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**CAPTIVATING CULTURE :  
ART IN THE SERVICE OF THE CORPORATE ORDER**

by

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## INTRODUCTION



The purpose of this thesis is broadly articulated by Pat Aufderheid when he suggests of a critic's goal:

to understand and make understandable the 'business side' of cultural issues in order to capture the process of creation.

(O'Brien, 1990, p. 360)

It is first necessary to elaborate on how cultural production can be seen as organised on industrial lines. The term 'culture industry' was probably first coined by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in 1947. The inadequacy of the use of the singular 'industry' to designate such a varied field which is far from heterogeneous, is discussed further in Chapter One.

Adorno and Horkheimer did not locate within this industrial field the forms of 'high' culture which they greatly admired. My focus then is that industry which is art and which has, along with many other culture industries, expanded greatly in the last quarter of a century. It is not the most significant culture industry in that it is appropriated and consumed by a very limited section of the population. Nevertheless, art institutions have a particular importance in that their quasi-mystical exclusiveness allows them often to elude a politico-economic analysis being brought to bear on their activities. It is essential then to understand in what way those institutions are instrumental in the means of production of art.

That they are an instrument producing both intangible and material goods, both public relations

and objects of potentially profitable investment, has been recognised by big business for some time. In Chapters Two and Three I will outline some of the historical conditions which have given rise to corporations providing capital investment to art, firstly in America, which has thus provided a model for other developed capitalist countries to imitate.

In Ireland (Chapter Three) it is a relatively recent phenomenon, but one which has largely been neglected a critical evaluation. There has though been criticism from several quarters with regard to state cultural policy:

It is quite clear that this elitist cultural policy is, like it or not, remote from the cultural inclinations of most Irish people . . . Without doubt, state subsidies are totally biased in favour of the more passive traditions of the urban middle class.

(Sparks, 1983).

The continued promotion of prestigious cultural institutions is favoured by cultural officials who deem it to be in the interest of a policy of 'democratisation of culture'. This process involves exposing a larger segment of the public to a 'high' culture of traditional and relatively elitist art forms. Therefore, they see an increasing financial support from business as the best way of benefiting this policy and cultural development as a whole.

Another idea for cultural development which has been argued for is that of real 'cultural democracy',

yet its stunted development is endemic of a society where real democracy and real public dialogue is absent and where the industrialisation of public expression has resulted in a very narrow range of divergent political opinions. In this society choice is indicated by mere consumption. 'Cultural democracy' would be a recognition of the value of all groups, of the importance of all people to express themselves in their own terms rather than in the terms of dominant cultural values. One such dominant value, and its domination a hindrance to cultural democracy, is the value 'Art'. In concluding I will indicate that if real democracy is ever to be achieved, if a more democratic control of capital is obtained, then a democratic culture would have no place for 'Art'.

CHAPTER ONE

ART AS A CULTURE INDUSTRY



In the developed world the main centres of symbolic production are in fact industries which produce and place cultural messages. A United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) study of such industries defined them thus:

Generally speaking, a cultural industry is held to exist when cultural goods and services are produced, reproduced, stored or distributed on industrial and commercial lines, that is to say on a large scale and in accordance with a strategy based on economic considerations rather than any concerns for cultural development.

(Schiller, 1989, p. 30)

Included here are publishing, the press, film, television, advertising and, more recently, the 'information' industry. Also to be categorised here are services which are displayed rather than produced serially, so that museums and art galleries also function as culture industries.

It is of note that the above definition is based not on technological determinants but rather on the strategies employed. It is usual, when the term 'culture industry' is evoked, that it refers to the 'mass media' and excludes the older, traditional cultural forms such as the plastic arts. In fact when the term was first coined by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in their Dialectic of Enlightenment of 1947, they were deeply attached to the forms, modes and values of artistic creation that had developed in 'Old Europe' since the eighteenth century. They thus drew a line between those forms of cultural production and

those ones they deemed collectively to be an 'industry'. Their insistence 'industry' in the singular also presents a misleading unified field; the industries of cultural production are various and their differences prevail over their similarities in both the artist's working conditions and in the way the products are appropriated by the classes that consume them.

