so in German than English guilds, the production of a 'masterpiece' or practical demonstration was required before a craftsman could become a master.<sup>31</sup>

By understanding the entire work process from beginning to end -- and so by unavoidably understanding the logic of production and the functional application of his work -- the craftsman was guaranteed "considerable latitude for innovation and creativity, even though, unlike [a Fine Artist] . . . he is working to the close specifications of a client."<sup>32</sup> This latitude was obviously strongly reinforced by craft secrecy, which prevented the possibility of amateur designers rigidly specifying the work. The artisan's product, while conforming to the general vision of a patron was as much the product of his own imagination and skill.

Creative and qualitative control over all the phases of production instills an attitude toward work that, while embodied in the idea of resignation, goes far beyond contemporary connotations of the word.

What was limited to the guild system . . . was artistic embellishment as an expression of the joy of work itself. We are addressing a range of artisanal creativity which stretches from the scrollwork that wheelwrights would carve into fitted wagons, through the decorative inlays that furniture makers would implace in table tops and bureaus, to the elaborate designs that master masons would mortar into facades of buildings. Keep in mind that all these forms of creativity were severely defined by tradition, limiting the latitudes within which such individual expressiveness could move. The entire modern vocabulary of expressive behaviour is risky in approaching these traditional people, for the entire social order and culture of which they were a part was based on the suppression of spontaneity and individuality.<sup>33</sup>

To a time conditioned to the idea that creativity can only be gained through the "liberation" of the Artist from the chains of patronage -- which amounts to the Artist's liberation from social

responsibility and even from craft -- the equation of medieval creativity with the suppression of self is utterly irreconcilable. But at the same time not even the most diehard connoisseur suggests that there is no creativity, not only in the works of the great masters of the period like Jan van Eyck, Robert Campin, the Limbourgs, the Hohenfurth Master or Master Honoré, but in works by lesser masters of trades serving more modest social functions -- spanning the whole range of artisanal production.

It was the artisan who shaped medieval urban life, as the peasant formed the countryside. What was there -- houses, streets, gardens, churches and palaces -- was the product of his skill. To suggest that the degree and consistency of creativity shown by these men and women was somehow at odds with or detachable from their social structure -- that the artisan was circumventing his social codes in his work -- is obviously nonsense.

The source of the extraordinary richness of medieval artifacts lay not in the artisan's individualism, but in the suppression of it -- in the subservience of individual interests to those of the community. It was the artisan's response to those interests, in the context of a "moral universe of a society in which people believed implicitly that the success of the community came before the advantage of the individuals in it",<sup>34</sup> that determined his creativity. To sever Art from that productive context is to drain it of its source of vitality, to condemn it to a sterile triviality which pathetically glorifies its own dehumanization.

## 2. Artisan and bourgeois

Two more paradoxical characteristics of the guild system need some examination. The guilds in particular, and town life in general, while representing the peak of medieval social production and so of medieval society, were also the vehicles through which social Progressiveness was made possible. At the same time the guilds, with the peasantry, formed the most stolid -- and effective -- resistance to the ideals of modernism.

The idea that "town air makes free" made urban life particularly attractive -- in spite of the living conditions -- throughout the Middle Ages. The peasantry in particular saw it as a major means of social mobility,<sup>35</sup> and the population of the towns swelled steadily until decimated temporarily by plague in the mid-fourteenth century.

The towns supported the centralized monarches over aristocratic traditions, the towns (and the merchant guilds in particular) were the bases from which the middle-classes assumed social dominance; towns made inevitable the industrial revolution and the subsequent dehumanization of production and of society.

The artisanal orders sided consistently with the bourgeoisie -- under Cromwell and Winstanley, Calvin, in the French<sup>36</sup> and American<sup>37</sup> Revolutions. "The ideology of democracy was pre-industrial and its first serious practitioners were artisans."<sup>38</sup>

Is there then, no difference between artisans and the middle-class? Certainly in simple numerical terms the points of similarity outnumber the differences: both eventually proved themselves hostile to established class structures; both favoured democratic forms of self-determination; artisans were considered, by the nineteenth century, to be members of the middle-class,<sup>39</sup> and looked down upon the labouring classes accordingly -- both, in other words, participated directly in the destruction of the old way of life in preparation for the new.

The alliance of artisans with middle-class ideology can be traced to the Calvinist work ethic.

These were essentially landless people . . . who could sustain themselves only through labour and had no reason to continue to consider it disgraceful. . . . The merchants and artisans who became enthusiastic supporters of the Protestant reforms saw work as the path to individual salvation, both here on earth and in the after-life to come.<sup>40</sup>

But here the similarities stop. The artisans wanted their work respected for what it was -- dignified and socially productive -- while the middle-classes wanted their work respected on the same grounds, despite the fact that their economic self-seeking was seldom dignified and only marginally socially productive. The middle-class manipulated the respect traditionally shown the artisanal orders, and when in a position to take power themselves, abandoned the skilled trades. In the final result, there can be no identification of interests between the two groups. The artisans, disaffected and ignored, had dropped out of the French Revolution -- or were guillotined -- by 1794.<sup>41</sup> By the same time, in Britain, artisans had also been cast aside in the power struggles between the landowners and merchants.<sup>42</sup>

What artisanal support of Progressive politics gained the craftsmen in the long-run was first, the destruction of their guilds and second, the destruction of their whole work process. And always, advances made by the middle-classes were paid for, as well as by the upper classes, by artisans.

By the seventeenth century, growing pressures from expanding international trade and the increasing hostility shown the guilds by town councils who identified their interests with the merchant classes, had already imperilled the traditional social perspective of guild production.

Instead of being brotherhoods of craftsmen desirous of advancing the public weal, they were now mere societies of capitalists, intent

only on private and personal advantage.  
 As a writer of 1680 observes "most of  
 our ancient Corporations and Guilds  
 [have] become oppressive Oligarchies".<sup>43</sup>

Certainly the guilds had not become universally "societies of capitalists" -- again, the merchant guilds must be separated from those representing craftsmen -- but a note of protectionism entirely alien to medieval conceptions of guild work was definitely present. And, because the guilds found themselves torn between two opposing views of production, elements of oppression did indeed creep into the system.

Many men and women suffered from the breakdown of the guild system's own rules. One time-honoured rule, for example, said that every qualified apprentice who entered at the bottom had a mastership waiting at the top. Already before the eighteenth century this rule had started to collapse in larger cities, but the general population growth of the eighteenth century put it in question everywhere.<sup>44</sup>

The guilds died, not because they became corrupt, but because outside pressures made them, as the representatives of a socially-determined work organization, obsolete. Guilds were replaced by institutions serving private interests, guildsmen were replaced by a working class which, while productive, was not socially productive.

The craftsman's joy in work -- "work and play in the same act"<sup>45</sup> -- was replaced by the industrial horror of the factories. The craftsman's creative control over and understanding of the work process vanished with the twentieth century production line. Until that time, artisans were still prevalent within the factories -- which may in part account for modern perceptions of the qualitative superiority of nineteenth and early twentieth century manufactures -- but they were a steadily shrinking minority. The artisan's view of the work

process as intimately, inextricably linked to his society decayed as his society decayed.

Today, it is still possible to find joy in work and to exercise creative control over the work process -- but this is no longer a social norm. It is rather a privilege of the social and intellectual elite -- Fine Artists, liberal wives and academics -- but these groups have by definition of their social mobility little legitimate interest in identifying themselves with a broader society beyond. These characteristics become a wedge, no longer a reflection of a humane and social work process but, like Fine Art, simply illustrations of social superiority.

But the artisanal tradition has not vanished entirely. While the idea that everything man makes is art has vanished -- followed by the appalling poverty that that implies for the great majority of workers -- many craftsmen still do combine pleasure in work, creativity and the third and primary consideration of submission to the social function of their work. Illustrators, cartoonists, studio and journalistic photographers, commercial artists, television writers, producers, directors, technicians and actors -- all are working within the traditional functions of art. Most of their work is, of course, for that reason rejected by both Fine Artists and connoisseurs. Yet these are the artists who continue to function under the attitudes to work that made the art of the past what it was -- and that continues to make it popular. They are, of course, low artists, and their work cannot be compared to the high art of the past. They function, most of them, as the artists who created emblematic woodcuts and chapbooks functioned: serving a single social function aimed at a specific social context. The best of them -- like Daumier and John Tenniel -- function as Rembrandt did: creating through their complete mastery of craft, a high art of far more universal significance.

At the same time, while popular art continues to function as it always has, it must for that reason reflect the social disintegration that afflicts the society that produces it. As socially-focussed forms of production, the popular arts will not contribute to that

decay. Social media must by definition resist the destruction of their societies; but as the decay deepens, they must adapt themselves to the new conditions or cease to be popular. It is through this process of the adaptation and replacement of media -- that is, through the nature of the medium itself rather than its specific content -- that the popular arts reflect the degeneracy of modern civilization.

### 3. Art against ideology: two popular media

You want to make a portrait of your wife. You fix her head in a temporary collar to get the indispensable immobility. . . . You point the lens at her face, and when you take the portrait it doesn't represent your wife, it is her parrot, her watering pot, or worse.<sup>46</sup>

The great advantage that the plastic arts hold over photography is their ability to transmit, to a far greater degree, aspects of the human imagination. The high arts of the past, and painting in particular, could select, distort, spiritualize and beautify the real -- they could transcend the mundaneness of everyday life so seldom avoided by the photograph.

The photographic portrait -- the first major use made of the medium -- did not render the high art of portraiture obsolete. The two media were not doing the same things: the photograph left a record; the high art portrait left a monument. The famous fears of nineteenth century painters -- "From today, painting is dead"<sup>47</sup> -- proved as groundless as the subsequent notion that photography "provoked in painting a tendency towards non-photographic reality".<sup>48</sup>

Photography did do the same thing that commercial low art portraitists had been doing for centuries, and this was the aspect

of painting made obsolete. These were not the artists who would form the avant-garde art for art's sake movement -- they were the artists who became photographers,<sup>49</sup> thereby presenting a functional continuum unaffected by changes in media. The whole sphere of significant photographic history since the invention of the medium in 1839 has served functions of substitute image-making and illustration only as low art.

Nor was photography the revolutionary medium that some nineteenth century writers depicted it to be.<sup>50</sup> Artistic media change societies less than societies change media to suit their particular needs. Art is in this sense a reflection of life, not, as the avant-garde often argued, the contrary -- reality the poor image of a perfect Art. Art may, as the next chapter will suggest, serve as a catalyst to revolutionary change, but there is no proof to substantiate a causal role.

The immense and immediate popularity of the photograph reflects the birth of a long-awaited -- and long overdue -- means of better fulfilling age-old social needs.

[The] Palace of the Institute was stormed by a swarm of the curious at the memorable sitting on August 19, 1839, where the process was at long last divulged. Although I came two hours beforehand, like many others I was barred from the hall. I was on the watch with the crowd for everything that happened outside. At one moment an excited man comes out, and he answers with a know-it-all air, that bitumen of Judea and lavender oil is the secret. . . Soon . . . a newcomer . . . tells us with no further comment that it is iodine and mercury.

A few days later, optician's shops were crowded with amateurs panting for daguerreotype apparatus, and everywhere cameras were trained on buildings.<sup>51</sup>

Photography was popular in part because it was inexpensive, thereby making portraits available to a vastly increased number of people. "By 1891, there were more than a thousand studios in France and more than half a million photographers employed."<sup>52</sup> It was as well a medium in which the least-skilled artist could make a recognizable likeness -- even if it was generally recognized that your wife looked less like your wife than her watering pot.

And this is perhaps the point. Was photography so overwhelmingly successful simply because of economics, or was the depersonalization of the photograph somehow desirable or at least consistent with the nineteenth century view of things? If it were just a matter of economics, the low art of portraiture would not have been swept away. Rather, a new substratum of popular artists would have been created to serve the needs of an expanded consuming public, while the portrait painters would have continued to serve their somewhat more affluent clientele. As it is, photographers served all strata of society, from rich to poor, and replaced the low art of portraiture altogether. Therefore, qualities intrinsic to the medium itself need some examination.

While the photograph served the functions of painting, it does not look like painting. The painting is the product of human 'touch'; the photograph is a machine image. Baudelaire concluded "that photography, that upstart art form, was the natural and pitifully liberal medium of expression for a self-congratulatory, materialist bourgeois class."<sup>53</sup> (He had his own axe to grind with the bourgeoisie.) But while photography was by no means the medium of the middle-class alone, and while his argument is based on the assumption that photography is not art -- that is, not avant-garde Fine Art -- Baudelaire does manage to raise what is perhaps the critical point about the medium: its relationship to materialism.

The most obvious value of the medium in this respect lies in its visual fidelity. The photograph (and related processes) can better than any other medium transmit the objective look of a thing. It is less successful, however, in transmitting the subjective 'feel' of

that thing. The photograph objectifies its subject in the most literal sense of the word: with the element of direct human participation in the imaging process removed in favour of chemical and mechanical interactions, the superficial object-ness of the subject is all that remains.

To a civilization based on commodities consumption, an image that has the capacity to turn everything it examines into a commodity amounts to a statement of social conviction. It is natural, then, that the new car, the new house -- the presents under the Christmas tree -- should find their way into our family photo albums. That social conviction may be a thoroughly decadent one when compared to the spiritual conviction of the past, but no medium serves it better than photography.

When the camera turned its eye to portraiture, the result was a less fortuitous, if equally accurate result; for people too were deprived of all but their transient objective appearance. Moreover, the clarity of the fine-grained, unenlarged images of the nineteenth century made a permanent record of the finest details of human features at a specific moment in time -- details that would have been made timeless through the idealization of even the most realistic painting.

All photographs are 'momento mori'.  
 To take a photograph is to participate  
 in another person's (or thing's)  
 mortality, vulnerability, mutability.  
 Precisely by slicing out this moment  
 and freezing it, all photographs  
 testify to time's relentless melt. <sup>54</sup>

It was certainly within the medium's power to idealize its subjects. Fine Art photographers -- from Henry Peach Robinson and Oscar Rejlander at mid-century to Julia Margaret Cameron and Peter Henry Emerson in the 1880's -- attempting to make photography acceptable as a Fine Art, <sup>55</sup> consistently used stilted academic groupings and blurred images to enhance the medium's 'painterly' potential.

But the techniques had no popular acceptance whatever until the turn of the century. Then studio photographers began to use texture screens and soft-focus as the Fine Artists had been doing for years to emulate Impressionist painting. But this is not an example of a dead Fine Art influencing a living popular one: the introduction late in the century of the No. 1 Kodak Camera had brought photography into everyone's hands. Around the same time, department stores began producing cheap landscape, genre and still-life photos -- traditional low arts of beautification. The majority of professional photographers had themselves been made obsolete for any broad scale social function.<sup>56</sup> No longer in great demand, the portraitists became Fine Artists themselves, on a modest commercial scale, no longer selling functional substitute images but Taste. The era of the true Fine Art of photography was born.

By muddling the popular and professional developments in photography with the Fine Art stream, photographic historians present an impression of fluctuating stylistic trends. This is only true of Fine Art photographs, which have evolved from stuffy academia through impressionism to surrealism, 'abstraction', social realism, dada, pop and formalism: the Art photo has consistently tagged along after its big brother, avant-garde painting.

Popular and professional photography has, on the other hand, maintained an imagery consistent to its unchanged function. Matthew Brady's graphic civil war images differ from those produced by contemporary journalists only in technological respects: improvements in film and cameras have given modern photographers greater mobility, an greatly improved capacity for freezing motion. Increased shutter-speed and compactness were paid for with a loss of resolution in the modern print, which accounts for qualitative differences between works from the two periods. Modern portraiture, too, differs only in technology -- yet the greater naturalism afforded modern professionals and amateurs has done little to humanize the medium. Snap shots prompt an empathy with the subject only if he is known to the viewer. With

no possibility for personal acquaintance, the fashion models in magazines, for example, remain depersonalized, objectified shells -- they have truly become style or sex objects.

The development of popular photography should therefore be considered according to functional considerations. Amateur photography -- substitute images reminding us of people or things we are separated from, or memories of past experience -- because it is humanized through shared experience, is a positive social expression reflecting personal bonds to other members of our society. Function transcends the intrinsic nature of the medium.

Commercial and journalistic photography -- arts of social conviction (and persuasion) and of illustration -- present a different image of man: no longer the social man but a creature dehumanized by a technological, individualistic environment.

Both images are "true", even though they are ostensibly in contradiction. Amateur snap-shots reveal the continued sociability of man -- but they reveal as well the limitations of his society. The very specificity of the photographic image reflects the reduction of human sociability from the generalized cosmos of traditional society to the personal sphere of family and friends.

What both streams demonstrate is the nature of the society which developed the photographic image as its own peculiar form of representation. Because the popular photograph unconsciously reflects the society that uses it -- because its functional aims are to reinforce the social fabric -- it is a much more dependable record of social decay than are the ideological photos of social persuasion taken by photographers like Louis Hine or Dorothea Lange who, by seeking out the extremes to illustrate industrial brutality, create near caricatures of human suffering. Their photographs focus on human weakness rather than strength in the face of disruptive forces (because those strengths, social in nature, belong to a social vision resistant to Progressiveness). The effect on the viewer is either the paternalism of humanist abstraction or complete despair in the human condition.

The dominant current running beneath modern existence is pessimism. The nineteenth century ideology of industrial Progress provided specific and tangible reasons for that attitude. In England, the optimism with which the whole population had greeted the Industrial Revolution in the mid-eighteenth century had utterly vanished by the beginning of the nineteenth. The mass of the population had not benefitted at all -- their position had, in fact, dramatically worsened. The population of England had doubled between 1800 and 1850. The brutality of industrial work, combined with the ravages of frequent economic depression made slum life barely tolerable; disease and pollution attacked all classes alike.

The average life-span in the rural area of Rutlandshire was, at mid-century, 52 years for the upper classes, 41 for tradesmen and 38 for mechanics and labourers. This compares to an average life expectancy in Manchester at the same time of 38 years for the upper classes, 20 for tradesmen and 17 for mechanics and labourers.<sup>57</sup>

As living conditions improved, the dominant attitude of pessimism was not dispelled -- it is built into the modern Progressive state. The neo-barbarism of production-oriented work processes, wherever they occur, forces the individual to look to the satisfaction of selfish ends -- because he can no longer look realistically to a greater society beyond.