Although the hold of capitalist production over culture has tightened by no means has all cultural production been industrialised. Yet Adorno's recognition that 'the culture industry turns into public relations, the manufacturing of 'goodwill' per se, without regard for particular firms or saleable objects (Adorno, 1979, p. 86), can be applied to institutions of 'high' culture which he so cherished that are increasingly dependent on sponsorship or patronage by industry and corporate capital.

It is no longer possible to adapt the ideas of Adorno and the Frankfurt school and claim that 'authentic' art is totally foreign to the industrialisation of culture. The surplus in capitalist production finds a lack of sufficient investment outlets and thus obliges producers to continually create new needs in order to extend the field for the creation of value. This then is integral to 'the process of the formation of cultural needs within a framework of economic, political and ideological class relations' (Miege, 1989, p. 23).

Cultural production, even within the sphere of 'high' culture, has long been recognised as a specific site for the valorisation of capital. The industry then must base itself on the prevailing dominant conceptions of culture, simultaneously putting new products on the market and creating a social demand. Further, in this industry, the penetration of capital takes place without, at least on the surface, changing the relations of production.

The terms 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour derive from discussions among classical economists, which Marx analysed thoroughly in the first part of Theories of Surplus Value, an uncompleted work. This discussion of productive and unproductive labour, implied no judgement about the nature of the work process under discussion, or their usefulness to humans in particular, or society at large, but was concerned specifically with the role of labour in the capitalist mode of production. It was then an analysis of the 'relations of production' rather than the utility of particular varieties of labour.<sup>1</sup>

Here, to analyse the position artworks occupy in the complex combinations of productive and unproductive labour which are characteristic of contemporary capitalism, whether labour is productive or

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1 For a thorough discussion of this see Harry Braverman, 'Productive and Unproductive Labor' in Labor and Monopoly Capital (1974), pp. 411-423.







or unproductive of surplus value, is determined not by its content but by the place it occupies in the relations of production. We must though indicate the exception, such as cultural labour within a co-operative mode of production:

they fall outside of the distinction between productive and unproductive labor, because they are outside the capitalist mode of production.

(Braverman, 1974, p. 411)

To disregard the concrete form or content of cultural labour is only in order to understand its social form, so as to further emphasise how social forms dominate and transform the significance of material things and processes. Dependent upon its social form the same labour may be productive or unproductive of surplus value; for instance, the same commodity (i.e. painting) can give rise to labour productive of surplus value (in a commercial gallery) or to labour unproductive of surplus value (within a public cultural gallery or museum). The latter example of the insertion of the product into a public cultural apparatus may yet be indirectly productive as it contributes to integrating the product into a process of circulation necessary for the realisation of value.

In producing commodity values the aim is to capture as great a margin over costs as possible. This is the 'valorisation' of capital. For the commercial capitalist, who buys in order to sell, the problem of the realisation of value constitutes the essence of

his business altogether. In advanced capitalism the functions of this realisation of value by capital engage large masses of labour so that:

while unproductive labour has declined outside the grasp of capital, it has increased within its ambit.

(Braverman, 1974, p. 415)

These labour processes cover the fields of marketing, advertising, promotion and speculation. The 'work of art' placed in a public cultural sector which is sponsored by and thus promotes corporate capital would then be unproductive labour of this type. While productive and unproductive labour are technically distinct if we attend to the instance cited above, it was said that the insertion of the product into the public cultural realm was potentially **indirectly** productive of surplus value. For 'high' cultural products the realization of value may necessitate a process of circulation whereby such public institutions contribute to the creation of demand.

Specific to cultural products is a

use value which results from the concrete labor of one or more artists and relates to the symbolic meanings associated with their use . . . but they are also commodities produced to be exchanged.

(Miege, 1989, p. 25)

It is important then to consider under what conditions the transformation of cultural use values into exchange values will take place. This then is the integration of the artist's concrete labour into a process of collective labour; but this process of collective

labour can never entirely erase the traces of the artist's labour.

This is true of the products in question, 'artworks', which have a limited reproducibility. The limited circulation pertains because certain social groups, in particular the working class, do not have the cultural codes necessary to use the products; but it is also because their rarity is an integral characteristic of the use value given to the product. It is of strategic importance for the art market to manipulate the 'aura' of this rarity.

Nevertheless the speculative character of the market for unique products causes the producer<sup>2</sup> great difficulties in attempting to master the conditions of valorisation for each product. This is not to say that art is outside of the conditions of production or that it eludes the determinations of the dominant ideology (which would be to accept an idealist notion of 'the arbitrariness of artistic taste'). Rather it is to say that 'social determinations operate upon a given type of product in an imprecise way' (Miege, 1989, p. 26).

For Adorno in 'Culture Industry Reconsidered':

the expression 'industry' is not to be taken too literally. It refers to the standardization of the thing itself . . . and to the rationalization of distribution techniques, but not strictly to the production process.

(Adorno, 1979, p. 87)

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2 Producer here means one who is responsible not for just one product but for a range of products, and is synonymous with director, dealer or curator.



This depends on reducing the process of cultural production to a series of distinct phases; from the phase of conception (the work of the artist) through to the phase of materialisation (to the form of commodity) and on to the transformation of commodity into money (distribution). Yet this only functions through the decisive intervention of a co-ordination agent, the producer. But this producer is not only an intermediary between labour and capital. In order to ensure a surplus value in a difficult speculative market, the producer compiles a list (the dealer a stable, the curator a catalogue) to insure against individual products that 'fail'. The producer's operation is the transformation of 'unique' and contingent cultural use values into exchange values in the market. The producer therefore intervenes in the very conception of the product.

The proposition that the production agent, who controls a range of cultural products and markets them as a package, therefore participates in the conception of each unit of that package, would be vehemently refuted by many artists in the name of 'creative independence'. The autonomy of this creative independence serves to obscure the fact that, thanks to the 'star-system', few artists are in a position to claim part of the surplus value produced, and the majority are paid little for their labour power. Often the belief is expressed that artistic creation

continues to function as it did in times of royal patronage or in the patterns of undeveloped capitalism.

Though not all artists share the same production structures for many products the phase of conception includes the participation of artist and members of artistic professions (such as skilled technicians and art directors). The participation in this of producers, dealers and curators, removes these 'cultural workers' control over the product and retains for the producer the overall conception. The phase of conception is thus pushed toward that of dominant industrial production structures.

For the realisation of value of unique products, it is of strategic importance that the true nature of the phase of conception is obscured. In the reverse of Adorno and Horkheimer's 'Entkünstung' whereby art is stripped of its 'aura', it is important to maintain the aura of artistic activity and of the independence of artists; that these commodities continue to bear the stamp of genius and not appear to emanate from research laboratories. If we neglect to fit the profession of 'artist' into the overall production process we may underestimate the influence of capital on artistic activity or fail to understand the decisive differences between culture industries and other industries.

Even when this product, the 'work of art' is catalogued in the public cultural sector, it may be impossible to make a radical distinction between it

and the product in a profit-seeking cultural sector. As already highlighted, the public sector plays a vital role in the distribution in and creation of cultural markets. In addition, it contributes to the financing of the conditions of production of cultural commodities. To be discussed in the following chapters are the recent historical conditions in capitalist societies which have tended toward a mixture of both private and state capital in financing the conditions of production of works of art. Thus in capitalist societies we are witnessing the promotion of culture by commerce and the promotion of commerce by culture.

The dominance of industrial conditions in cultural production has been pointed to as furthering cultural democratisation:

The essentially nostalgic reflex of the intelligentsia at the intrusion of industrial processes and at the intervention of big business in cultural production must be rejected . . . The progress of democratization and decentralization is being brought about on a much wider scale through industrial products accessible in the market than through the "products" subsidised by public authorities.