The marketplace permeates Progressive life on all levels. After industrialism met all of the legitimate material needs of modern society, it was forced to create new ones, catering only to irrational, narcissistic ego-gratification -- the glorification of the self above the 'others'. "Driven by these insatiable desires yet incapable of satisfying them, modern man is confused, anxious, depressed, frustrated, aimless and weary, discontented and increasingly lawless."<sup>58</sup>

The irrational nature of the stock market only adds to the pessimism of Progressive civilization. For the speculator in particular, risk investment may mean overnight wealth -- it may also mean financial disaster in as short a time. Unlike the aristocrat, who remains socially respectable even when penniless, the bourgeois who loses his

money is just another 'lumpen proletarian'. "An existence endangered in this way produces for all its actual prosperity, an outlook on life from which the optimism of an earlier age vanishes beyond recall."<sup>59</sup> The social expression of this personal pessimism is the general fear of economic depression -- the terror of having to do without, or even just the fear of not perpetually "getting ahead".

Dispirited, debased and dehumanized, reduced to utter insignificance through the collectivization of modern super states and industrialization -- reduced to little more than a consuming object who views the rest of society as the enemies, as competition for his piece of heaven on earth -- modern man could not conceivably create a social medium that did not reflect in some way his degradation. Media evolved by traditional, socially-focussed cultures cannot effectively serve Progressive society -- even though the functions demanded of new media remain unchanged and even though, by serving social functions, they resist the social fragmentation of Progressive individualism. For all their resistance to the ultimate conclusions of utopianism, they must at the same time reflect the progress that that social disease has made. Photography was popular, not in spite of its dehumanizing qualities, but because of them. It was the first great popular medium of modern man; television is the latest.

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Industrial culture rests on the industrialization of culture. A system of symbols, of consciousness, of sensibility, of pre-conscious and unconscious meanings, has been assimilated to the imperatives of machine production, market organization, and bureaucratic power. That this has entailed deep alterations in the structure of culture itself is obvious . . . From the late medieval period until the eighteenth century, high culture and popular

culture were consonant: an artisanal idea of process may well have constituted one of their common elements.<sup>60</sup>

Of the twentieth century arts of illustration -- comic strips, movies and television -- it is the latter which has come to dominate contemporary culture. Therefore, it should be safe to say, it is television which best reflects the state of late modern society.

While the illustrative function that these arts serve is universal, both the manner in which they serve that function and their technological aspects are not -- they are responses to specific social needs.

Illustrative popular arts now primarily take the form of entertainment -- amusement and escape. These are comparatively new terms in their current sense, appearing "as acceptable forms of social behaviour" only in the seventeenth century, and inseparably associated with the rise of the middle-class to political and economic pre-eminence.<sup>61</sup> Among the arts, both high and low, that evolved from this time onward to provide public entertainment were opera (first performed in 1607), the novel, concerts (first performed in 1672), music halls, vaudeville, musical comedy, operetta, movies and comic strips.<sup>62</sup> Significantly, the evolution of new high arts of entertainment ends in the mid-eighteenth century, when libraries, used bookstores and reading clubs came into existence. None have been added since that century's final isolation of elite culture from its popular counterpart.

The visual high arts of entertainment of course suffered the same fate as the high art of painting: they became atrophied in an antisocial Fine Art ethic, incapable of producing new forms in response to changing social conditions. That role was, for the first time in history, carried by the popular arts. Fine Art Connoisseurs -- the intelligensia, class-conscious economic elites and upwardly mobile aspirants to these categories -- can, of course, find nothing more contemptible than the popular culture of their own time. Yet precisely these same connoisseurs will likely appreciate at least some of the

popular culture of even the immediate past -- big band music, old movies, blues, jazz, old radio serials or Broadway musicals -- and insist, moreover, that contemporary revivals of these forms be as eclectically "pure" to the originals as possible. Made useless by changing needs of society, the popular arts of the past have become untouchable cult icons. To change them -- that is, to adapt them to contemporary needs -- is to popularize, perhaps the paramount sin that the cultists can imagine.

The reasons for the social elite's loathing of television is that it serves above all a social function -- it provides a shared social experience and demonstrates common social traits.<sup>63</sup> The Art Lover, of course, Loves Art because he wants to demonstrate how he is different from, and superior to, his society. Yet the popular arts of the past that he appreciates acted in exactly the same way as those of the present. Is the Art Lover simply an anachronism, living in a vanished past, clinging to traditional value systems that are no longer functional? Of course not -- he is Progressive: a liberal revolutionary firmly convinced that the repressive value structures of the past must be swept away. When television is in its turn replaced by a medium better suited to its social content, the Art Lovers will 'discover' television, and Archie Bunker and Rhoda will be elevated to a par with Bogart and Dietrich. The elitist does not prefer the popular art of the past because it is better, but because it is socially dead.

Television, like photography, does not reflect the disintegration of modern society through what it does. What it does is to retard that disintegration by acting as a source of social unity. If social collapse is embodied in the Progressive ideological madness that has replaced the traditional humane society, then television is, like all its predecessors, an art against ideology. What is significant about the entertainment media is that they are needed at all, and needed on an increasingly pervasive scale.

Part of the reason for television's popular success is that it is, like photography, a technological media. Two points suggest themselves here: first, the increasingly technological nature of media,

and of life in general, reflect the popular acceptance of part of the utopian ideal -- not that man is perfectible, but that technology is essential and desirable in creating Progress. But at the same time they are social media serving traditional functions. It is, therefore, not technology and technological media in particular that are dehumanizing. Man is a technological creature -- the evolution from primitive to traditional social structures is in large part determined by advances in technology.

The photograph may be a dehumanized machine image -- it is not dehumanizing to the consumer of the image. Technology is merely a reflection of a dehumanized social structure. It may be the tool used to destroy environments; it is not the cause of that destruction. Modern man is dehumanized by a production-oriented work ethic that removes his control over and responsibility for what he does.

It is in response to these conditions that formalized, varied and increasingly monolithic forms of entertainment evolved. As society collapses, it is necessary to both replace human sociability artificially and offer escape from the realities of industrial life. It may be argued that the sacred arts of the past offered escape as well. "Sacred icons presented the faithful beholder with a concrete, meaningful world. Whether they portrayed a sacred past or anticipated a sacred future, icons provided a sense of origin, destiny, and participation in that order."<sup>64</sup> Because traditional culture was socially-oriented throughout all the aspects of its life, escape took the form of a spiritual restatement or re-inforcement of man's earthly existence. It explained, justified and objectified his earthly, individual hardship by presenting the social result. If traditional man escaped through his entertainments, he escaped from his concrete individual life into a concrete social one.

The fragmentation of individualist culture destroys a homogeneous, concrete social structure and in so doing reverses the way in which art has traditionally accomplished its functions. The individual in such a structure is not escaping into a social reality beyond himself, he is escaping from his external social reality.

As the brutalities of the industrial revolution are camouflaged through humanitarian liberalism and trades union action, as general standards of living in parts of the world reach unprecedented heights, the functions of mass-media in creating artificial images of society become more, rather than less pressing. Whereas the older media like the music hall were patronized on perhaps a weekly basis, and comic strips were read for a few minutes each evening, television is watched much more frequently and for much greater periods of time. It is, moreover, a much more powerful medium -- some researchers suggest that "TV viewing has all the properties of an addiction."<sup>65</sup>

The general improvement in North American material conditions and the parallel rise in popularity of powerful technological media suggest that the view of these media as social control -- as instruments of social oppression -- is only partly true. Television emerged at a time when the risk of social revolution was lower in North America than it had been for a century. The possibility for internal ideological struggle remains negligible. The possibilities for such action in the future depend, in both ideological blocs, on economic factors -- on the success of industry in meeting material wants.

Television was not imposed on the North American masses because that imposition was unnecessary. The state has succeeded less in changing its society through media mind control than it has itself been changed to suit the nature of popular media. The positive functions of television grow out of needs basic to human nature. Man is a social animal. He needs at least the illusion of being part of a human society. As that society in fact grows weaker, the illusion must obviously grow stronger to compensate.

The social problems illuminated by the use of television are thus much greater than can be solved by economic or political means. Liberal attempts to eliminate poverty and democratize government have, if the growth in mass media illusions of social life are any indicators, done nothing whatever in creating a more humane, more social environment. The growing pervasiveness of entertainment media suggests, in fact, that demonstrable social foundations have all but vanished.

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A medium that is one nation's defence against the desocializing (and so dehumanizing) effects of Progressive ideology, may be another's catalyst to social degeneration. As early as 1918, Woodrow Wilson had realized the potential of the mass media -- "broadcasting could revolutionize world order by providing the means for beaming truth directly to the people, over the barriers of government censorship and propaganda."<sup>66</sup>

This export of American culture began in earnest in the 1920's with the motion picture. Films that in the United States created an image of a society functioning in spite of Progressive change, presented to the less decadent world outside (to the third world in particular) -- a world that for the most part still possessed a more or less traditional social structure -- only an image of absolute plenty. "The movies' appealing, highly sanitized version of American life was, in effect, an extended commercial for American products."<sup>67</sup>

Television intensified the propagandistic aspects of an exported popular art, and added to the foreign market a more blatantly persuasive image of American consumer ideology, advertising.

Though American telefilms currently are obtaining their largest revenues from the high-income countries whose audiences are prospective customers for the advertising messages that accompany and finance the film showings, the developing world receives some attention too. [United States Information Agency official W.P.] Dizard points out that "Almost every U.S. distributor is selling films at cut-rate prices (in Latin America, Africa, and Asia) against the day when these markets will become stronger."<sup>68</sup>

Popular mass art, resistant to ideology in its own context, when exported becomes one of the more powerful tools in the Progressive state's Cultural policy. It presents the American view of a material

cosmos, a world of things replacing the traditional spiritual world of community. Nor is this an isolated instance. The systematic breakdown of traditional culture is a universal -- and essential -- characteristic of all Progressive ideologies.

4. Cultural policy and cultural decadence:  
the Yugoslav experience

It is necessary in any discussion of art's relationship to Progressive ideology to consider both ideological blocs. Among the socialist nations, Yugoslavia offers especially good examples of a peasant arts' collision with the facts of industrial civilization.

They could rarely read and far more rarely write; they went regularly to church, never talked politics, never conspired, never thought, delighted in physical exercises, listened with inherited reverence when the Bible was read, and were, in their unquestioning humility, exceedingly well-disposed towards the 'superior' classes. But intellectually they were dead. . . . In truth, they were not human beings; they were merely toiling machines in the service of the few aristocrats who had guided history down to that time. 69

Engels, as this quotation suggests, did not think very highly of peasants. His criticisms would be endorsed by any Progressive ideology, from conservative to liberal to socialist to fascist. The peasant is necessarily condemned because no remnants of the old order embody more completely an hostility toward Progress. If Progress is to be in any way a demonstrably valid theory proving that things are getting better instead of worse, the peasantry as well as the

aristocracy must be shown to be worthless.

Engels demonstrates as well the method of historical proof employed by revolutionary theoreticians: the peasantry is worthless not on any measureable social grounds, but because it is not Progressive. Criticism is restricted to the context of the basic dogma of the faith. Traditional society functioned on the same basis, of course -- to the medieval Christian, a Muslim was inferior because he was not Christian. But to a faith based on the worship of reason, such an approach is simply unreasonable.

The basis of Engel's criticism is that peasants do not behave like intellectuals: they prefer the social functions of religion to the epistemological, antisocial views of the cult. They prefer taking social responsibility only for their immediate environment to involving themselves in the macro-cosmic social engineering of politics. They are prepared to work productively in a well-defined social order instead of demanding a voice among the decadent ruling elite. They are inhuman, then, because they are social rather than antisocial, productive rather than decadent and destructive.

The basic characteristic of the peasantry -- in spite of Engel's implication that they are indistinguishable from slaves -- is the same as that defining artisans: control over the work process.

From this point of beginning, one sees a peasant as a man who is in effective control of a piece of land to which he has long been attached by ties of tradition and sentiment. The land and he are parts of one thing, one old-established body of relationships.<sup>70</sup>

As with the artisan, the peasant's intimate relationship to the land is perceived less as a means of self-fulfillment than as the productive subjection of self to a dominant social function. Because of this essentially social outlook, the peasant is suspicious of Progressive social elements: his view of economic social

relationships is based on "the idea that agricultural work is good and commerce not so good . . .".<sup>71</sup>

This outlook is completely at odds with the ideals of modernism. "Traditional peasant marketing . . . is on a small scale, that is, the market does not provide the primary dynamic of social interaction, as it does in the most industrial societies."<sup>72</sup> But traditional peasant culture is not insular -- like the whole of traditional society it is socially rather than production-oriented. It requires "continual communication to the local community of thought originating outside of it. The intellectual and often the religious and moral life of the peasant village is perpetually incomplete . . .".<sup>73</sup> The peasant community sees itself as only one element of a cluster of such elements, forming together an organic social structure. The life of each community is both an addition to and a drawing from that greater tradition -- an exclusively social conception antithetical to industrial market-oriented civilization, which places the interests of the greater and lesser communities in opposition to one another in the same way that interest groups within the community are in continual conflict. It has been clear from the beginning that that which serves the interests of industrial civilization is generally hostile to the people who comprise that civilization.

Just as the traditional peasant community is a particularized expression of the greater society, from which it draws its intellectual, religious and moral guidelines, so the popular art of traditional societies is a particularized expression of the social precepts expressed in the high art of the culture. The death of the high arts, reflecting the breakdown of the socially-focussed culture that produced them, while underlining the paucity of modern life is in fact beneficial for the popular arts, for it forces them to accept to a far greater degree the multiple social functions of the traditional high arts. Conscious attempts to "create" a popular or high art form have, when tied to utopian ideology, met with rather less satisfying social results. As suggested above, the wedding of art and utopian perfectionism can only, to varying degrees, produce Fine Art.

Ivan Generalic was born in the peasant community of Hlebine, Yugoslavia in 1914, and worked as a herdsman and labourer. Inasmuch as he was a peasant and is a painter, he is a 'peasant painter' --- but not without some qualifications.

The European peasantry has not remained unchanged. Its symbiotic relationship with the greater community beyond must obviously mean that the little community will change as the greater one does. "As agricultural civilizations across the globe modernize into industrial urban civilizations, their peasants become what may be called 'post-peasants', having only some of the traditional attributes of peasants."<sup>74</sup>

Generalic's painting, then, is not like peasant art from earlier periods: it is considerably better, for one thing, at least in technical terms, because he has been granted the luxury of working full-time at art. He also aims his production at the international Fine Art market and his success there, producing an elevated social status within the community, raises the problem of the degree to which he 'invents' peasant culture. However, as a product of that culture, Generalic will not invent to anything like the extent of the 'peasant painters' of the past, intellectuals like Pieter Brueghel who created "an automatic analogic extension" of their own world.<sup>75</sup>

But more significantly, Generalic's work is not the product of a tradition of peasant painters. He began painting as the direct result of a social and nationalistic impulse: in 1930 he met Krstu Hegedusic, a founder of 'zemlja' -- 'Earth' -- a consciously primitive school of Yugoslav nationalist painters.<sup>76</sup>



fig. 4

Generalic's early water-colours, like 'Under Arrest' (1934) [fig. 4], were often polemical in nature: "The police came often in those days, and since no one was ready to give up his animals or his last sack of grain many were beaten up or even arrested."

In this sense, Generalic's statements are consistent with those of reformers from Thomas More to the present. Even in his polemical works, Generalic's concerns are consistent with those of peasants everywhere -- resentment of taxes ('For Taxes', 1934), and of the loss of control over the village economy to external authority ('Revolt in Djelekovac', 1936).<sup>78</sup> But Generalic does not take the final step -- the intellectual's creation of new egalitarian orders. Instead, he looked to traditional sources of comfort and justification: religion, indigenous myths and magic, as in his 1935 'Prayer for Rain'.

Generalic's shift from polemical to traditional subject matter occurred during the Second War. In 1945 the country, under Tito, became communist, and Generalic's imagery had become at once both



fig. 5

more consistently traditional and monumental, as in 'Winter', 1949 [fig. 5]. Traditional concerns for presenting religious iconography in a comprehensible local environment emerged as a continuation of his earlier political works.

Members of Generalic's school exhibit similar concerns for both monumentality and traditional Catholic subject matter, as in Ivan Vecenaj's

Moses II (1965) and 'Flight into Egypt' (1967). In some respects, traditional social concerns are presented in an art that at first glance would appear to grow out of and function for the immediate peasant community.

But this is only half true. Generalic's attempt to "create" a tradition of visual art, even though based on the values of his community, created only an artificial construct or parody of peasant life that never was accepted by the community itself -- "all the people in the village made fun of me . . . and laughed at my work."<sup>79</sup>

Generalic from the beginning had placed himself apart from his community. While his work draws from peasant life a strength appealing to the outside observer, it does not fulfill art's prime function -- to serve the community that produces it. Generalic's work is, on a modest scale, Fine Art, and as such serves to mirror the problems inherent in Yugoslav Cultural policy, and in Cultural policies in general.

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Between 1945 and 1951, under Soviet rule, the Yugoslav State attempted to eradicate traditional religious beliefs. Recognizing the extremely deep religious roots of both Catholicism in the north and Islam in the south, however, the new regime of indigenous rule "normalized its relations with the Vatican to allow for the exchange of diplomatic representatives".<sup>80</sup>

The obvious questions then, are how much has the maintenance of traditional world view contributed to Yugoslavia's generally acknowledged degree of success as a socialist nation, and how much is the contribution of state policy?

Faced with the absolute failure, in the Soviet Union, of one of the essential humanitarian bases of Marxism -- the withering away of the state -- Yugoslavia attempted to bring about that 'spontaneous' occurrence through legislation. The "Basic Law on the Management of Economic Enterprise and Higher Economic Associations by the Working Collectives", passed in 1950 and operational by 1952, attempted to create a worker-managed economic base.