(Girard, quoted in Miege, 1989, p. 71)

The thesis quoted here is by Augustin Girard and was prepared for a UNESCO meeting; it recognises that a capitalist process of production is at work and that capital seeking new areas of investment is using cultural work as productive work. Girard's thesis does not recognise that, since the meaning of a work of art is contingent, it does not have the same meaning when



it serves to varolise capital as when it when it does not. The UNESCO secretariat at the same meeting concluded that unless counteracted by decentralisation the development of industrialisation would, rather than lead to democratisation,

give rise to inequalities and distortions that can in some circumstances amount to the deliberate manipulation of opinion.

(Miege, 1989, p. 73).

In a culture industry producing hard-to-market cultural goods such as art, the support of state subsidies continues to be necessary. This public cultural sector trains not only artists but also consumers of cultural goods. Yet it also continues to find its public outside of the working classes. Its market, though numerically insignificant compared with other cultural markets, is largely bourgeoise. Their consent to the commoditisation of art results in the accumulation of more and more sophisticated products by the few. The management of their opinion helps assure the perpetuation of the reigning economic and social model.

CHAPTER TWO

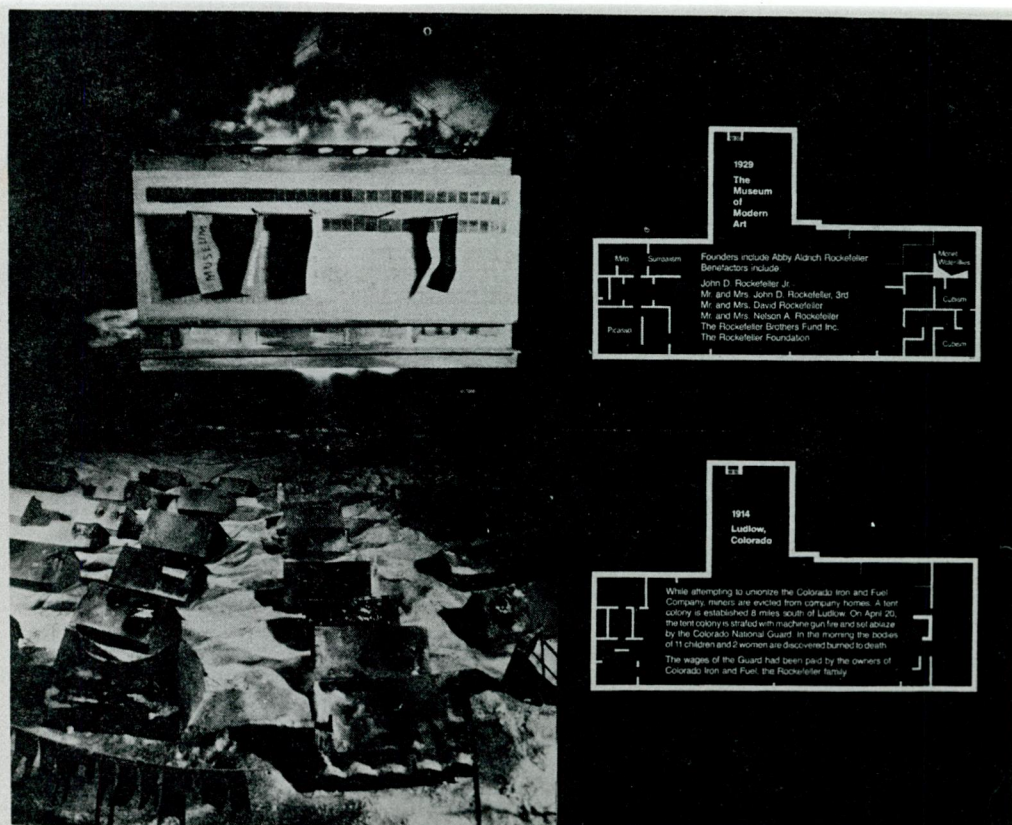
CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT IN AMERICAN ART



The symbiotic relationship of big business and modern art in America can be indicated with reference to one single family: the Rockefellers. In 1914, in Ludlow, Colorado, attempts were made to unionise the Colorado Iron and Fuel Company. The organising miners were evicted from company homes as a result and set up a tent colony which was then one night set ablaze and machine-gunned by the Colorado National Guard. Several miners, two women and eleven children were killed. The wages of the Guard had been paid by the owners of Colorado Iron and Fuel, the Rockefeller family.