The economic grounds for turning away from central planning include the argument that such a system is useful during the initial stage of development but becomes a burden as the development process takes hold. There was a feeling that etatism resulted in state bureaucrats

replacing capitalists as exploiters  
of the workers.<sup>81</sup>

It was not deemed possible, of course, that the humanist abstraction of the Holy Worker could himself exploit the working classes, but this is precisely what happened. By 1964, Yugoslavia was experiencing a major pricing crisis. Attempts to remedy the problem with a partial return to laissez-faire economics predictably worsened the situation -- prices rose still more, and unemployment began to be a serious matter.<sup>82</sup>

What was intended as a socially-oriented view of production turned out no differently from any other production-oriented industrial approach. Yet, as was suggested earlier, this social orientation of production is one of the first characteristics to appear in the emerging traditional social structure -- where it emerges 'naturally' and 'spontaneously' without the benefits of social engineering.

Having eliminated capitalism as an agent of corruption, the Yugoslav failure to create a socially-focussed production must lie in the process of social engineering itself. The popular reaction to the economic difficulties of the 1960's tends to reinforce this conclusion. While the urban intelligensia attempted, successfully, to channel dissent into a number of divisive nationalist movements, it seems clear that the crisis of the late 1960's was in fact one of rising expectations<sup>83</sup> -- a frustration resulting "from the discrepancy between value expectation and value capabilities."<sup>84</sup>

The root of the problem, then, was in the theoretical solution: the Progress ethic. Once material Progress is sold to a people as feasible and open to all, the existence of the state depends entirely on meeting those expectations. Material production must be oriented to what appear in practice to be fundamentally antisocial goals of productivity and efficiency. The lip service paid to the ideals of socially-oriented industrial production can amount to no more than that, for, as has been proved time after time, from the industrial

revolution until today, the two concepts -- industrial production and society -- are completely antithetical.

Yugoslav Cultural policy mirrors the state's commitment to world-wide industrial civilization. It too is based on the ideal of the withering away of the state in self-managing socialism: on "the idea of emancipated labour, the gradual withering away of the traditional functions of government power and on the development of various forms of direct democracy in their stead."<sup>85</sup>

Like arts policy everywhere, the Yugoslav version manages to say a great deal without conveying very much of substance. The mechanical processes employed to achieve this emancipation are presented nebulously, and concern the liberation of art "from the arbitrary functions of the state and the utilitarianism of day-to-day routine policy."<sup>86</sup>

This gives some idea of the real intent of liberal socialists -- it is a policy antithetical to the creation of forms of high art serving well-defined social functions. If, as socialists suggest, the interests of the individual are identical to those of the enlightened state, then the propaganda functions required by the state can only benefit the individual. It seems that even liberal socialists view the state as the enemy of the people, its functions within the Progress ethic as arbitrary and compromising. What Yugoslav policy calls for -- and what it gets in the country's Cultural production -- is in fact only Fine Art: High Tone internationalism, incomprehensible to a people scarcely, if at all, removed from traditional peasant origins.

The global aims of cultural development have been defined in conformity with the principles of self-management: the socialization and democratization of culture, complete freedom of creativity, the development of the national cultures on the basis of equality, an opening to

world cultural processes and trends, the cultural activation of local and regional communities, the emancipation of culture from provincialism and the assertion of the cultural role of the working people.<sup>87</sup>

A number of inherent contradictions present themselves here. Can the development of national cultures be consistent with an opening to world cultural processes and trends; is the emancipation of culture from provincialism compatible with the activation of local groups; can complete freedom of creativity produce an art serving a social, rather than a purely private function? The fact of the matter is that the global view of art production is virtually everywhere linked to the Fine Art ethic: views that destroy provincialism and replace it with New York standards of homogenous Taste. The backbone of this cultural cloning is ironically, complete freedom of creativity. Local groups functioning within this ethic evolve only as late provincial variants of Big Time Fine Art, using Art only as a divisive means of creating arbitrary class boundaries within the community. If the Yugoslav policy hopes to link up its own art production to an international high art glorification of the working people, it is out of luck: that high art simply does not exist.

There are other problems with Yugoslav cultural policy. Why should a state with a rich and varied cultural background feel the need of a formalized cultural policy at all, and how can it hope to legislate such a policy if such a background does not exist? These questions apply to cultural policies everywhere, and to the agencies set up to administer them. The very fact that a government agency is deemed necessary for the preservation of art indicates only one thing, that the art in question is socially dead (or at least endangered) and can therefore no longer support itself. It serves no social function, and must be embalmed in art galleries and "Art Banks" -- a living culture's discards turned into the icons of a decadent elite.

This differs considerably from earlier state-funded arts of a propagandistic nature, like Baroque, which had a clearly defined social function to serve. Modern elitist terms like 'lowest common denominator' do an injustice to the high political arts of the past -- the social gulf that the phrase implies is only applicable to a civilization which uses Art to reinforce and widen that gap. Because they are expressions of widespread social conviction, the high arts aimed at unifying all denominators.

This is of course the espoused function of modern Fine Arts agencies as well, with one significant difference: rather than humbling themselves by stooping to the common denominator of social conviction, the Fine Arts structures hope to raise the masses to the level of Taste of the social elite -- Taste which, because of its decadence and social irrelevance, is continually scorned. Because of the masses' steadfast refusal to be perfected to the new courtly standards, Fine Art simply becomes more and more a social wedge separating classes. Whether or not the sympathies of the Art agencies are legitimate has become entirely irrelevant.

Because state agencies necessarily concern themselves with the preservation of dead art, it is safe to say that bad art will be produced because of a cultural policy, good art in spite of it. The Creative Freedom offered by state arts councils -- the freedom from social responsibility -- is not coincidentally linked to the mediocrity generally produced under such funding: it is the cause of it.

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"It was on 13 September 1931 that Naive Art in Yugoslavia came into being", with the opening of a travelling exhibit set up by the Smithsonian.<sup>88</sup> The terminology is interesting here, for it suggests that art does not exist until the international market becomes aware of it. Recognizing this international potential, the Yugoslav government set up, after the war, a number of art clubs in rural areas like Hlebine led by professional peasant painters like Ivan Generalic. In

In November 1952, a permanent exhibit, prompted by Generalic and others, was opened in Zagreb.<sup>89</sup> Yugoslav peasant painting was the invention of Progressive state policy. By 1970, the schools had achieved full international acclaim -- which meant, for the "real" connoisseurs, it was time to move on to a new discovery.

Far too many art dealers indiscriminately offer on the world market everything produced by Yugoslav peasants, workers and retired folk, and have thus turned paintings and sculptures into just another commodity for the consumer market.<sup>90</sup>

Because of the equalities of traditional peasant life, an art embodying those qualities was encouraged by state and market. Because of the social focus of the peasant social system and the luxury of time and training, the Hlebine school produced a Fine Art of demonstrable craftsmanship seldom seen in the West since the decay of the old academic system. But because of the socially disruptive nature of state and market interference and the production of work solely for gallery display and outside consumption, the artists of Hlebine school, having in effect seceded from their culture, are drawn steadily away from it into international Progressive civilization. Peasant society is reduced to an Art consumer style.

This process of de-socialization is readily traceable in Generalic's art and in his comments about his pictures. By the 1960's conscious manipulation of format begins to appear, as in



'Double Portrait' (1964) [fig. 6] -- a rather slick innovation that was short-lived. It stands at the beginning, however, of a process of internationalization that

fig. 6

marks more recent production.

Birds are a continuing source of symbolism in Generalic's work. In earlier scenes, like 'The Barn in Flames' (1954) -- depicting a cock crowing from a roof as a fire burns -- the symbolism is social: "Around here they say that if a cock flies up on a roof and crows, there's going to be a fire. It's a belief that many people in these parts still heed today."<sup>91</sup> By 1970, however, the picture 'Bird in Flight' carries a markedly more esoteric explanation: "It seems to be announcing or foretelling something, though it's hard to say what."<sup>92</sup>

Generalic had begun thinking in terms of all the big city cliches that he must have been hearing for twenty years at his gallery openings around the world: "the important thing is that the picture be full and balanced . . . What's important in painting is complete freedom, otherwise you can't produce a genuine or important work of

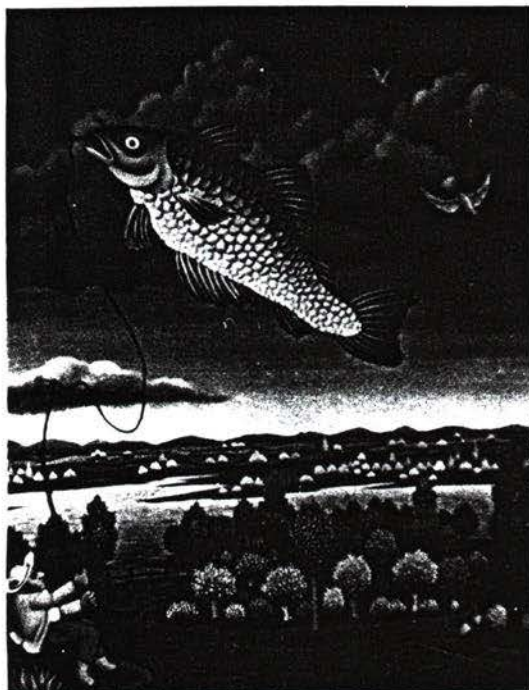


fig. 7

art."<sup>93</sup> The incongruities become more pronounced, as in 'Fish in the Air' (1970) [fig. 7], depicting a giant fish floating in the air at the end of a fisherman's hook. The purely personal experiences of an international celebrity are added to a surrealistic incongruity as in 'Cows in Front of the Eiffel Tower' (1972), which take the paintings even further from the shared experiences of peasant life. Both add an element of self-conscious naivety not found in earlier works.

Generalic's later work displays a sense of 'otherness', of his growing isolation from the village's life -- an impression entirely lacking in paintings from the 1950's. Of the 'Old Bull'

(1972), he says "The bull has that kind of strength that can resist anything, and in the same way I can put up with those who behave badly toward me because they're eaten up with envy for what I've been able to achieve in my art."<sup>94</sup>

The same trend away from the basics of peasant life to an at once more cosmopolitan and more pointedly naive view of the world is present in the work of other members of the group -- as in Generalic's son Josep's 'Beatles in Hlebine' (1973).

For Ivan Generalic, the final rejection of traditional culture for the purely personal ends of the Fine Art ideal was precipitated by the death of his wife in 1975. Having set himself apart from the strength of the community, he used painting in a psychotherapeutic manner. Works like 'Self Portrait' and 'Mask of Death in the Night' (both 1975) reveal only an individual experience. Traditional religious and mythic structures that softened the blows of death play no role in these pictures. This is personal art, severed from the social life of the community, and as such necessarily reflects the individual's helplessness in the face of reality, rather than the community's transcendence of it.

Virtually all of Generalic's works have considerable appeal. There is little stylistic alteration to mirror the decline of his art -- the changes are all determined by a steady loss of contact with his peasant culture. Because his works were made for international rather than local purchasers and evolved to suit the Taste of those buyers, Generalic's work presents an impression to the outside observer of continuing growth and refinement. But the outsider sees only style and an idyllic, alien fantasy world. He does not see that while Generalic can draw strength from his community, his adoption of the self-imposed social exile of the Fine Art myth of Genius makes him incapable of putting anything back in to his society.

There is no possibility that the Hlebine school can ever serve the culture which gave the art it produces its strength and vitality. The external forces that made the school possible must also negate

the evolution of a social tradition. Fine Art ideology is anathema to true art production, and it is the Fine Art ethic that dominates not only the market and Progressive state policy, but the secessionist outlook of Artists as well.

##### 5. Bourgeois and proletarian, the rise of bureaucracy

. . . an 'order' is in principle a part of an integrated society defined by a function relative to an aspect of the common good. Being "a part of society" does not distinguish an order from a class, but being "a part of an integrated society" does. An order is defined by a function relative to an aspect of the common good, and whenever there is a function to be fulfilled in relation to the common good, this function integrates. . . . By contrast, what belongs distinctly to the notion of classes . . . is that in their dynamism there is a definite tendency toward secession, which is particularly noticeable in the working class.<sup>95</sup>

The Fine Art basis of Yugoslav peasant painting reflects a decay of the country's peasant society in general. And, as is the case with painting, the acceleration of that process is the direct result of state policy.

Part-time farming and the participation of some family members in non-agrarian pursuits was not unknown before the war. Its growth has been accelerated by the post-war expansion of industry, whose regional distribution it tends to reflect.<sup>96</sup>

Intrinsic to all Progressive ideologies is the perceived necessity to absorb traditional forms of social production into efficiency-oriented industrial production -- to degrade the peasant and artisanal orders into the industrial working class. Viewed from the perspective of production and subsequent social organization, the similarities between bourgeois and proletarian are considerably greater and more significant than their differences.

As long as capitalists remained the ruling class, the differences between dominant and subordinate classes were explained away through ownership of the means of production. That distinction is no longer plausible for a number of reasons: the rise of a propertyless professional and managerial ruling elite; the universal "right" to upward social mobility through compulsory education, civil rights movements and trades union action; and a general decay in work processes common to all social classes.

Nowhere is the disintegration of modernist society more clearly reflected than in the individual's loss of control over his immediate environment -- over his work process and over the political decisions that determine the nature of his existence. What began in the industrialized nations as the dehumanization of the work processes of the lower social strata, has rapidly spread to include virtually all of the labour force, from labourers to service workers to the managerial elite.

Many writers have noted the same subdivision of tasks, the same loss of professional autonomy among the white-collar and service workers that went on among the factory proletariat. Indeed, we would not stretch things to speak in the first half of the twentieth century of a white-collar proletariat.<sup>97</sup>

What has been created in effect is mass culture. Dehumanized through the loss of essential social characteristics, the most basic of which centres on meaningful production, mass man is isolated, and so is forced to develop to a degree unprecedented in European history before this century, the individualism that began to emerge in earnest four centuries before and signalled the collapse of European civilization.

The notions of many liberal and socialist educators and philosophers that mass culture is to some degree the product of, or is at least exacerbated by the mass media are only partly accurate -- as chapter VII will discuss in relation to advertising. The liberals and socialists may well pose irrelevant and simplistic solutions, for it is precisely they, in conjunction with industry -- the instrument of Progressive ideology -- who are the cause of the problem.

The very notion of a mass culture presupposes a material capacity, on the part of those in command of the cultural market, to treat large publics as composed of cultural consumers. . . . Culture no longer concretizes itself in individual relationships to nature and society, but in an enormous multiplicity of forms, processes, and entities which seem independent, detached from their origin in human activity. 98

Progressive ideologues of course put themselves against this very aspect of modern life -- capitalist exploitation. Yet they insist that industrial production is the essential pre-requisite for Progressive civilization -- that production merely needs to be made "humane" and "responsible", that people themselves merely need to be altered to accept their "liberation". Progressive theory assumes that the re-humanization of culture will -- somehow -- automatically follow in the wake of the workers' freedom from oppression. The fact that this has not happened under conservative, liberal, socialist

or communist regimes is for all practical purposes ignored.

Capitalism is not, and never was, the root of social degeneracy. If it were, the social problems attributed to it would have waned proportionally as capitalism, "the private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange",<sup>99</sup> itself waned. With the emergence of the liberal welfare state, the "right" to upward social mobility inherent in compulsory education, the explosive migration of the industrial proletariat to the ranks of the more socially desirable university-trained white collar workers<sup>100</sup> have all militated against the continuation of unbridled capitalist exploitation. Yet instead of creating a "post-industrial", humanized system of production, the dissolution of modern civilization continues unabated. Far from vanishing with the death of capitalism, mass culture becomes an ever greater fact of modern life -- utterly irrespective of social class.<sup>101</sup>

Leftists would argue that liberalism is nothing more than a tool of capitalist ideology, making palatable an otherwise intolerable system. This is undoubtedly true<sup>102</sup> but what initially motivates a concept does not necessarily remain the motivation behind it. Western liberalism created such a monumental bureaucratic structure to protect private enterprise that it absorbed a major part of the old capitalist structure into its guts almost without noticing it.

Embedded in the concept of totalitarianism, perhaps more implicitly than explicitly, is the assumption of a monolithic entity with clarity both in jurisdiction and decision making. But . . . [the] supposed monolithic entities suffered power struggles within the ruling group, diffusion of decision making, and a complex, often unclear, relationship between party and state.<sup>103</sup>

Liberals would argue that similarities between totalitarian regimes and Progressive democracies do not exist. But once again, what the two conceptions of mankind have in common may be more significant than their differences.

The blurring of monolithic governing entities -- Party or parliament, or both -- and governing bureaucracy is not the only point of comparison, but it is a very important one. Perhaps the defining characteristic of the liberal democratic platform, universal suffrage and the individual responsibility to intelligently choose between competing ideologies,<sup>104</sup> has all but vanished for two reasons: the collapse, particularly in North American politics, of any firm ideological belief or freedom of choice;<sup>105</sup> and the replacement of that foundation with random advertising methods of promoting and "packaging" political candidates.

Owing to the lack of ideas, the lack even of real arguments which can be marketed, the parties imagine that attractive pictures and slogans, the true, human, and honest expressions they conjure up, will give them the two or three percent of the voters who make the difference between resounding victory and resounding catastrophe. . . . "I think of a person in a polling station, in doubt over his two ballots," writes one advertising expert. "He is in the same situation as someone in doubt about two competing toothpastes. It is the toothpaste most firmly implanted in his mind which he chooses."<sup>106</sup>

The loss of political freedom of choice in the democratic industrialized nations parallels a growing, and contrived dependence of citizens upon the bureaucratic structures of government. The paternalism of modern democracies -- or government as Big Brother -- underlines the identifying characteristic of all Progressive ideologies; democratic or totalitarian they are, above all else, revolutionary.

Nowhere in the West is the cultivation of revolutionary attitudes more clearly seen than in the remarkable rise to social prominence of the professional classes, medical practitioners in particular.