The public outcry that followed was, in time, pacified by the ingenuity of Ivy Lee, one of the first public relations men, who identified the association of the Rockefeller name with that of philanthropy. This operation included the establishment of a number of foundations, coinciding with art collecting, the founding of museums and the move of family members into the boards of trustees of already established cultural institutions. In 1929 the Museum of Modern Art in New York was founded with benefactors that included seven members of the Rockefeller family. At present Mrs. John D. Rockefeller is chairman of the board of trustees. Also in New York, the Metropolitan Museum's board is presided over by C. Douglas Dillon who, until 1976, was the chairman of the Rockefeller foundation. The Whitney Museum also has a Rockefeller representative on the board, Mrs. Laurence Rockefeller.





"Culture and Barbarism," Greg Sholette, 1989 (36" x 42" Photo-Diorama and Text)

FIGURE 2





FIGURE 2

That such museums, regardless of perceived motives of philanthropy or altruism, are enlisted as corporate agents is specifically stated by David Rockefeller:

From an economic standpoint such involvement in the arts can mean direct and tangible benefits. It can provide a company with extensive publicity and advertising, a brighter public reputation, and an improved corporate image. It can build better customer relations, a readier acceptance of company products, and a superior appraisal of their quality. Promotion of the arts can improve the morale of employees and help attract qualified personnel.

(Haacke, vol. II, p. 102)<sup>1</sup>

Museums have anyway been invariably supported by wealthy patrons and their endowments, and have usually served to celebrate the past and present of the established order. Exhibits of social conflict may be displayed but without a text to outline the historically specific context in which they were produced. An example of this would be Picasso's Guernica in MOMA, New York, which, until Franco's death in 1975, was displayed without the commentary which provides an audience with the information that in 1937 the Basque town of Guernica was bombed by the Luftwaffe at Franco's request. Yet the transformation of museums into 'becoming public relations agents for the interest of big business and its ideological allies' (Haacke, 1984, p. 108) can be dated from about the mid-1960s. It was in that period that the big American museums

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1 This quotation appears on a plaque made by Hans Haacke.



began the practice of installing temporary exhibition title and corporate sponsor, draped in front of the building.

The corporate sponsor wishing to achieve maximum penetration would endeavour to associate itself with exhibitions which can lure large crowds. The public, in turn being made to expect that only lavish shows were worth seeing, would exert pressure on the museum to stage more blockbusters thereby continuing the museum's dependence on the corporation for funding.

The extent of growth of American corporations funding of the arts is such that while in 1967 they spent \$22 million, the figure today exceeds \$1 billion annually (Wallis, 1986, p. 52). A large proportion of this is forthcoming from only a handful of multinationals including IBM, Exxon, Philip Morris and Mobil. That this apparently extravagant generosity is necessitated is spelled out by the director of the Metropolitan Museum who reports that his institution is 'dependent on corporate sponsorship' (Wallis, 1986, p. 52). Underlying this is the fact that this cultural welfare is one hundred percent tax deductible. Also though, the majority of the cultural 'spectacles' of the temporary exhibition are also partially funded by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), a publicly-funded organisation established in 1965. This input of public taxes into events which serve to represent the corporate sector must be seen in tandem with American

trends toward an inequitable corporate share of the tax burden (Figure 3). In the period of expansion of corporate arts funding between 1960 and 1983, the corporate income tax bill dwindled from 23.2 percent to 6.6 percent of all federal revenues. These trends have accelerated to the extent that a Congressional budget office study reported that the

poorest one-tenth of Americans pay 20 percent more of their earnings in federal taxes in 1988 than they did in 1987 and the richest will pay almost 20 percent less.

(Schitler, 1989, p. 29)

How then does this collusion between governmental agencies, the multinationals and the institutions of art shape the cultural experiences within those institutions that we are exposed to. If, as for Allan Sekula,

the meaning of a work of art ought to be regarded, then, as contingent, rather than immanent, universally given, or fixed

(Haake, 1984, p. 91)

the interpretations are largely dependent on the context in which the work is encountered. The encounter takes place not just in the context of a specific site, but also **after** the selective cataloguing operation of the curator.

The lack of control over this phase of conception by the artist, and the frail nature of the artist's intentional meanings is prominently illustrated by the history of the New York School of artists in the 1950s. This lack of control over the work was such that not



**Table 1** The Shrinking Corporate Tax Burden (Major tax sources of Federal revenues and their share of the total for fiscal years)

<i>TAXES</i>	<i>1952</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1981</i>	<i>1982</i>	<i>1983</i>
Individual Income	42.2%	44.0%	46.9%	47.2%	47.7%	48.3%	47.2%
<b>Corporation Income</b>	<b>32.1</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>6.6</b>
Social insurance*	9.8	15.9	23.0	30.5	30.5	32.6	35.5
Excise	13.4	12.6	8.1	4.7	6.8	5.9	6.4
Estate and Gift	1.2	1.7	1.9	1.2	1.1	1.3	0.9
Other	1.4	2.5	3.0	3.9	3.7	4.0	3.5

*Source: New York Times*, March 20, 1987, with data from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget.

*Note:* Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

\*Includes Social Security, Medicare, Unemployment, Railroad Retirement, and Federal Employee Retirement taxes.

**FIGURE 3**





FIGURE 3



only was it used for aesthetic pleasure or decoration or status symbol but also as an educational weapon. Two important articles published in Artforum by Max Kozloff (May 1973) and Eva Cockcroft (June 1974) outline how such art was enlisted as a propaganda weapon in the Cold War. Large, impressive international exhibitions were paraded with the purpose, as Russell Lynes put it,

to let it be known, especially in Europe, that America was not the cultural backwater that the Russians, during that tense period called "the cold war" were trying to demonstrate that it was.  
(Fuller, 1980, p. 79)

That abstract art was more manipulable by ideological forces is elaborated on by Alfred Barr, the first director of MOMA, who wrote an article in the New York Times Magazine in 1952, called 'Is Modern Art Communistic?', in which he identified realism with totalitarianism and proclaimed that abstract art was on 'our side' (Fuller, 1980, p. 80).

Thus American art was able to become a world power precisely by severing itself from explicit politics and allowing its political orientation to be made by its promoters. And the international 'Triumph of American painting' paralleled the triumph of its would-be promoters, the American multinationals. After World War Two, only the US had escaped the widespread losses of people, property and industrial facilities which were sustained in Europe and Asia. Particularly in the first twenty years after the war, there was a rapid

expansion internationally of already domestically huge American enterprise. Privately owned US companies set up production facilities in scores of countries which were then added to by the local placement of US banks, advertising agencies and public relations and marketing firms. The triumph of this, 'global resource-allocation control, what empire is actually all about' (Schiller, 1989, p. 12) and the relative domestic prosperity that it ensured gained the support for big business of the general populace of America.

The cultivation of the fear of communism through legislation (the Smith-Mundt, 1948 and McCarran-Walter acts and the Taft-Hartley Labor Law, 1947) made affiliation with communist-related organisations grounds for exclusion from government jobs, and the Congressional Committee on Un-American Activities, though perhaps cheered by the masses, was firmly rationalised by the benefactors of such a policy. The deployment of military bases worldwide to counter "potential Soviet aggression", not only protected the global interests of US corporations but also diverted attention away from US economic political and cultural expansionism.