[By] emphasizing impulse rather than calculation as the determinant of human conduct, and by holding society responsible for the problems confronting individuals, a "government-oriented" professional class has attempted to create a demand for its own services. Professionals . . . have a vested interest in discontent, because discontented people turn to professional services for relief. But the same principle underlies all of modern capitalism, which continually tries to create new demands and new discontents that can be assuaged only by the consumption of commodities.<sup>107</sup>

Alienated mass man replaces social production with personal consumption. Having lost control of the work process, he will be ever more indifferent to his absorption into centralized state mechanisms, which must themselves continue to grow to protect industry and the population from their mutual conflict of interests. In any ideological structure, bureaucracies emerge "automatically with the introduction of . . . monopolistic political power systems, and . . . no amount of control, however broadly based, can prevent such a development."<sup>108</sup>

No totalitarian leadership in its right mind<sup>109</sup> wants to rule through political terror. Stalin resorted to that technique in the face of the failure of the ideals held by Lenin (that the workers would perfect themselves spontaneously once given the proper political system)<sup>110</sup> and because the Soviet industrial complex was incapable of meeting the material demands of the newly liberated populace. But there are indications that the process followed in the West (following its own reigns of terror in the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries) will be repeated in Communist Bloc countries as the vision of an unattainable ideology fades into the alienation of consumerism.

[The] drive for consumption, the chase after Western commodities and fashion gear, the eating and drinking bouts become expressions of human alienation just as they have been, and are, in capitalist systems. People are no longer aware of this kind of alienation and their only regret is that consumption meets with more difficulties in the East than it does in the West. They even have illusions about Westerner's opportunities for unlimited consumption that the communist regimes try to dispel in vain, since the bureaucrats themselves are mainly interested in their own material well-being. On the contrary, the drive to consume is being systematically promoted since people who are interested in consumption represent less of a political threat to these regimes.<sup>111</sup>

As Western freedom of political choice evaporates into just another advertisers' con game, and thus merges with communist dictatorship of the bureaucracy, as human beings in both systems come more and more to embody the humanists' abstract invention of culture in the computerized egalitarianism of absolute dehumanization, the real Revolution shows its colours. Is Freedom nothing more than the freedom to consume: equality only the equal right to consume? Even if these rights could be given to the whole of humanity -- if the real heroes of the American productive dream were not victimized Third World workers and their jackbooted leaders -- even if after sixty years of Progressive world democratization by both ideological camps the gap between the world's rich and poor were narrowing instead of growing, even then there was supposed to be more to the Revolution. It was to end up in freedom, not psychotherapy, in equality, not the police state.

But as noted earlier, these dreams are not built into ideological theory -- they are only the hope of the great modern leap of faith. Totalitarianism is built into the theory, and it is totalitarianism that we have wound up with. Nor is it an ideology based simply on the rule of terror -- that is only its most primitive method. Totalitarianism is absolute control, the control of thought, by antisocial interests.

The tragedy of modern man is twofold. It is the loss of community, of the social focus of his life and his conviction in the spiritual capacity of his species -- it is the loss of human quality and strength. But perhaps even worse, his is the tragedy of the systematic destruction of all the remnants of those old strengths, even in areas of the world not genuinely infected with the West's social decline, by often legitimately well-meaning Progressive people.

"[The] naive notion that people normally want liberal democracy has been disastrously present in twentieth century liberal thought."<sup>112</sup> The same might be said of socialist attempts to "liberate" the Third World's innate class-consciousness. What is in fact liberated is not man's repressed impulse to perfection, but his human nature -- the desire for social mobility, power over others and material luxury. Kept in check by traditional social orders, these are the forces let loose by class revolution. World revolution may indeed, as Marx suggested, be inevitable as the Third World suffers under the puppets of the great world ideologies, but it is so only because of the systematic destruction of the old order by the Progressive intelligensia.

Theirs is the modern dilemma, to convince the peasants and artisans of the world that what they really want from their revolution is not the simple life of craft and local autonomy but the great world vision of the new messiahs. Yet the members of the old order have been remarkably reluctant to seize the riches offered by their betters. The police state is the idealist's first compromise with reality -- mind control through fear. With the second phase of

totalitarianism -- the pleasure principle of the evolved industrial revolution -- art begins to play a crucial role. This is not of course the Fine Art of the dilettante avant-garde, but advertising, the real art of revolution.

## FOOTNOTES (Chapter VI)

1. Roy Wagner, The Invention of Culture (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1975), p. 77.
2. Jean Duvignaud, The Sociology of Art, Timothy Wilson, trans. (London, Granada, 1972; orig. ed. 1967), p. 73.
3. Stanley H. Udy, Jr., Work in Traditional and Modern Society (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 1970).
4. Ibid., tables pp. 31, 132-133: Type V, the most developed, was characterized by complex stratification, centralized government, sedentary agriculture and exclusive proprietorship. Among the societies exhibiting these characteristics were Burma, China, England, Germany, Haiti, Iran and Rome. Type IV presented all of the characteristics but complex stratification -- among them Crow, Fijian, Mzab, Maori and Tahitian culture. Type III lacked centralized government and complex stratification (Hopi, Iroquois and Zulu); Type II exhibited only exclusive proprietorship (Haida, Kwakiutl and Ojibwa); Type I, the most primitive, possessed none of the characteristics (Blackfoot, Copper Eskimo).

## 5. TYPE OF WORK ORGANIZATION

TYPE OF SOCIETY	PRODUCTION DETERMINED	SOCIALLY DETERMINED
I	31	2
II	15	11
III	28	86
IV	22	82
V	0	78

-- from Ibid., p. 35. The 125 societies were further broken down into 359 work organizations.

6. Ibid., p. 45.
7. Ibid., p. 15.
8. Friedrich Heer, The Intellectual History of Europe, op. cit., p. 460.
9. Walter Ullmann, The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages (Baltimore 1966), pp. 14-15.

10. Ibid., p. 57.
11. Edward Shorter, "The History of Work in the West", Work and Community in the West, E. Shorter, ed. (New York 1973), pp. 1-33, esp. p. 6.
12. Friedrich Heer, The Medieval World (London 1962), p. 46.
13. Ibid., p. 48.
14. "Articles of the Spurriers of London, 1345", Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History, Vol. II, No. I (New York 1971; rpt. 1902 ed.), pp. 21-23, esp. p. 21.
15. "Also, that no alien of another country, or foreigner of this country, shall follow or use the said trade, unless he is enfranchised before the Mayor, Alderman and Chamberlain . . .". Ibid., p. 23.
16. John Harvey, Medieval Craftsmen (London 1975), p. 66.
17. Ibid., p. 128.
18. Ernest Weekley, An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English Vol. II, op. cit., p. 970.
19. John Harvey, op. cit., p. 9.
20. "Order of the Pageants of the Corpus Christi Play in the City of York, A.D. 1415", Translations and Reprints . . ., op. cit., pp. 29-32, esp. p. 32.
21. Walter Ullmann, Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages (New York 1966), p. 220.
22. Francis Aidan Hibbert, The Influence and Development of English Guilds (New York 1970; rpt. 1891 ed.), p. 47.
23. Urban T. Holmes, Jr., Medieval Man (Chapel Hill, Univ. of Carolina, 1980), p. 113.
24. Edward Shorter, op. cit., p. 9.
25. Urban T. Holmes, Jr., op. cit., p. 123.
26. "Rules of the Guild of White Tawyers", Medieval Culture, Ruth Brantl, ed. (New York 1966), pp. 142-143, esp. 142.
27. "Selections from the Usages and Customs of the Gild of the Holy Trinity of Lynn", Translations and Reprints . . . op. cit., pp. 19-20, esp. p. 19.

28. Edward Shorter, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
29. Ernest Weekly, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 378.
30. John Harvey, op. cit., p. 128.
31. Ibid., p. 49.
32. Edward Shorter, op. cit., p. 3.
33. Ibid., pp. 9-10.
34. Ibid., p. 11.
35. Urban T. Holmes, op. cit., p. 81.
36. Gwyn A. Williams, Artisans and Sans-Culottes (London 1968), p. 20.
37. Howard B. Rock, Artisans of the New Republic (New York 1979), p. 20.
38. Gwyn A. Williams, op. cit., p. 114.
39. W.H. Chaloner, The Skilled Artisans during the Industrial Revolution (London 1969), p. 5.
40. Walter S. Neff, Work and Human Behavior, op. cit., pp. 85-86.
41. Gwyn A. Williams, op. cit., pp. 86-87.
42. Ibid., p. 63.
43. Francis Aidan Hibbert, op. cit., p. 103.
44. Edward Shorter, op. cit., p. 13.
45. C.W. Mills, White Collar (New York 1956), p. 222.
46. Nineteenth century comment on photography, quoted in Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York 1978, 4th ed.), p. 21.
47. Paul Delaroche, quoted in Bruce Bernard, Photodiscovery (New York 1980), p. 15.
48. Jean Gimpel, The Cult of Art, op. cit., p. 135.
49. Gisele Freund, Photography and Society (Boston 1980; orig. French ed. 1974), p. 35.

50. Ibid., p. 74.
51. M.A. Gaudin, quoted in Beaumont Newhall, op. cit., pp. 17-18.
52. Gisele Freund, op. cit., p. 85.
53. A. Thomas, The Expanding Eye (London 1978), p. 8.
54. Susan Sontag, On Photography (New York 1977 ed.), p. 15.
55. Beaumont Newhall, op. cit., p. 37.
56. Gisele Freund, op. cit., p. 88.
57. Francis D. Klingender, Art and the Industrial Revolution (St. Albans, Herts.; Granada, 1975 ed.), p. 145.
58. R. Robert Sinai, The Decadence of the Modern World, op. cit., 108.
59. Arnold Hauser, The Social History of Art, Vol. III, op. cit., p. 55.
60. Norman Birnbaum, The Crisis of Industrial Society (New York 1969), p. 113.
61. Harold Mendelsohn; H.T. Spetnagel, "Entertainment as a Sociological Enterprise", The Entertainment Functions of Television, Percy H. Tannenbaum, ed. (Hillsdale, New Jersey 1980), pp. 13-29, esp. p. 16.
62. Ibid., p. 17.
63. "Every TV family show -- whether trite or profound -- offers concerned viewers an opportunity to analyze the ways in which social norms are implicitly or explicitly present."  
Gregor T. Goethals, The T.V. Ritual (Boston 1981), p. 41.
64. Ibid., p. 34.
65. Jerome L. Singer, "The Power and Limitations of Television", The Entertainment Function of Television, op. cit., pp. 31-65.
66. Emily S. Rosenberg, Spreading the American Dream (New York 1982), p. 93
67. Ibid., p. 101.
68. Herbert I. Schiller, Mass Communications and American Empire (New York 1969), p. 87.

83. That the nationalist movements were not ethnically deep-rooted is witnessed by a number of rigorous public surveys on cultural relations carried out in the 1960's, showing that in Croatia, one of the major areas of dissent, over 85% of the population registered high ethnic tolerance.  
-- G.K. Bertsch, Value and Community in Multi-National Yugoslavia (White Plains, New York 1971), pp. 108-109.
84. Ibid., p. 114.
85. S. Majstorovic, Cultural Policy in Yugoslavia (Paris 1972), p. 11.
86. Ibid., p. 12.
87. Ibid.
88. B. Keleman, Naive Art (London 1977), (no pagination).
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Ivan Generalic, quoted in N. Tomasevic, op. cit., p. 143.
92. Ibid., p. 192.
93. Ibid., p. 186.
94. Ibid., p. 205.
95. Yves R. Simon, Work, Society and Culture, op. cit., pp. 93-94.
96. S.H. Franklin, The European Peasantry (London 1969), p. 184.
97. Edward Shorter, op. cit., p. 23.
98. Norman Birnbaum, op. cit., p. 23.
99. Samuel Brittan, Capitalism and the Permissive Society (London 1973), p. 54.
100. By the 1970's, the number of white collar and service workers far surpassed the total number of blue collar workers. Considerably more than  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the white collar force were of the new ruling elite -- professionals, managers and technicians.  
-- the Editors of 'Fortune', Challenges for Business in the 1970's (Boston 1972 ed.), p. 38.

101. Robert Ulich, Progress or Disaster? (New York 1971), p. 123.
102. See, for example, Seymour E. Harris, ed., Saving American Capitalism: A Liberal Economic Program (New York 1948).
103. Michael Curtis, Totalitarianism (New Brunswick, New Jersey 1979), p. 75.
104. Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism (New York 1979), p. 229.
105. All parties, whatever their original philosophy, are now to a great degree committed to maintain established social services and their accompanying bureaucracies, so that the basic degrees of political philosophy -- from entrepreneurial individualism to collectivization -- are to a considerable extent lost. But as significantly, freedom of political choice is a hindrance to the functioning of a bureaucratic system. As John F. Kennedy pointed out in 1962:

"Most of us are conditioned for many years to have a political viewpoint . . . The fact of the matter is that most of the problems that we now face are technological problems, are administrative problems. They are very sophisticated judgments, which do not lend themselves to the great sort of passionate movements which have stirred this country so often in the past. [They] deal with questions which are now beyond the comprehension of most men."

-- quoted in Ibid., p. 145.

106. Herbert Tingsten, The Problem of Democracy (Totowa, New Jersey 1965), pp. 200-201.
107. Christopher Lasch, op. cit., p. 395.
108. Ota Sik, The Communist Power System, M.G. Freidberg, trans., (New York 1981), p. 12.

109. This is a rather delicate point, for it can be obviously argued that no totalitarian regime is in "its right mind". On the other hand, it might be too convenient to suggest that modern history is determined by the whims of a handful of madmen, however much it may seem so. The important point is that these men are the logical product of a long and logical Progressive argument -- an argument made insane by its initial rejection of society as it is, in favour of society as it might be.
110. Ota Sik, *op. cit.*, p. 19. For that matter, Lenin too imposed his fair share of political terror.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
112. G. Lowell Field and John Higley, Elitism (London 1980), p. 61.

## CHAPTER VII: Conclusion: The Trivialization of Art

## 1. The avant-garde: the revolution that failed

A worker's figure in heroic pose  
with a red flag and an appropriate  
slogan -- how temptingly intelligible  
that is to a person unversed in art  
and how terribly we need to fight  
against this pernicious intelligibility.<sup>1</sup>

Our revolution is directed at the  
so-called typographical harmony of  
the page, which is opposed to the  
flux and reflux, the jerks and  
burst of style that are represented  
on it. We shall use, therefore, in  
the same page, three or four different  
colours of ink and, if necessary, even  
twenty forms of type.<sup>2</sup>

$$S(P_i + P_{ii} + P_{iii} + \dots P) Y = T \quad 3$$

Wherever utopianism has spread the avant-garde has followed, from France to Germany, Russia, and England, the United States and finally, in greater or lesser degrees, throughout most of the civilized world. The two phenomena are intimately linked, often through their mutual demand for revolution as the basic requisite for a decent society, always through the underlying assumption of Modernism -- that the Art of the advance guard would help to lead mankind to a state of perfection. Art could no longer be a socially functional thing, serving society as it is; society must now adapt itself to its Art.

The majority of avant-garde Artists -- comprising Arts and Crafts, Futurism, de Stijle, Bauhaus, fauvism, surrealism, dada, social realism, German Expressionism, Post-Impressionism and so on -- have all considered themselves social visionaries, bringing the New Art to the New People.<sup>4</sup> The form of revolutionary action chosen was, of course, confrontation. And since the political implications of

the People's Art were never absorbed by the People, in the bourgeois West or in the worker's socialist paradise, that confrontation amounted to a purely stylistic one. In this sense, there are no significant differences between ideologically-inspired and a-political Fine Artists like the Impressionists.

According to theory the masses, by rising to Art, would develop the connoisseur's aesthetic appreciation of beauty, thereby making misery, brutality, exploitation and ugliness unbearable -- "to reintroduce the aesthetic into daily life was a profoundly revolutionary act: by altering their experience of and expectations from the world, it would prepare the masses for social, political, and economic revolution. . .".<sup>5</sup>

But people, including both the middle-class and the industrial proletariat, always had appreciated beauty -- to do so is a basic human characteristic. If the avant-garde were to gain any credence for its avowed super-human status, it must necessarily redefine beauty -- as ugliness. The proletariat would naturally respond to such an expression of its own alienation and the reactionary middle-class would refute it with the full force of its pompous stupidity -- or so the social realists and expressionists thought. The less polemical formalists like Mondrian took a slightly different approach -- because the Chosen Class was perfectible and the middle-class forever condemned to its decadent stagnation, the creation of a perfect art was all that was necessary for the building of utopia. The industrial proletariat did not listen.

Nor were the masses particularly interested in appreciating the subtle nuances of self-alienation depicted by dada, surrealism, abstract expressionism, conceptual and performance art. The therapy-minded intellectuals and connoisseurs were interested, and were even more appreciative of the sterile perfection of Mondrian, hard edge, colour field, minimalism and the rest. And the biggest Philistines of all -- the corporations -- liked International Style architecture so much that they turned it into their own statement of antisocial industrial and financial conviction. For the masses trapped inside

the perfect spaces of van der Rohe's offices or Le Corbusier's apartments, the fact that their neuroses and alienation grows rather than evaporates is their own fault -- it is no wonder that, with their stubborn resistance to self-perfection, they feel like alien contaminants in a dehumanized, sterile but perfect world.<sup>6</sup>

None of this matters much anymore, now that the avant-garde has died.<sup>7</sup> The bohemian search for revolutionary society was seldom more than a social misfit's half-hearted retreat from what he thought he couldn't have anyway -- middle-class success. Roy Lichtenstein's comments on Pop Art sum up the whole attitude as well as anything: "It was hard to get a painting that was despicable enough so that no one would hang it . . . The one thing everyone hated was commercial art; apparently they didn't hate that enough either."<sup>8</sup>

It boiled down to ugliness and amateurism for its own sake -- to mystification instead of enlightenment, to the simple desire of Fine Artists for an elite class standing through participation in one of the cults of modernism. And, as usual, the only ones to rise to the bait were (and are) those who sought to impose their own image of perfection on society -- the humanists, libertarians and egalitarians, appointing themselves the new cultural elite in the classless society; the upwardly mobile, using connoisseurial Taste as a means to and justification for social superiority; and the misfits, the inspired Geniuses of the Fine Arts who once formed messianic leagues of malcontents, and who now find themselves welcomed by a new power structure that prizes socially secessionistic behaviour. After all the fuss, there seems to be no major divergence of interests in what art historians still see as groups socially poles apart, but which have still managed to merge into post-modernism: the post-war avant-garde academy.