The most significant effect of this long period of anti-communistic fervour was the absence it created of a real spectrum of public opinion and expression, where even muted social criticism could be misconstrued. Its legacy remains; in a poll conducted in 1987 for the

Times Mirror company, 70 percent of the respondents classified themselves as anti-communistic.

This is contributory to and extends into the seemingly apolitical nature of American art institutions. Producers are made to accede to the taste of the established institutions:

It is not necessary to construct a theory of intentional cultural control. In truth, the strength of the control process rests in its apparent absence. The desired systemic result is achieved ordinarily by a loose though effective institutional process.

(Schiller, 1989, p. 8)

This process utilises the education of professions and the career paths built into these professions. It rewards the performing of what is "expected"; of "objective" rules which are merely norms. Therefore only the occasional intrusion from above is required. In these institutions of art, it is the effective internalisation of values which determines control.

Thomas Messer, the director of the Guggenheim Museum in 1970, stated:

You approach corporations with projects you believe are acceptable to them in the first place. These tend to be safer projects.

(Haacke, 1984, p. 90)

This process of conforming to the dominant ideology is evidenced by a 1968 exhibition in MOMA 'Dada, Surrealism and their heritage', where the work of John Heartfield (Figure 4) was conveniently omitted from both the exhibition and the catalogue. In 1975 the Whitney Museum held exhibitions of 'Women's Art' and





*"The finest products of capitalism" (March 1932). "In February 1932 six million were unemployed in Germany. The German title 'Spitzenprodukte des Kapitalismus' contains a pun on 'Spitze' which means both 'lace' and 'summit'." Dawn Ades, *Photomontage* (Thames and Hudson, 1976)*

FIGURE 4





FIGURE 4

'Black Art' which were presented as movements. These were immediately followed and overshadowed by a return to the dominant mainstream commemorating the Bicentennial by staging the Rockefeller collection simultaneously in the Whitney, the Metropolitan and in MOMA.

Geno Rodriguez, the director of the 'Alternative Museum' in New York, tells of how a major foundation came to him expressing an interest in supporting political shows. He outlined a forthcoming show 'Foreign affairs - conflict in the Global Village', and the foundation representative was at first enthused:

I said, "Well it's about South Africa", and he said "Oh right on", and I said "It's about Central America" and he said "Terrific!" Then I said "And it's about the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip by Israel" and he said "Oh, dear, I don't think we can fund it".

(O'Brien, 1990, p. 37)

This then is, in the words of the Metropolitan Museum director: 'an inherent insidious hidden form of censorship' (Wallis, 1986, p. 52).

This American model of corporate sponsorship has, principally in the last decade, been adopted in most developed capitalist countries. Even in France, where there has been a historical national concern with the defence and promotion of French culture, the Louvre announced in 1987 that it was:

seek[ing] American corporate and private financing to help complete a decade long project to renovate the museum and upgrade its conservation and exhibition facilities.

(Schiller, 1989, p. 125)



In Britain the Conservative Government has been instrumental in wooing corporate funding through the establishment of the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA) and the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme (BSIS), whereby the government would top up any new arts sponsorship scheme in the ratio of £1 for every £3. Business has also been involved with capital projects such as the recently opened 'Sainsbury' wing of the Tate Gallery (not a supermarket attached, but a gallery named after the supermarket chain that financed it).

In the next chapter we turn to investigate such developments in an Irish context. In 1988 Cothu, the business council for the arts, was set up along similar lines as the ABSA in Britain. Its establishment was the culmination of efforts on the part of government through the Department of the Taoiseach and the Arts Council to increase business involvement in the arts. In examining the motivations for this relationship between corporations and Irish arts institutions, I have drawn upon several quotations by prominent figures, the subtleties of which would never betray the brashness of David Resnicow, of the American division of Ruder Finn and Rotman Public Relations:

Supporting the arts gives access to the community's opinion leaders, the movers and shakers. The board of any institution - opera, ballet, the symphony - are the local civic and political leaders who shape a community. You buy direct contact with these people.