As the Art cult's inner sancta -- bank vaults, art banks, galleries and museums -- swell to bursting point with the avant-garde's ultimate condemnations of bourgeois society, the revolutionary Artist finds that he can do nothing right. Latrines, bricks, sand, decapitated chickens, the 'photodocumentation' of conceptual works, videos of

performance Art -- nothing is without its price, and all of it meant to be price-less.

The Soviet avant-garde has been luckier, managing to get its shows bulldozed by the authorities -- but then, in the perfect State, the avant-garde was to vanish along with disaffectation and exploitation.<sup>9</sup> The continued existence of the little revolution in Art merely reflects the failure of the big revolution in society.

A detailed discussion of what the avant-garde had to say for itself (and what it had to say -- the theoretical keys to the world of esoterica that elevated Fine Artist to the ranks of the intelligensia -- was considerably more important than what it had to make) would be fruitless here. The only ones who need convincing of the inanity of the typographical revolution and the hundreds of other trifling Progressive concerns of Fine Art's Geniuses are the cultists themselves -- and as modern Art prices skyrocket, few of them are willing to concede or even care that their cult objects are little more than a bad joke to the world outside.

In fact, there is no reason why the avant-garde should warrant any more than an occasional footnote in art history books. With the exception of the modernist architecture related to the avant-garde movement (whose influence has been more or less universally negative), the avant-garde has had no influence on its own society, nor has it ever achieved any significant popular support. Even the most inspired Genius of them all, Picasso, remains little more than a name to the majority of our culture.

. . . certainly no painter has ever been known to so many people . . . [But] if you take a world view, not more than one out of every hundred who knows the name of Picasso would be able to recognize a single picture by him.<sup>10</sup>

Picasso has projected, not a body of works to our culture, but an image of Picasso the man. Even to his own mind, his image was all, his work nothing.<sup>11</sup> But to be precise, the facade that Picasso had erected about himself was not that of a man, but of a superman, a Genius. And in one way or another, to one degree or another, this is the image that the whole of modernist Art rests upon. The concept gave the advance guard the credentials it needed to assume that presumptuous position; and provided an essentially divine rationale for redefining what art was, and what the artist did.

## 2. The myth of inspired Genius: Fine Art and the idea of degeneracy

The Platonic circle at Careggi used Fine Art as a working model of the ideal of 'gentilezza'. The nobility granted by God to the Artist was embodied in his Genius: "A work of Art created by the artists was henceforth considered to be the reflection of an individual thought and no longer that of a superior idea."<sup>12</sup>

It is for this reason -- that Genius reflects the personal merits of an individual -- that the Italian Renaissance created the concept; its similarity to the notion of nobility is unmistakable. Yet the very concept of creative Genius has never been seriously challenged by Fine Art apologists.

The closest medieval equivalents to the Renaissance term Genius were the words 'gin' and 'engine' -- both meaning skill, wit, craft, or a mechanical device.<sup>13</sup> They meant, essentially, the ability to do a job well; nothing more, but nothing less, either -- the modern craftsman or technician still understands the social implications of the sentiment, and does not seek any "higher" fulfillment: there is none. A job well done is work that more than adequately fulfills its social function; an act of Genius serves essentially private ends

-- it is "above" serving a social function.

The word 'Genius' was used throughout the Middle Ages, but only in a mythological sense. Its usage evolved from early Etruscan times through to the medieval period. From its original reference to the god of birth it evolved in the Middle Ages to be a god of birth and fortune: it always remained an allegorical figure, its qualities never transferred to individuals.<sup>14</sup>

It seems logical that an age like the Renaissance, whose small coterie of intelligensia assumed for itself god-like powers of creativity, would express that attitude in mythic language. Within the context of social legitimization, the term is simply a restatement of 'gentilezza', or nobility -- the glorification of more commonplace qualities, like craft, disguised by esoterica. It is perhaps significant that Leonardo da Vinci saw Art to have two key elements: mechanics and nobility -- the latter quality being what one would normally associate with Genius, that individual quality which determines the transcendence of a work.<sup>15</sup>

A rational, if intense, egotism or burning individualism in the genius links up in a subtle way with the pathologic expansiveness of the insane; it does not link up with anything in commonplace humanity. . . . Like much of the neuropathic stock from which he is derived, the genius, at least before he becomes a successful genius, forgiven everything by the elite, finds it hard to adapt himself to his environment. . . . Of course, after the attainment of success, society adapts itself to him.<sup>16</sup>

The Genius, as the term was applied to Fine Artists until about the Second World War, was someone who, purportedly through the superiority of his intellect and emotional sensitivity, could not fit into a world created by and for lesser creatures. He was in that sense antisocial, but this was in theory the result of the inadequacy of his society, not of his refusal to see himself as a part of that society. He was alienated, not from a society to which he considered himself superior but, incredibly, from himself, whatever that may mean. As a member of the avant-garde he was generally a socialist or a fascist; he would only accept a society that had progressed to what he saw as his own level of perfection. He was, at the same time, explicitly or implicitly an anarchic individualist, blaming the breakdown of the society in which he lived on the inferiority of its inhabitants and not on the divisive individualism that he so firmly believed in. The fragmentation of a society into alienated individuals could be rectified, he believed, through an even greater individualism, even more self-expression.

Since the War, the concept of inspired Genius has been somewhat euphemized, as is to be expected from an institutionalized revolutionary movement. As Fine Artists become respectable professionals, often with tenure to consider, behaviour becomes more symbolic. But even so, modernists (even those critical of aspects of modernism, like John Berger) can still speak of "the glory and mystery of genius".<sup>17</sup> The concept has only been softened; it has not been eradicated or even substantively altered.

In a research project begun in 1921 by Lewis M. Terman, a group of nearly 1500 gifted children were periodically observed at selected points in their lives and careers. In 1959 a volume was published summarizing their lives to date. Suicide rates were at or below normal. The test group as a whole showed "normal or below-normal incidences of serious personality maladjustment", nor were those tested above 170 IQ "appreciably more prone to serious maladjustment".<sup>18</sup>

There is, then, nothing inherently antisocial or deviant in the personalities of intelligent people. If the Arts attract social outcasts, they are drawn not by their superior intellect, but by their deviancy. The intellectual mystique surrounding the Arts is not demonstrably more than a legitimization and a glorification of antisocial behaviour.

But the creative Genius is not necessarily an intelligent or capable person: he is something more -- inspired.<sup>19</sup> Yet the concept of inspiration, too, can be traced to a specific need for legitimization.

Generally impoverished and deprived of political power and a privileged class status following the demise of the ancien regime, the Romantic artists and men of letters revived the classical notion of "divine mania" or "inspiration" and established it as a defining mark of the extraordinary individual. The aura of "mania" endowed the genius with a mystical and inexplicable quality that served to differentiate him from the typical man, the bourgeois, the philistine, and, quite importantly, the "mere" man of talent. . .".<sup>20</sup>

The problem that emerges, then, is the same as with that of connoisseurship: once the facts of the matter -- the content of a painting or the ability of a man -- have been purposely obscured, made "mystical and inexplicable", is it then important whether or not anything exists behind that mask? Is the person exhibiting the behaviour commonly agreed to be that of Artistic Genius necessarily a genius in the sense that the word is understood in the sciences? To be a Genius is simply to behave like one, to conform to the convention of what Genius is. Once the behavioural mystique is stripped away -- and the Romantic notion of "divine mania" is only an exaggeration of the mystique surrounding the intelligensia that it had

cultivated since the Renaissance, when it was expressed as 'melancholia' -- what remains is, at best, a man of greater or lesser talent, and just as likely (since a mystique is deemed necessary in the first place) a man of no talent at all.

What then is the difference between the talented man and the Genius? The man of talent "differs from the ordinary man merely in quantitative terms or in the degree of mental acuity".<sup>21</sup> In terms of social production, talent is readily discernable by all; therefore a talented craftsman's product will be objectively superior by comparison of the work with that of lesser craftsmen. The objective criterion is clearly that of function, whether in a low art like woodworking or a high art like painting -- the work of talent will better fulfill the social functions required of it; the talented artist will better combine craft and an understanding of his society's needs. Not so the man of Artistic Genius.

The talented man adapts his skills to the needs of society; the Genius, fired only by an 'inner compulsion', is outside his society, superior to and scornful of it. He seeks to change society to suit his desires, is incapable or unwilling to adapt himself to the good of his community. Hence the other part of the myth of Genius: the social outsider is also outside society's laws, producing the idea of the Genius as deviant -- criminal, libertine, pervert, alcoholic, drug addict, madman, frail consumptive and syphilitic.<sup>22</sup> The Geniuses are the bohemians -- the Picassos, Genets, Wildes, Lautrecs, Rothcos, Pollocks -- seeking out the debased social dregs, wallowing in their unadaptability, and glorifying it.

Yet in all other professions, the myth of the mad Genius has long since been rooted out.<sup>23</sup> How can such a patent absurdity continue to be a major foundation of modernist Fine Art ideology? The answer is simple, and can only be seen in terms of cultism. While purporting above all to seek the Truth, Fine Art, with no responsibility to or connection with its society, is free to determine its own doctrine and mythology. If that goes against everything that is

objectively provable, it doesn't really matter. With the religious leap of faith the myth becomes the Truth. Those who accuse the Fine Arts dilettantes of idle, antisocial self-glorification are simply dismissed as insensitive, shallow, vindictive or just 'unhip'. In other words, the demonstrable proof is ignored in favour of a personal attack on the critic.

So the faery castle of Fine Arts floats on, firmly rooted in its myth of Genius. Social historians have done little to alter that fact -- the most influential of them, like John Berger and Herbert Read, buy the myth as readily as the bourgeoisie they criticize: the messianism of the political left requires the vision of the perfect man as much, and more, than did the bourgeois individualism that preceded it.

### 3. Paradise for sale: market and mobility

It is perhaps clichéd by now to point out that the greatest failure of the avant-garde was its success. In its attempt to produce the unsaleable commodity and so stay ahead of the Art Loving collector, the avant-garde went in the name of absolute truth from absurdity to absurdity. It is generally agreed that the 1970's saw the death of Progressive Art of ideology,<sup>24</sup> but the final blow had been struck earlier, in 1956 -- the year that painting prices surpassed stock prices in percentage increase.<sup>25</sup> Two years later avant-garde Art made its first major appearance on the international market. Fine Art had finally joined the mainstream of the revolution -- not the revolution of the Artistic and academic intelligensia's messianic daydreams, but the real revolution of the marketing of social status. And as Progressive painting (liberator of the latent connoisseur within each proletarian) was becoming a movable item on the New York market, International Style architecture (releasing the perfect man through the creation of the perfect environment) was taken up as the monument of corporate business and state.

Modern connoisseurs are proud of their appreciation of contemporary Fine Art. They have to be, for it is only their acceptance of the Progressive Art of their own day that separates them from the connoisseurs of the past -- a notorious pack of bunglers who let Rembrandt and Daumier starve, who ignored Turner and Blake, who ridiculed the Impressionists and laughed the Armory Show out of town. To the liberal market Tastes of the late 1950's, there were few times when the Art Lovers of the past had not in fact turned up with egg on their faces. The mistake would not be made again -- even if it meant (as it did) being conned into serious contemplation of 'abstracts' by parrots and chimpanzees.<sup>26</sup>

There are certain implications inherent in modern connoisseurs' criticisms of their predecessors -- that the contemporary version is more sensitive, more tuned-in to the Truth, that he has exploded arbitrary class and nationalistic prejudices and emerged a member of the perfected intelligensia; a member of the True revolution, and not a simple social climbing narcissist. It is a difficult suggestion to debunk, because it has no grounding whatsoever in demonstrable fact. It is for this reason that the Fine Arts edifice, to the astonishment of its critics, continues to grow. It forms a closed system unassailable by the laws governing the world outside: the Culture Lover embraces Art because he is superior; he is superior because he embraces Art.

But before accepting this rather nebulous and self-congratulatory rationale as evidence of the perfected man's honed sensitivity, other more pragmatic reasons should be examined as possible causes for the latest golden age of the living Fine Artist. These alternatives centre on aspects that have been a major passion of all connoisseurs -- the Art market and social mobility.

The pre-eminence of Paris as the heart of the international art market ended abruptly in 1789. Its successor was perhaps obvious: Britain had become, with the Industrial Revolution, the economic leader of the world; the massive flow of booty from British imperialism was

already well under way. But it was primarily the sale of a single collection, smuggled from France -- that of Phillipe, Duke of Orleans -- that in the space of the eight years after 1792 created the English market.

The Orleans Sales do not mark a major deviation from the earlier French, Dutch or Italian markets. A list of chief buyers, while unlike any one of the above markets, is consistent with British tolerance of both mercantile and aristocratic interests. Twelve of the buyers were nobility, six were gentlemen amateurs, four were painters, six were dealers. There were ten merchants (four of whom were M.P.'s; three others had been knighted) and three bankers. There was only one industrialist, the Duke of Bridgewater, whose interests may perhaps be identified with his lineage rather than with his profession.<sup>27</sup>

One of the bankers, however, John Julius Angerstein, does stand at the beginning of a significant trend in the nature of art marketing. Angerstein was no speculator. He bought Sebastiano del Piombo's 'Raising of Lazarus' at the Sale of 1798 for £3,750. In 1803 the French government offered £10,000 for the work. Shortly afterward William Beckford offered £13,300, "the biggest offer that had ever been made for any picture in history" -- Angerstein refused both.<sup>28</sup>

It has been said that he was a new type of collector in that his acquisition of pictures was also an acquisition of prestige. His was certainly not the first collection which was intended to bring prestige to its owner, but as a self-made man of foreign birth 'considered deficient in Education' he may well have relied on his pictures to express himself . . . As the collection increased, more and more visitors were allowed to see it, until not to have seen Mr. Angerstein's pictures was to be socially unfinished.<sup>29</sup>

His collection granted him a social stature that he did not possess as a birthright, but this seems common enough in the history of connoisseurship. What makes Angerstein remarkable is not that he sought equality with the aristocracy, but the success that he achieved in doing it. While earlier bourgeois collectors had been satisfied to rise to the level of the aristocracy, Angerstein forced them to rise to his. This is perhaps less a reflection of his collecting prowess than a reflection of the times; nevertheless, Angerstein was a portent of a critical phase in the market's development -- the disappearance of aristocratic influence, and of the traditional qualitative and socially functional concerns that that perhaps implies.

But Angerstein bought something even better than prestige and temporal fame -- he bought immortality. If he did not see that, the collectors who came after him clearly did. His collection was bought posthumously by Parliament in 1823, and forms the nucleus of the National Gallery.<sup>30</sup> 'Lazarus' has been the Gallery's Number One for over a century and a half and somehow, through the vague connections between temporal ownership and perpetual identity, Angerstein has retained some of that Number One-ness for himself.

Until the 1840's the British market had centred on sales of Old Masters, early and High Renaissance and seventeenth century Dutch for the most part. But the enthusiasm generated by the Orleans Sales often vanished when a purchase was later proved to have been manhandled or of doubtful provenance. By the 1880's this and a number of other factors had combined to significantly change the market's wares. The growth of advertising and of the popularity of prints had given painters and collectors a whole new source of income in the sale of engravers' copyrights. A new market for living artists developed as well, as advertisers bought works outright for promotional functions, as in the well-known example of Pear's Soap's purchase of John Everett Millais' 'Bubbles' in 1886. Moreover, the nationalism of the Victorian era, embodied in the Gothic revival, and a shift in Taste away

from the 'dark' Old Masters (a darkness produced primarily by discoloration from gas lighting) produced a renewed interest in contemporary British art. All of these factors combined to produce in the '80's a revival of the fortunes of living Fine Artists that would not recur until the post-Second World War American market.<sup>31</sup>

The result was that a group of mild social radicals and early avant-gardists, the Pre-Raphaelites,<sup>32</sup> did achieve market success during the members' lifetimes. The P.R.B.'s choice of confrontation through subject matter rather than style, at a time when exotica was the rage in academic painting, made the Brotherhood a very borderline group of radicals indeed, and in fact the radical inspiration soon faded from its concerns. Nonetheless, acceptance of any sort of radical movement by the Fine Arts academic structure would not be repeated until the academy fused with the avant-garde seventy years later.

But even as the P.R.B. and late-century academics were enjoying the fruits of their golden age, changes were occurring that would effectively shut living avant-garde Artists out of the big-time British market. The movement of patronage away from landed gentry to industrialists became rather more rapid with the depression of the 1880's. Increasingly poor agricultural revenues made land a liability, while the Settled Lands Act of 1882 made the liquidation of property easier. Aristocratic collectors began to move their collections. This influx of Old Masters did not however immediately return them to favour with the British market. It was only in the early years of this century that the full potential of the Old Masters renaissance was realized.

It would be a distortion to suggest that the man who best realized the potential of the revitalized Old Masters market, Sir Joseph Duveen, was responsible through his activities for keeping the avant-garde hungry. The collecting class of the early twentieth century did not exhibit social characteristics that would permit it to accept a revolutionary avant-garde Art form. Duveen did however set into motion patterns of activity and views of the nature of art

stemming from those activities that would be absorbed by the new Art patrons of the second half of the century.

The art market at the turn of the century still formed a closed circle of dealers and well-known collectors.<sup>33</sup> As such -- and as a clique functioning under decidedly aristocratic codes of conduct -- the market was still based on mutual trust and discretion (to as great a degree as it ever was). Large sales were not publicly broadcast; the assumption remained that connoisseurship was a largely personal matter. That it was also a matter of prestige was not doubted, but the aristocratic conceptions lingered as well that the broadcasting of prestige tarnished it, reduced it to the vulgar and so defeated its purpose.

Duveen managed, without disturbing the select nature of the art market -- indeed, by focussing on its selectivity and channeling it to an even more elite group -- to confront and destroy this tradition of discretion in the dealing of works of art.

He worked for the new American aristocracy -- multi-millionaires like Pierpoint Morgan, Henry Frick, Andrew Mellon, John D. Rockefeller, William Randolph Hearst, the Wideners, Rothschilds and Huntingtons. As with J.J. Angerstein before them, their collections were not the personal reassurance of a hereditary right to power but one of the few justifications for a social superiority based on more materialistic impulses.

Duveen delighted in publicity and so, it must be assumed, did his clients -- at least in the publicity reflected upon them by Duveen's spectacular deals at their expense. And that expense was unprecedented. Entering the art market at the time when the cult of uselessness was making its belated appearance in America, Duveen's clients naturally sought the legitimizing association with the holy humanism of Art, and as naturally wanted their spiritual superiority spread about. To buy a picture was one thing, a precious cult object quite another. It was a pastime in which there was no room for bargains. "In a society in which prestige is based on money, the more you pay the more you get."<sup>34</sup>

There were a number of problems to be overcome. Contemporary cult objects were clearly not suitable to Duveen's aspirations. In an age when anyone who had affected the bohemian life-style and had the price of a beret could call himself an Artist, dealing in current production became a risky proposition. It was too cheap and too plentiful for one thing. And not only was the living Artist capable of damaging his price through over-production, the point was rapidly being reached where the avant-gardist could destroy his credibility altogether by doing something transparently silly. (On the other hand, the point was also approaching where the Artist would be unable to destroy his credibility, no matter how silly his Art became -- he could only do so by doing something socially functional.) In 1910, Duveen concluded that the risks were too great, that only Old Masters were a sensible proposition, and instructed his clients accordingly.<sup>35</sup>

The next problem, easily solved, was that of price. Old Masters were plentiful if no longer cheap, but price was of no consequence -- unless it was too low. Duveen had been known to refuse a painting until the asking price was raised to his own operating level ("I really cannot afford to buy a picture that costs only three hundred pounds.")<sup>36</sup> For him to have bought low and sold high would have reduced him to the level of a profiteer. By raising his prices to the upper strata of big business he not only raised his own prestige to the level of capitalist respectability, but used that very respectability to maintain an artificially high standard of price for the paintings he dealt on the market.

But it was the same market that Duveen manipulated so masterfully that presented the greatest threat to his operation. The art market is not significantly different from the stock exchange -- it is governed for the most part by the same people, and by the same hysterical herd-stupidity. While the Old Masters market was safer than most, there had been enough fluctuation in even these prices that Duveen was anxious that his clients' purchases never be subjected to that uncertainty -- a drop in the value of a purchase recommended by him, or

an overly zealous investigation of an attribution, would damage not only his own prestige as a reputable advisor of Taste, but that of his clients as well, as connoisseurs of Taste. He was regularly known to buy back a work himself to keep it in the 'family' circle, and he persuaded most of his collectors to establish foundations (bearing, as a rule, their own names), or to donate their collections (usually on the stipulation that they remain intact) to public museums.<sup>37</sup>

Immortality and iron-clad investment (tax concessions made the bequest system profitable while the donor was alive and still in possession of his collection) combined to satisfy the clients. Their bequests -- the Andrew Mellon Collection, the Jules S. Bache Collection, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Kress Foundation, the Norton Simon Foundation, the Widener Collection, the Hearst Collection, to name a few -- granted the United States in general the High Class European Culture that turned it from a frontier into a bona fide Cultural entity. The often miserly, ruthless capitalists were, as much as the European avant-garde, the legitimate predecessors of the post-war American avant-garde. It was they who brought the utopian ideals of Fine Art to a nation that had long resisted them as Continental foppishness. The great collectors of the pre-War era believed implicitly in bringing "Taste and Truth to the vulgar",<sup>38</sup> that the masses must improve themselves by rising to the level of Art, the perfect image of the American City of God. The sentiment was recognized and carefully nurtured.

Many museum founders shared the concerns of other prominent Americans that the family and the church were losing much of their civilizing and stabilizing power and the fear that millions of immigrants would modify the physical, social and political structure of American cities beyond recognition. These anxieties motivated many art collectors and enthusiasts

to contribute to a variety of charitable causes, and they stimulated the conversion of public art museums into semi-religious and educational causes.<sup>39</sup>

The masses of immigrants to the New World had been promised comfort and abundance. What they more often received was the disease, poverty and discontent of urban slum life.<sup>40</sup> The Art Palace, like the bank, was an image of the impregnability of the social elite and a statement of its ideological commitment, and so is consistent with traditional functions of art and architecture. But the museum was also a surrogate church, one of the gateways to the utopian religion of universal upward mobility.

The museum, and the Art museum in particular, is revolutionary, among the holiest of holies of the revolutionary cult of classlessness. The symbolic accumulation of the world's history under one American (or French, or English) roof provides both a rationale for and a proof of the superiority of a nation's ideology. To the Americans of the Gilded Age, that ideology was expressed as Manifest Destiny. "It meant expansion, legitimated by Heaven or the fates, inspired by economic interest, territorial greed, and missionary idealism -- expansion toward the western coast or over the whole North American continent, or perhaps even the whole hemisphere."<sup>41</sup>

It is no coincidence that the people who inherited that ideology, and were in the strongest position to act upon it, were the same ones who most strongly advocated the preservation and encouragement of Culture. High Class Culture was both the statement of their ideological belief and a rationale for their greed. Nor was the Art they chose to support accidentally a dead art -- the art of a vanished society. It was the only art that could serve their function. A living art does not need preservation or elite support. It does not perpetuate the social mobility myth of perfectionism or reinforce the status of its owner.

Duveen added one more significant element to the business of Art -- the Art Expert. He met Bernard Berenson in 1906, and they shortly afterward began a professional relationship that lasted into the 1930's.<sup>42</sup> Already a well-respected art historian, Berenson functioned as Duveen's rubber stamp -- the phenomenal prices being realized required at least the pretense of authenticity. Berenson's word was impressive, and considered gospel by the millionaire clients. Fortunes changed hands on the authority of a stylistic connoisseurial judgment amounting to little more than an educated guess.

To Duveen, however, Berenson's word was God only as long as it corresponded with his own opinions or promises, and it is suggested that Berenson, receiving a commission of 10% of his own appraisals, quickly developed "a convenient gift for coming up with the answer which happened best to suit Duveen's book."<sup>43</sup> It was over this method of viewing art history that the pair's relationship ended. Duveen had lined up a Giorgione for Andrew Mellon. He asked three-quarters of a million dollars and Mellon took it. Berenson decided it was a Titian. Mellon ("I don't want another Titian") sent it back, and Berenson was through.<sup>44</sup>

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Duveen's protectionist policy had predictable ramifications. Old Masters were popular investments because production had ceased and, due to Duveen's inspired means of avoiding market fluctuation through public bequests, they were a rapidly depleting resource. Theoretically, of course, the number of old paintings was virtually limitless, bequests or no, but one of the main reasons for the Old Masters' constant popularity was that, as works serving the social functions of their own time, they demonstrated an undisputed quality of craft and social vision universally comprehensible to Western culture. The American capitalists therefore elevated their own stature by associating themselves with an art of demonstrable quality.

In this sense they followed very traditional aristocratic procedure, justifying their own power, as Charlemagne did, by taking as their own the qualitatively and socially indisputable images of past power. Therefore, because the art of the Old Masters was objectively classifiable in social and qualitative terms, lesser works of the past, functioning according to the same canons, were similarly open to a less prestigious ranking.

The best of the Old Masters were very much a limited commodity, and by the end of the Second War, when a greatly expanded if less affluent buying public began to emerge, the Old Masters well had more or less run dry.

What remained of the Old Masters stock outside of the museums was largely tied up by a handful of big galleries. In 1959, for example, the vaults of Wildenstein Galleries in New York contained more than 2000 works -- from Italian Primitives to Post-Impressionists. Among them were eight Rembrandts, twelve Poussins, four Titians, nine El Grecos, 79 Fragonards and 400 Primitives -- not for sale, but stockpiled awaiting the higher prices of an artist's return to fashion.<sup>45</sup>

New galleries were forced to promote the far less dependable Moderns. The auction houses, the mainstay of art distribution, were also forced to change their methods. Until 1958, the major houses, the most respected of which was Christie's, continued to function as they had done since their emergence in the eighteenth century -- staid, understated, gentlemanly affairs where the publicity of prices was considered crude. In the late 1950's however, Peter Wilson became chairman of Sotheby's -- hitherto almost exclusively a booksellers -- and in 1958 launched the Goldschmidt Sale of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings.

There were only seven works in the Sale -- three Manets, two Cezannes, a Renoir and a van Gogh -- but between them they fetched an unprecedented \$2,186,800.<sup>46</sup> Obviously the market was at last ready for the Moderns, but Sotheby's methods were also influential. No longer avoiding the press as the old houses had always done, Sotheby's

"made a complete 'volte-face' and began to woo newspapers, magazines, radio and television with all the ardour that modern public relations can stimulate."<sup>47</sup>

After the impact of the Goldschmidt Sales, the problem of keeping less spectacular sales before the public eye was solved when Sotheby's employed a firm of press and publicity experts to maintain a high-profile image of the firm. The appearance of Madison Avenue on the art market coincides with the emergence of a new patron class -- a class which had turned upward mobility from a utopian daydream into a practical plan of action, and was therefore far more revolutionary than the capitalists it replaced. It had no intention (even if it had had the opportunity) of legitimizing itself through patronage of the product of a tradition-bound past. In order to claim social superiority, it had to set itself against the standards adopted by its predecessors: they had bought quality to add an aristocratic dimension to their ruthless lives, so the new class chose amateurism; the capitalists had clung to the old 'laissez-faire' utopianism, the new class chose the new revolutions of socialism, therapy, universal education and universal consumerism. The new patrons were the rising professionals, corporate managers and government bureaucrats. The pathetic Fine Art of a frustrated, demoralized American avant-garde was not only available, it exactly suited their purposes.

#### 4. The New Courtiers

Style is not the man; it is something better. It is a dizzy, dazzling structure that he erects about himself using as building blocks selected elements from his own character.

Style is the way in which a man can, by taking thought, add to his stature. It is the only way . . .

All we need to do is to esteem  
 the freedom to reject as highly as  
 the license to accept; to reform our-  
 selves instead of other people . . .<sup>48</sup>

This excerpt could have been written by any one of a thousand aristocrats from the high Middle Ages to the present. It was, however, appropriately penned by a male artists' model -- a bohemian non-conformist, scornful of bourgeois and aristocracy, seeking the new Truth of the Life-Style.

The phrase "to reform ourselves instead of other people" is particularly significant in light of the post-War evolution of Western society. The whole Western quest for utopia has inevitably degenerated into a search for personal gratification -- a search led not by capitalists or communists but by the next stage in the process of social disintegration, the anarchists of the professional-therapeutic movement.

The "old Freudian notion that civilization inevitably breeds neurosis is now being accepted throughout the clinical profession."<sup>49</sup> Since a society exists through the accumulation of the social norms of the past, for the new libertarians "the process of finding themselves involves as much 'unlearning' and correcting of the 'remembered' past as learning new and better ways of being."<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps only advertising embodies truly revolutionary epistemology better than therapeutics. For both, the past is what makes us sick, what holds us back from personal gratification. That the social norms and mores that traditionally held the individual back did so in order to hold the society together is of no consequence. What the Progressives are really saying is that it is not only human history that makes us sick, but human society as well.

To the new revolutionaries -- bohemians, socialists, businessmen, liberated homosexuals and heterosexuals, advertising men, activist women, teenagers, racial activists, the intelligensia and those who aspire to it -- society is only a meaningless Puritan-bourgeois obstruction to personal "fulfillment". What that

fulfillment means is upward social mobility to the utopian state of classlessness. What classlessness means, apparently, is not the utopian evolution of human society to a higher plane, but the systematic and perhaps irreversible destruction of that society. Just as an industrial production ethic replaces social concerns with a fetish for efficiency -- and in so doing pushes culture back into a state of barbarism -- so the subsequent reversal of the class structure that makes a purely social view of production possible reflects the spread of the new barbarism throughout the social structure.

Even if the modern mania for therapeutic anarchism could be beneficial to the individual -- and the rising incidence of suicide, divorce, psychopathic crime, terrorism and the general urban horror of the civilization that invented the therapeutic cures for these complaints suggests that it is a fairly ineffectual substitute for the social controls of traditional culture -- there remains the question of the worth of a civilization that increasingly devotes itself solely to the avoidance of pain.

The growth of bureaucracy, the cult of consumption with its immediate gratifications, but above all the severance of the sense of historical continuity have transformed the Protestant ethic while carrying the underlying principles of capitalist society to their logical conclusion. The pursuit of self-interest, formerly identified with the rational pursuit of gain and the accumulation of wealth, has become a search for pleasure and psychic survival.<sup>51</sup>

The death of the Protestant ethic, the last tenuous link with traditional society's acceptance of struggle as the strength of human culture and not its handicap, has brought Western man closer than ever before to the realization of all the old utopian dreams, except one -- that the world of the liberated epistemologist would be a nice place to live.

Instead, the neo-barbarism of industrial life has produced only narcissistic savages, increasingly unable to grasp the essentially social idea of 'the future'. What the new anarchists want, basically, is the realization of a fundamental fact of advanced traditional culture -- autonomy.<sup>52</sup> But not the autonomy of peasant, artisanal and aristocratic orders which integrates into a more or less uniform social vision. It is rather the secessionism of an individual's or class's autonomy from the rest of what remains of Progressive society.

The new courtiers do not model themselves consciously on their predecessors. The egalitarianism that made possible the rise to power of the professional, managerial and bureaucratic elite makes the capitalists' recreation of courtly grandeur economically impossible. But more importantly, their associations with Progressive ideology require a clean break with the values of the decadent ruling elite of the past. It was necessary for the new courtiers to evolve new standards of "class" to reinforce their social superiority.

There are differences between the new and the old courtiers. The social function of the old order was theatrical and therefore relatively superficial. The new elite plays an instrumental role in ideological struggle.

The theatrical function of the old order presented an image of paradise intended to reinforce the resignation of the lower orders to their earthly hardship. The modern elite attempts to bring that paradise to earth by implimenting utopian schemes common to all brands of revolutionary politics: universal education, so we may have a society of literati; unlimited consumption, the opulence of Heaven; medical and technical Progress, to eliminate death, suffering and the need for work; governmental growth, that the inequality of earlier life may be eradicated.

These functional differences have taken the decadence of the old order from the courts and systematically spread it through every level of society to a greater or lesser degree. The dissolution of traditional social boundaries has opened the ranks of the decadent

elite to an ever greater proportion of the population.

In a society of abundance that has reached the population phase of insipient decline the class struggle alters as the middle class expands until it may number more than half of the whole population in occupational terms, with an even larger proportion, measured in terms of income, leisure, and values. The new possibilities opening up for the individual are possibilities not so much for entering a new class, but rather for changing life style and changing character within the middle class.<sup>53</sup>

The new courtiers, with no solid class boundaries to mark their stature, are even more dependent on style than their courtly predecessors. The styles of the past were quite adequate for the capitalist princes of Duveen's day. They were, with their passion for antiquarianism, classicism and palacial pomp, in some ways the descendents of the aristocrats they replaced. The styles of the courts of the past served both their own Tastes and their images of themselves. The educators, doctors, lawyers, bureaucrats and managers who replaced them had achieved their new positions not through simple capitalist ruthlessness but through widespread epistemological revolutionary action. This, together with the comparative rarity and subsequent astronomical price of Old Masters, forced the New Western ruling elite to embrace an Art form that was at once revolutionary, available and relatively cheap.

For these new patrons of the Arts,<sup>54</sup> the intellectual-sounding doubletalk of the Fine Art gurus and pointless juggling of style by the avant-garde supplied exactly the right combination of literati gloss and faddism to ensure not that the masses would eventually perfect themselves by rising to Art, but that the social stature of the elite would remain secure behind a wall of Culture. This is not meant in any way to suggest that the cult of Art ministers to a

closed elite. As a revolutionary cult it is open to all -- to all who are willing to secede from the society served by the anti-theoretical popular arts -- and as a segment of the much larger Progressive cults, the cult of uselessness is aimed at destroying, by individual upward mobility, the social foundations of the past.

Clement Greenberg was the first in a long line of academic apologists of the avant-garde. His appearance coincides with the new courtiers' entrance as devotees of the post-War strain of modernism that was the purest expression of the cult of uselessness yet seen in the West. His method of legitimizing Abstract Expressionism, typifies formalist apologetics of Progressive Fine Arts. It rests on three primary foundations: legitimacy through eclecticism, through a focus on style to the exclusion of content or social function, and through "scientific" doubletalk.

. . . during the 1920's and 1930's abstract art had become almost wholly identified with the flat silhouettes and firm contours of Synthetic Cubism, Mondrian, the Bauhaus, and Miro . . . To see all this disappear under a flurry of strokes, blotches and trickles of paint was a bewildering experience at first. It looked as though all form, all order, all discipline had been cast off . . .

This was, of course, absurd. What was mostly involved was the disconcerting effect produced by wide-open painterliness in an abstract context. That context still derived from Cubism -- as does the context of every variety of sophisticated abstract art since Cubism, despite all appearance to the contrary. The painterliness itself derived from the tradition of form going back to the Venetians. Abstract Expressionism -- or Painterly Abstraction, as I prefer to call it -- was very much art, and rooted in the past of art.<sup>55</sup>

In this Introduction to the catalogue of the 1964 'Post Painterly Abstraction' exhibit in Los Angeles, Greenberg manages in 250 words to squeeze in the names of a dozen prominent periods, schools and artists of the past: Baroque, High Renaissance, Classical, Analytical Cubism, Leger, Delaunay, Kandinsky, Synthetic Cubism, Mondrian, the Bauhaus, Miro and Klee.<sup>56</sup> His name-dropping serves two basic functions. It establishes Greenberg to the devotee as an intellectual connoisseur who knows his art history and should therefore be trusted when he says that Jackson Pollock does art, too. But more significantly, Greenberg is supplying his own stable of Artists with a long revolutionary precedent to their own revolutionary actions -- a Progressive tradition stretching back to the Renaissance. And since he adopts a Progressive view of history, it is implied that his Artists, having taken their stylistic revolution far beyond the vision of the Old Masters, are in fact even better artists than the Old Masters were. The fact that the artists of the Renaissance, and especially those of the Baroque period, had no Progressive intention whatsoever makes no difference: they are, through scholarly and popular consent, artists of 'quality' and therefore are trivialized by the modernists into the (for their needs) necessary function of rubber-stamping any actions that modern Fine Artists choose to perform. The past for these theorists is a plaything to be manipulated at random. To achieve this, of course, only style can be discussed, for any other historical perspective makes nonsense of modernist jargon. The Venetians applied paint heavily, therefore they were in their naive, tradition-inhibited way, attempting to create what Jackson Pollock finally achieved! They did not, of course, use a painterly technique to suit the needs of their own time, but to suit the needs of ours.

Greenberg isn't satisfied with demonstrating, however dubiously, that Pollock is in direct line of descent from Rubens, like all other "sophisticated abstract" artists. Abstract Expressionism is not, like the others, a mere Progressive step in a long line of such steps -- it is the last step, the glorious realization of five centuries

stylistic evolution, which sets brand new criteria for all that is to come: Abstract Expressionism is to Greenberg the mother of all that comes after.

Some of the artists in this exhibition look "hard-edged", but this by itself does not account for their inclusion. They are included because they have won their "hardness" from the "softness" of Painterly Abstraction; they have not inherited it from Mondrian, the Bauhaus, Suprematism, or anything else that came before.<sup>57</sup>

Now that 'Jack the Dripper' and the other Abstract Expressionists have faded into what is arguably a well-deserved obscurity (except in the farthest Cultural backwaters of modernism) Greenberg's claims seem a bit overblown, even to many diehard Fine Art apologists. Yet Greenberg's methods continue to be used, because they are the only ones that can with even the remotest plausibility justify the actions of Fine Artists. What he preached above all was what Tom Wolfe calls the Word ("without a theory to go with it, I can't see a painting").<sup>58</sup>

It was bound to happen -- just as visual Art shed the last vestiges of content, it had to replace that content with external theory, all dressed up in scientific jargon. What's in a name? Everything, apparently.

B.C.



Critical to Greenberg's vocabulary is the word 'abstract', a prestigious word of long scientific and philosophical usage. Unfortunately, there is nothing at all abstract about Abstract Expressionism: neither in the philosophical sense of abstraction from nature, nor in the traditional art historical sense of a "purely geometrical regularity" offering escape from "the caprice of the organic"<sup>59</sup> (or, as in Islamic art, offering proof and illustration of the perfection of God). It is not even abstract in terms of its own theory -- that the painting is not a thing at all, but the record of a deed or a set of actions.<sup>60</sup> As such, it was supposed to be as naturalistic a record of an event as a photograph would be.

Clearly what Greenberg meant to say was that Abstract Expressionism was simply non-representational, a considerably less grandiose term that anyone can understand. Pollock just didn't (or couldn't) depict anything from his society's concrete or imaginary visual vocabulary. That the Art was self-expressionistic is undeniable, but this is perhaps no great justification either. When the same 'painterly' self-expression is performed on lavatory walls, it is called vandalism (small wonder that the New York City subway system is in danger of winding up in the Museum of Modern Art).

Why does 'Painterly Abstraction' more accurately sum up the movement than 'Abstract Expressionism', when the terms seem synonymous? How did the formalists win their 'hardness' from the 'softness' of Action Painting? Why is it absurd that form, order and discipline seemed to have been cast off when the shedding of those socially-conditioned handicaps was the very basis of the Action Painters' Freudian/surrealist approach?<sup>61</sup> And how, as a revolutionary art of the individual's subconscious, can it be in any way rooted in the past of art?

Pollock without Greenberg to explain him means nothing at all, and apparently Greenberg means nothing either. The cult devotees who parroted Greenbergian doubletalk at the galleries and cocktail parties ("what wide-open painterliness in an abstract context!"; "such 'thick, fuliginous flatness'")<sup>62</sup> were not expressing what the paintings or

even the theories communicated to them. They were merely responding with the appropriate chant in the liturgy of the cult of uselessness. The last thing that the Word is intended to do is describe or define. Its function instead is to baffle the unconverted, to obscure the fact that avant-garde Fine Art had finally followed its revolutionary mandate from utopianism to antisocial trivia.

The Artist-Genius, freed from his servility to the patrons of the past, became even more enslaved to the utterly random whims of novelty and faddism. With the ability to paint no longer considered an asset in the cult's worship of amateurism, there were no objective criteria left. In this situation, the priesthood that elected itself the decoder of Art for the Cultured Elite was obviously in a vastly more powerful position than the humble Artist, and the Critic has (with inevitable changes of particular personnel) remained the real creator of Modern Art.

In a tennis match played without transmission concern -- i.e., without a ball or net -- style counts for a great deal, and only a style critic could presume to select champions. Thus, as we might expect, style critics have themselves promoted net-less and ball-less matches to a certain degree in order to place themselves in a position of power in the distribution system.<sup>63</sup>

Whatever the critic-priests of Art seek in their promotion of the Fine Arts, their motivations are clearly less than altruistic. The old capitalists' vision, (however strongly slanted to private protectionist ends it may have been) of Art palaces and Art as the focus of public conviction rapidly vanished with the new courtiers' modernism. Greenberg was never paid, as many critics are, to write introductions to dealers' catalogues, but he gladly admits to accepting free paintings (his own choice from an Artist's body of work) and to selling those paintings. Moreover, "he consorts so

closely with artists as to end by advising them what and how to paint."<sup>64</sup>

He is outraged by the persistent accusations of improper conduct and conflict of interest (the priesthood must retain a veneer of altruism). Yet ostensibly criticism evolved as a function necessary to maintain a level of sanity and responsibility in an Art that had irresponsibly severed itself from the natural criticism of social need. Criticism was meant to serve social ends, to be more than the dealer's self-seeking. Greenberg's word was gospel. His approval of an Artist was a guarantee of an automatic price increase for the Artist's paintings of a thousand to fifteen hundred percent. If Greenberg happened to catapult to fame an unknown who happened to show his respect for the critic by giving him a painting, perhaps that is a lucky coincidence. Perhaps it is also an unconsciounable conflict of interest, tantamount to a bank manager writing cheques on his clients' accounts. For those precious few in control of the Art world, the business of Taste has become a fool-proof racket. The Word is even better than the Midas Touch.

But the stories about Greenberg, Rosenberg, Steinburg, MOMA, Wildenstein and the rest -- about fraud, influence peddling and manipulation -- are all well-known. The Art crowd (each of whom claims to "buy it because I like it") ignores them. As Andy Warhol suggested, the step after Art is business Art.<sup>65</sup> The great triumph of the modernist revolution lies in its elevation of the Art crowd to a par with stockbrokers and Art to a par with blue chip stocks. In this sense, of course, Art is even safer than stocks, for somewhere along the line stocks represent some sort of productive human activity, subject to basic economic and even social laws. Modernism suffers no such handicaps.

At the time that Artists began to fully realize Jose Ortega Y Casset's ideal of the absolutely dehumanized Art form, the Art crowd realized the dehumanized economic system, with no productive human ties whatsoever to mess things up. The only snag is that this perfect Art was to produce perfect men. But like all revolution, it made instead

only the perfect commodity.

The style-juggling of the new courtiers and of Fine Artists is the logical product of revolutionary epistemology in its ultimate stage of consumerism. Life-Style amounts to little more than consumer faddism. From Zen to EST, saunas to tanks, judo to jogging -- clothing, diet, housing, pastimes, everything among the upwardly mobile is ruled by the self-conscious cultivation of novelty and personal comfort. Life is reduced to a succession of styles, shifting as the less hip masses of the upwardly mobile catch up. Artists are in this sense only adapting to the changing needs of their new patrons, who when Doing Art require the same stylistic transience. But this is too simple an explanation for the random rotation of Art styles, or rather, Art theories, since the rise of the new courtiers. It overlooks the fact that this transience of middle-class life is precisely what Artists since dada have been attacking.

The avant-garde's and post-modernists' contempt for the 'unhip' middle-class and their replacement of what they consider a hidebound morality with revolutionary self-interest are the same criticisms and the same solutions presented by the professional elite. Given this identity of interests the post-War promotion of avant-garde Art by all of the major Fine Arts institutions -- the unification of sworn enemies into an avant-garde academy -- should come as no surprise. It also can be no coincidence that the major supporters of the Arts are now corporations, acting on the advice of a managerial elite, and government agencies headed by a bureaucratic elite. Fine Artists themselves, successful or otherwise, if they cannot make an acceptable living from corporate or government handouts wind up among the intellectual elite in universities and colleges, doing what they have claimed to have been doing all along -- intellectual rather than manual labour; philosophy instead of craft. The predominance of theory since the triumph of amateurism, however, suggests that visual art does not function very well at presenting the complexity of thought that a literary discipline like philosophy can achieve. Art can certainly, as it traditionally has done, illustrate a socially agreed upon

philosophy or theology; it cannot create a philosophical system in the absence of common consent.

Even in the final stages of Fine Artists' involvement with socialist ideology -- the Art Workers' Coalition of the late 1960's -- Artists maintained that the "enemies" of Art were, in accordance with already long-defunct Marxist doctrine, capitalist collectors like David Rockefeller.<sup>66</sup> They completely failed to notice that there were no tangible differences apart from specific jargon between their own ideological stance and that of the new courtiers. All of them -- Artists, student radicals, therapists, bureaucrats, hippies and managers -- wanted a world revolution of self-awareness. Frictions arose, as they inevitably do in and between messianic cults because each interest group saw itself as the saviour of mankind. But the cynicism, the denial of tradition or the perversion of tradition into self-centred ends, the arrogant contempt for the uninitiated disguised as paternalistic humanism, the utopian vision of an utterly individual-oriented future, and the vehicle of change -- the Life-Style -- were and remain constant to all of the Western revolutionary cults.

The avant-garde has been dealt with in this paper in a brief, generalized manner that will be offensive to those readers sympathetic to, or even selectively critical of the phenomenon. But in the final analysis, as note 54 suggests, modernist Art continues to function as Fine Art always has -- as a class Art that is, for all intents and purposes, unknown outside of that class except as an oddity from another world occasionally depicted in the media. The connoisseurial class is much bigger now, and much more accessible, and avant-garde Art is an icon in its faith in upward mobility. But it is only an icon for the faithful. It does not reach beyond its patron class to lure those as yet unenlightened into the fold. Avant-garde Art was intended to serve this function but failed, and so warrants only a minor place in any study of world revolution. The truly

modernist art, the one that works, is advertising.

## 5. The art of revolution

The usefulness and value of most things depend, not so much on their own nature as upon the number of people who can be persuaded to desire and use them.<sup>67</sup>

Advertising, instead of being privileged, as it is, to lie, cheat, obtain money under false pretences, and poison, should be dealt with as any other social activity is dealt with.<sup>68</sup>

"What good is happiness if it doesn't bring you money?" -- slogan of the Golden Ulcers, an elite admen's luncheon club.<sup>69</sup>

If the liberal intellectual elite shares any opinions with those it presumes to lead, it is a hatred of advertising. In fact, the elite may even hate it more -- as a cult focusses its bitterness on the established religion of the day. It sees advertising and the modern world's worship of consumption -- and the subsequent reduction of all objects to consumable objects -- as something entirely, or at least partially antithetical to what it has in mind for man's fate.

Yet just as utopian theory leads inevitably to the condition of the world as we now find it, utopian action continues to worsen the situation.

Like so many of the milestones of modernism, London's Great Exhibition of 1851 was an inseparable mix of left wing utopianism and mercantilism. While social radicals like Thomas Carlyle wrote

glowingly of Paxton's Crystal Palace, the whole idea of the Exhibition had been conceived by a Scottish sergeant as a means of diverting public attention from the socialist Chartist movement.<sup>70</sup> It was also among the first great platforms for launching mass advertising -- fifty-three pages of the Exhibition's catalogue were devoted to advertisements.<sup>71</sup>

The Exhibition is often seen as a birthplace of modernism, and in this sense too the interests of the two supposedly antithetical utopian extremes are inseparably mixed. In the first half of the eighteenth century industrialists had begun urging the development of free art and design schools to improve the design of their goods and regain the craftsmanship of the past.<sup>72</sup> In 1837, a government school of design was founded under John Papworth and led directly to the South Kensington complex -- the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Royal College of Art, the Natural History and Science Museums. These monuments to Empire, with the Great Exhibition, led in their turn to the socialist Arts and Crafts movement -- and through that to de Stijle, Bauhaus and to the re-identification of theoretically antithetical utopian factional interests in the International Style.

Advertising at the time of the Exhibition was still in a primitive state. Its generally accepted function was simply to inform potential customers of a firm's existence and services. Firms like Holloway's did spend fortunes advertising all-purpose remedies, but this remained dubious practice for respectable companies. In fact, extravagant advertising had since its appearance in the seventeenth century been limited to quack medicines promising everything from white teeth to "celestial fire [in] the bedchamber."<sup>73</sup> In the United States however, advertising was at the time of the Exhibition experiencing a profound revolution both in nature and in function.

Its leader was P.T. Barnum (1810-1891). Popular memory has reduced his life to a single phrase -- "There's a sucker born every minute" -- and has in this sense treated him a bit unfairly, however prophetic his words would prove in the fully evolved consumer revolution. Barnum was in fact as closely tied to the philosophy of

Franklin's Poor Richard as he was to the Madison Avenue con artists of today. His books and lecture tours preached all of the Protestant virtues -- temperance,<sup>74</sup> economy, charity, austerity -- to which he added one overriding course of action, "advertise, advertise, advertise your business."<sup>75</sup>

Barnum was no advocate of free-for-all publicity -- he was offended by advertisements amidst the Beauty of Nature or on man's great monuments (he was particularly annoyed with the firm that wrote in huge letters on the pyramids of Chiza, "Buy Warren's Blacking, 30, Strand, London", but could not hide his admiration for the fortune made for the company by hostile editorials -- any publicity is good publicity).<sup>76</sup>

But Barnum was also not simply a representative of late Puritan philosophy. For the Puritan, the virtues he aspired to were largely ends in themselves; to Barnum and to his century in general, they were simply aids in "The Art of Money-Getting", as one of his popular lectures was called -- the art of which he considered the lecture itself an admirable illustration.<sup>77</sup>

Barnum valued the good opinion of others not as a sign of one's usefulness, but as a means of getting credit. "Uncompromising integrity of character is invaluable." The nineteenth century attempted to express all values in monetary terms. Everything had its price. Charity was a moral duty because "the liberated man will command patronage, while the sordid, uncharitable miser will be avoided." The sin of pride was not that it offended God but that it led to extravagant expenditures. "A spirit of pride and vanity . . . gnaws the very vitals of a man's worldly possessions."<sup>78</sup>

Barnum helped to change the nature of advertising by rejecting its traditional role of illustration in favour of a persuasive function. Long before Fine Artists followed suit Barnum realized, like the quack pill sellers before him, that the actual worth of a product was incidental to what its perceived worth might be. He devoted his life to this cause, in promotions and in his shows. "In place of intensive spiritual absorption, Barnum's exhibits concentrated on information and the problem of deception."<sup>79</sup>

As a free enterprise utopian, information -- and through it education -- was Barnum's secret of success. Yet this amounted to little more than a drawing card. "'Information' interested Barnum merely as a means of mastering the market."<sup>80</sup> Information and deception were synonymous.

The early pill sellers had remained tied to a cause and effect rationale in advertising -- a pill would give certain results and its value (or worthlessness) was therefore easily determined. Barnum discovered that deception worked even more effectively if advertising had no rational basis. A century before the avant-garde fully achieved it, Barnum removed content from the art of advertising and invented a "performance art" of pure form. But unlike the modern version, Barnum's irrationality, his parody of human behaviour, achieved its end.

Barnum hired [a man] . . . and asked him to take five bricks and place them at various points on Broadway, then walk from one to another, exchanging them, and keeping silent. Within thirty minutes, Barnum reported, hundreds of New Yorkers were gathered to watch this strange behaviour. Every hour the "brick man" would go into [Barnum's American] museum, followed of course by citizens who had to pay the admission fee to satisfy their curiosity . . . This was the most convincing kind of advertisement for Barnum: it employed

novelty, demonstrated ingenuity,  
and achieved free publicity.<sup>81</sup>

Barnum considered this sort of outright con, and the innumerable hoaxes that he presented in his travelling freak shows to be "educational" -- a pickpocket could perhaps claim much the same. Barnum peddled, not education of course, but simple novelty. His phenomenal world-wide success was based on this philosophy of continual change -- it was revolutionary epistemological action in its purest sense: individual perfection equals education equals social change equals, eventually, novelty.

\*

The American economy, having reached  
[by 1920] the point where its techno-  
logy was capable of satisfying basic  
material needs, now relied on the  
creation of new consumer demands --  
on convincing people to buy goods for  
which they were unaware of any need . . . 82

It seems evident that the rapid expansion of advertising -- in quantity and, as significantly, in persuasive intent -- marks the point in the West where legitimate social demand was satisfied. The Progressive growth ideology of industrial society therefore required some external force to guarantee a continuation of that growth.

Because of industry's need for a massed consuming culture, advertising has kept more closely tuned to social reality than the messianic avant-garde ever was or tried to be. Advertising is no more popular or social an art form because of that -- it simply is more effective.

As a tool of industry, advertising has promoted technological Progress to a greater and far more effectual degree than corresponding avant-garde "movements" like futurism. In fact, the whole history of persuasive advertising has been one of blatant utopianism, denouncing

the present as inadequate, promising a paradisaical future through consumption.



fig. 8

One of the more overt (but by no means uncommon) statements of promotional technological utopianism is demonstrated by a current ad for the Bell System [fig. 8]. An eighty-word promotion of the "information Age" uses the word "change" eleven times; associated with that change are the various means that the Information Age will alleviate many of the painful necessities of contemporary life -- hardships like going out to shop. The blurb is illustrated by a truly 'deus ex machina' utopian image -- the limp, newly-created hand of the Sistine Adam drawing the spark of life, not from

God, but from his telephone.

But advertising does more than simply promote scientific utopianism. It makes methodical use of advances in the social sciences to refine its revolutionary techniques of mass persuasion. From an ill-defined ideology of Barnum-esque self-improvement -- so ill-defined that Henry Ford, the great democratizer of the automobile, and indeed the majority of industrialists of his day, failed to see in the working classes the huge consumer market they became after the War<sup>83</sup> -- post-war advertising has become a science. By the early 1960's research had become a critical element in the success of any advertising agency.

Every facet of advertising that could be tested was measured with slide rules and the new computers. There were pre-tests, post-tests, eye-camera studies, palm-perspiration analyses of emotional response to ads, recall tests, message-retention tests, readership studies, motivational studies, audience-profile studies, demographics, psychographics, focus-group studies, and on and on.<sup>84</sup>

By 1969 a sizable industry had established itself in this business of mind control. American businesses annually spent four hundred million dollars on external research and an additional one hundred million dollars on internal market research.<sup>85</sup> The result of all this labour was the reduction of human experience to its most abstract and superficial basics. "You didn't need a vocabulary; you just strung together words that were known to test high, such as 'new', 'mothers', 'easy', 'you', 'your', 'free', 'hurry', 'limited time only', and 'use this handy coupon'."<sup>86</sup>

Once again the altruistic utopian forces of the intelligensia are closely tied to the interests of its avowed enemies. As physical sciences rallied to the aid of industrial output, social scientists were drawn into the problem "of getting everything consumed".<sup>87</sup> At last the social sciences had a chance to take concrete action that would be felt beyond the universities. Perhaps they weren't creating the Perfect Man, but they were rapidly turning out the perfect consumer and that, in mass culture, was the next best thing.

It is of course extremely unfair to lump all social scientists together with the comparative few who directly served Madison Avenue, Hitler or Stalin. Most of them -- psychiatrists, psychologists and other members of the therapeutic professions in particular -- had no desire to see the docile materialists of Progressive society. They wanted revolutionary self-seekers. But so did the advertisers and their employers. The socially Progressive elite has simply failed to realize that the theoretical revolutionary self-seeker and the practical docile materialist are one and the same.

The obvious question at this point is why, with all of the tests and the batteries of experts, does advertising remain such a universally unpopular art form? Part of the answer seems to lie in what it is that makes popular art popular.

A recurrent theme in the television series 'Barney Miller', for example, is the individual versus the Government Agency -- welfare, immigration, internal revenue, the F.B.I. and so on. The victim is sympathetic -- perhaps down-and-out, perhaps committing an illegal act in a moral cause. He is prevented from taking affirmative action on his own behalf by bureaucratic red tape. The bureaucrats take two forms -- nice guys wanting to help, but who are themselves bound by their own bureaucratic structure, and psychopaths, zealously performing an official antisocial function. Solutions, of course, come in spite of state help -- due entirely to the autonomous compassionate action of the immediate community. In other words, the series is popular because it rests on basic human strengths, invariably social in nature.

Advertising, on the other hand, begins with the same arrogant contempt for human society held by the social messiahs. "Fear, jealousy, envy, ambition, snobbery, greed, lust, and other appeals antithetical to society, are incessantly played up in popular ads to the disfigurement of human values."<sup>88</sup> Advertising is the antithesis of a popular art. It preys upon insecurity and weakness, creating phobias about bodily functions, masculinity or femininity, aging, material success and social status, and it conveniently provides the cure -- products to make you smell good, look good, to give you the image or style of success. Social values are reduced to transient Life-Styles -- clothes make the man, but only after the man inside them has been exorcised. Here is the real revolution of style that the avant-garde and Art Lovers blither about -- nothing as trifling as Art reduced to pure form, but a whole society of pure form.

Advertising does not create antisocial characteristics. The suicidal narcissism of modern life is the product of a centuries-long process of social decay. But while, contrary to the avant-garde's

belief, no art form has produced or can produce social revolution of its own accord, advertising is clearly a catalyst in the process.

Like liberalism, humanitarianism, socialism and avant-garde Art, advertising advocates above all upward social mobility -- it promotes in all classes "styles of life appropriate to the new statuses."<sup>89</sup> Like all social radicals, the ad man's ideal state is a sort of egalitarian classlessness -- at least in terms of traditional society's class barriers. In that revolutionary heaven, the makers of style -- styles of consumption or styles of social change -- take on phenomenal importance in recreating arbitrary class lines based on Taste, a term which could perhaps be generically applied to the whole spectrum of faddism ranging from correctness in fashion to correctness in social ideology. These random class boundaries, chimerical in essence, of course grow ever more so as the consumer society is seduced by the ad man into an ever more rapid turnover of Life-Styles.

Any counter-revolutionary concerns -- for the loss of human dignity, ecological despoilation, moral decay and so on -- far from impeding revolutionary Progress, are merely absorbed and returned as the merchandise of this year's Life-Style: individualist therapeutics and Protestant evangelism, solar houses and new ways to take a bath. Like Lenin's ideal continuing revolution, consumer society can and indeed must condemn itself as it was in favour of what it could be. The industrialists call it planned obsolescence, the social radicals call it epistemology. Both demand continual social change prompted by perpetual dissatisfaction. It seems obvious that such a system can never produce any significant level of social contentment, that even if utopia were attainable, and even if it were a habitable state, the point of social perfection would pass entirely unnoticed and would be in its turn denounced as reactionary.

The social revolution that advertisers promote is arguably cosmetic -- simply the image or illusion of real Progress. Just as the Soviet liberation of the Noble Worker has had to be enforced through mind-control, so advertising, using more or less the same methods,

attempts to arrest social change at a point advantageous to the present status quo.

. . . social change is in fact perceived to be an obstacle to [an ad agency's] operations. Common experience and a reading of Max Weber convince us that all bureaucracies are reactionary. . . . The changes caused by affirmative action -- like putting women, hispanics, or blacks into commercials -- mean additional effort and expense. It is understood that these changes must be taken without consulting the wishes of the agencies.<sup>90</sup>

But while advertisers and producers may resist state schemes of universal mobility, they are precisely the ones who most demonstrably benefit from them. While each underprivileged group that attains freedom of mobility may suffer from a resulting social breakdown at all levels of their lives from community to family, they become in the process consumers. Just as the working class appeared as a vast, almost untapped market following the War, so women, hispanics and blacks emerged in the last two decades as consumers in their own right.

Social critics like John Berger denounce advertising's use of the word 'revolutionary' for everything from cars to oven cleaners as a co-option of the idea of true social revolution.<sup>91</sup> But as suggested in the last chapter, conspicuous consumption is the inevitable product of a successful industrial ideology. The art form that actively promotes the fruits of revolutionary industry is itself genuinely revolutionary in nature.

As may be expected, advertising in the communist bloc nations is as yet in a rather primitive state. But even in nations like the Soviet Union, whose industrial production seldom meets existing demand, the function of advertising is less strictly informative than

persuasive -- it "tries to sell things that might not otherwise be bought."<sup>92</sup> In theory, Soviet advertising is as closely tied to Soviet utopianism as Western advertising is to the individualistic strain. "It seeks to 'raise the culture of everyday life, introduce useful customs and traditions' [sic] and 'inculcate' . . . good taste."<sup>93</sup> No doubt this statement would be qualified with the assurance that the Taste inculcated in the liberated proletarian has nothing to do with the bourgeois variety, but since Taste has repeatedly shown itself to be nothing more than the appreciation of random fads meant to create rather than remove class barriers, it is difficult to see how the egalitarian version can be much different from our own.

But while the effectiveness of advertising in creating the perfect Soviet man remains to be proven, the more pragmatic benefits to the industrial ideal are also recognized by the Soviet hierarchy. Claiming that their advertising carries a fundamentally different function from that in the West, the Soviets in the final analysis fall back on purely Western rationales for the phenomenon, "namely, that it serves only to realize latent needs" -- that is, "needs" that people don't know that they have -- "and that the raising of consumption levels is a substantial good."<sup>94</sup>

Liberals and socialists alike use as their major measure of humanitarian effectiveness the rise in a nation's per capita standard of living -- its equality of access to consumer goods. But if increased consumption is the final point of humanitarianism (assuming that individual or social upward mobility is a means of achieving a higher standard of living for all), why then is an art of persuasion necessary to promote what is supposedly a natural and spontaneous impulse to social betterment and to the avoidance of discomfort?

It may be argued that Western advertising exists primarily as a tool in the social elite's internal struggle to draw consumption from one competitor to another -- that the desire to consume must always rise to the ability to produce. But the existence of, and basic conceptual impulse behind advertising in non-competitive socialist

economies suggests a qualifier to the simple competitive theory of advertising.

While envy of wealth and the desire for unlimited consumption may be elements of popular fantasy in traditional cultures, it is evident from the nature and growth of advertising that a great many overriding social impulses and conventions have first to be destroyed before that dream can be popularly accepted, as an attainable reality. Those impulses and conventions -- resignation of the self to the interest of the whole -- are what comprise a society. By reversing the order, by placing the interests of the individual above those of the community, advertising reflects the underlying characteristic of Progressive society -- secessionism. The decay of the traditional holistic view of society into fragmented, mutually hostile components is all that Progressiveness can accomplish. Progress and decadence are synonymous; they bring with them the utopia that intellectuals have dreamt of for half a millenium -- a truly dark age of barbaric narcissism.

## FOOTNOTES (Chapter VII)

1. Natan Altman, "'Futurism' and Proletarian Art" (1918), Russian Art of the Avant-Garde: Theory and Criticism, John E. Bowlt, ed. and trans. (New York 1976), pp. 161-164, esp. p. 163.
2. F.T. Marinetti, quoted in Alan Young, Dada and After (Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 1981), p. 18.
3. N.N. Punin's formula for creativity ("where S equals the sum of the principles (P), Y equals intuition, and T equals artistic creation.") -- John E. Bowlt, op. cit., p. 171.
4. On the association of avant-garde Artists with radical social philosophy, see Donald Drew Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts, op. cit.,; Theda Shapiro, Painters and Politics (New York 1976); Robert Hughes, The Shock of the New (London 1980); Hilton Kramer, The Age of the Avant-Garde (New York 1973).
5. Theda Shapiro, Ibid., p. 223.
6. On the failure of modernist architecture, see works like Peter Blake, Form Follows Fiasco (Boston 1977); Tom Wolfe, From Bauhaus to Our House (New York 1981); Robert Hughes, op. cit.
7. "Did cultural turmoil predict social tumult? Many people thought so then [1880]; today we are not so sure, but that is because we live at the end of modernism, whereas they were alive at its beginning."  
  
-- Robert Hughes, op. cit., p. 9.
8. Roy Lichtenstein; interviewed in "Art News", Nov. 1963; reprinted in Readings in American Art Since 1900, B. Rose, ed., (New York, 1972 ed.), p. 168.
9. Theda Shapiro, op. cit., p. 225.
10. John Berger, The Success and Failure of Picasso (New York 1980; rpt. 1965 ed.), p. 6.
11. Ibid., p. 9.
12. Jean Gimpel, The Cult of Art, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

13. Ernest Weekley, An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 511, 631, 639.
14. Jane Chance Nitzsche, The Genius Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages (New York 1975), pp. 7, 135-136.
15. V.P. Zubov, Leonardo da Vinci, trans. D.H. Kraus (Cambridge 1968), p. 264.
16. Arthur C. Jacobson, Genius (Port Washington, New York 1970; rpt. 1926 ed.), pp. 141-142.
17. John Berger, op. cit., p. 10.
18. Lewis M. Terman and Melita H. Oden, Genetic Studies of Genius, Vol. V (Stanford, Cal. 1959), pp. 31, 46, 21.
19. Alfred Hock, Reason and Genius (Westport, Conn 1960), pp. 61-67.
20. George Becker, The Mad Genius Controversy (Beverly Hills 1978), p. 129.

John Berger (op. cit., p. 10) recognizes the artificiality of the concept, but justifies it by suggesting that "At the beginning of nineteenth century this was a necessary belief; it was what allowed artists to continue when faced with the way in which the ever more powerful bourgeois world was reducing everything, including art, to a commodity." A leading critic of the English New Left, Berger entirely ignores the fact that popular artists have, from that time onwards, consistently fought the dehumanizing and despiritualizing tendencies of modern civilization, without resorting to the exhibitionism of Genius.

21. George Becker, Ibid., p. 86.
22. Andrew Gemant, The Nature of the Genius (Springfield, Ill. 1961), pp. 99-102.
23. Alfred Hock, op. cit., pp. 125-126; George Becker, p. 127.11.
24. Robert Hughes, op. cit., p. 379.
25. R.H. Rush, Art as an Investment (New Jersey 1961), graph p. 385.
26. F. Taubes, Abracadabra and Modern Art (New York 1964), pp. 21, 26.
27. Gerald Reitlinger, The Economics of Taste, Vol. I, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

28. Ibid., pp. 32-33.
29. Sir Philip Hendry, quoted in Robert Wraight, The Art Game, op. cit., pp. 19-20.
30. Geraldine Keen, The Sale of Works of Art (London 1971), p. 58.
31. Gerald Reitlinger, op. cit., pp. 109-110.
32. A number of the "artistically radical" P.R.B., of which "Ruskin was a strong supporter and [William] Morris a younger member" supported the Chartist Movement, and, with the German "religious-communist" Nazarenes as their model, formed a secessionist anti-academic movement.  
  
-- Donald Drew Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts, op. cit., pp. 403, 454.
33. K. Middlemas, The Double Market: Art Theft and Art Thieves (Farnborough, England 1975), p. 22.
34. Robert Wraight, op. cit., p. 20.
35. Maurice Rheims, Art on the Market, op. cit., (?London 1961), p. 1511.
36. Joseph Duveen, quoted in S.N. Behrman, Duveen (London 1952), p. 85.
37. John Russell Taylor and Brian Brooke, The Art Dealers, op. cit., p. 14.
38. D.M. Fox, Engines of Culture: Philanthropy and Art Museums (Madison, Wisconsin 1963), p. 7.
39. Ibid., p. 11.
40. Leland D. Baldwin, The American Quest for the City of God (Macon, Georgia 1981), p. 199.
41. James MacGregor Burns, The Vineyard of Liberty (New York 1982), p. 457.
42. S.N. Behrman, op. cit., p. 127.
43. J.R. Taylor and B. Brooke, op. cit., p. 130.
44. S.N. Behrman, op. cit., p. 37.

45. Robert Wraight, op. cit., pp. 51, 59.
46. Geraldine Keen, op. cit., p. 203.
47. Robert Wraight, op. cit., p. 129.
48. Quentin Crisp, How to Have a Life-Style (London 1975), pp. 3, 14.
49. Henry Malcolm, Generation of Narcissus (Boston 1971), p. 137.
50. Ibid.
51. Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism, op. cit., p. 131.
52. See David Riesman, The Lonely Crowd (New Haven 1950; 1970 ed.), pp. 285-288.
53. Ibid., p. 293.
54. Should any doubt remain in our society that the new utopians have indeed replaced capitalists as the ruling elite in the West, there is no better proof than their patronage of the Fine Arts. Patronage of high or Fine Art, whether it be Church, monarch, bourgeois, or capitalist, has always been the privilege of the state, and changes in patronage (in Renaissance Florence, for example) clearly mark changes in power. In this context, the performing arts in the United States (1976) were patronized overwhelmingly by the professional class -- close to 65% of the total audience were professionals, a class which comprised less than 15% of the total adult population. Blue collar workers, by comparison, comprising approximately 50% of the adult population, accounted for less than 5% of performing arts audiences -- from figures calculating Broadway and Off-Broadway productions as well as more traditional Fine performing Arts like orchestras, opera and dance. It seems safe to assume that differences in the patronage of the visual Fine Arts are, if anything, more extreme.
- figures from W.J. Baumol and W.G. Bowen, "A Survey of American and British Audiences for the Performing Arts", The Economics of the Arts, Mark Blaug, ed. (London 1976), pp. 148-172, esp. p. 157.
55. Clement Greenburg, "Post-Painterly Abstraction", Readings in American Art Since 1900, B. Rose, ed., op. cit., pp. 169-171.
56. Ibid., p. 169.
57. Ibid., p. 171.

58. Tom Wolfe, The Painted Word (New York 1979 ed.), p. 4.
59. Wilhelm Worringer, Abstraction and Empathy (New York 1967 ed.), p. 20.
60. Robert Hughes, The Shock of the New, op. cit., p. 375.
61. Ibid., p. 259.
62. Clement Greenberg on Pollock, quoted by T. Wolfe, op. cit., p. 56.
63. John R. Stocking from "The Iconography of Style", a paper delivered to a symposium on criticism and the arts at the University of Calgary, Canada; Feb. 17, 1979.
64. Sophy Burnham, The Art Crowd (New York 1973), pp. 151, 155.
65. Andy Warhol, The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again) (New York 1975), p. 92.
66. Sophy Burnham, op. cit., p. 235.
67. From "An Advertisers' Guide to Publicity (1887)", quoted in W. Hamish Fraser, The Coming of the Mass Market, 1850-1914 (London 1981), p. 134.
68. George Bernard Shaw, quoted in Walter Shaw Sparrow, Advertising and British Art (London 1924), p. v.
69. Edward Buxton, Promise Them Anything (New York 1972), p. ix.
70. Donald Drew Egbert, Social Radicalism and the Arts, op. cit., p. 407.
71. W. Hamish Fraser, op. cit., p. 134.
72. G. Chagy, The New Patrons of the Arts (New York 1973), p. 35.
73. Joseph J. Seldin, The Golden Fleece (New York 1976; rpt. 1963 ed.), pp. 14-20.
74. P.T. Barnum, Barnum's Own Story, Waldo R. Browne, ed., (New York 1961; rpt. 1927 ed.), p. 382.
75. Neil Harris, Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum (Boston 1973), p. 156.
76. P.T. Barnum, Humbugs of the World (London 1866), pp. 9, 10, 13.

77. P.T. Barnum, Barnum's Own Story, op. cit., p. 304.
78. Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism, op. cit., p. 112.
79. Neil Harris, op. cit., p. 79.
80. Christopher Lasch, op. cit., p. 111.
81. Neil Harris, op. cit., p. 54.
82. Christopher Lasch, op. cit., pp. 136-137.
83. Ibid., p. 136.
84. Edward Buxton, op. cit., p. 45.
85. Samm Sinclair Baker, quoting Dutka, head of Audits and Surveys Co., The Permissible Lie (Cleveland 1968), p. 122.
86. Edward Buxton, op. cit., p. 45.
87. Joseph J. Seldin, op. cit., p. 227.
88. Ibid., p. 283.
89. Daniel Bell, The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism (New York 1976), p. 69.
90. Ronald Berman, Advertising and Social Change (Beverly Hills 1981), p. 133.
91. John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London 1972), p. 151.
92. Philip Hanson, Advertising and Socialism (London 1974), p. 65.
93. A. Markushevich, quoted in Ibid., p. 67. Author's brackets.
94. Ibid., p. 71.

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