(Financial Times, 9 January 1986)

**CHAPTER THREE**

**IRELAND : CULTURE OF CAPITAL**



In the late eighteenth century, British landlords took over the lands of the commons - the acreages of land designated for use by the entire community - and those of small property holders; in a series of acts of enclosure. Enclosure is a term which could be applied in Ireland as elsewhere to the developing capture of sites of public expression by corporate capital. Established cultural institutions then are being utilised to foreground a profit-motivated world view and promote the virtues of concentrated capital. Yet institutions, such as the National Gallery, have by their 'establishment' nature since their inception produced and been consumed largely by a privileged elite. This elite have defined themselves by their proximity to high culture, the possession of knowledge which, when obtained, indicates for them a superior existence. This 'enclosure' then may be merely symptomatic of the changing nature of capitalism in its advanced development.

In this late stage of capitalism capital accumulation has embarked on a new cycle, based on the internationalisation of the world economy, the deregulation of the market, and the reconstruction of productive processes through new technology. Capital has been concentrated to such an extent that now, of the fifty greatest economic powers in the world, only half are nation states (Sheehan, 1989).



Lea Andrews Maquette for 'Young Tom and old Dobbin discover Sonning Common'

FIGURE 5



In Ireland in earlier periods of nascent capitalism wealthy industrialists and mercantilists, and their families, such as Basil Goulding, the Iveagh family of Guinness' and Hugh Lane, were central figures in the patronage and promotion of 'high' art.

It could therefore be seen as evolutionary that if the system of power and money-making in Ireland has developed a corporate identity, it would follow that the artforms consumed by their bourgeois class would also assume such an identity. In 1983 the Arts Council undertook a survey published under the title 'Audiences, Acquisitions and Amateurs'; of those surveyed 8 percent had attended an exhibition in the previous year and only 2 percent had purchased paintings or sculptures by living Irish artists. The survey also found that this participation was predominantly middle class.

If 5 percent of the population owns 72 percent of the wealth (Byrne, 1989, p. 43) then this 5 percent have been active in transforming the activities of ostensibly public cultural institutions so as to benefit themselves, as evidenced in the commercial advice of Margaret Downes, a member of the board of the Douglas Hyde Gallery:

sponsorship, initially developed as a derivative of advertising and PR, is now accepted as a communication medium in its own right.

(Sunday Business Post, February 1992)

Neither has this privileged class been slow to congratulate themselves on their cultural endeavours.



Cothu, the business council for the arts, which was established in 1988, presented 'The First Arts Sponsor of the Year Awards' in November 1991. This ceremony was held in the new Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMOMA) amidst much pomp and with the prestige of President Mary Robinson presenting the awards. Previous to this, a series of weekly profiles of businesses nominated for the awards appeared in the Sunday Business Post; these illuminate the motivations of some of the eighty corporations who are members of this organisation. Frank Casey, managing director of ICC, sponsors of the National Concert Hall, believes that:

it helps the image of the company. It behoves companies like ICC to do what the princes of old did for music.

(Sunday Business Post, 30 June 1991)

Obviously though this lineage is no longer based on blood, as in feudal times, but rather on capital. For the brewers Murphys, product endorsement is the central issue:

This idea of the arts being enjoyable is very important because if people are enjoying themselves they will associate the pleasure with the brand we are trying to promote.

(Sunday Business Post, 23 June 1991)<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere Dermot Egan, the chairman of Cothu and deputy chief executive of Allied Irish Banks, espouses the gender-based nature of the target audience:

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1 John Hackett, Murphy's Marketing Manager.

Arts sponsorship provides a means of accessing the female market . . . because women are much more interested in the arts.

(Sunday Business Post, 28 July 1991)

Egan indicates some field of activity that women lack an interest in, and perhaps this is the male dominated business world. Another director of Cothu, Malachy Smith of sponsors Wang Ireland, recognises the industrial nature of artistic production, but laments that this is not recognised widely enough, that the artistic community should:

get its act together, realise that it too is selling a product and learn to play the game.

(Sunday Business Post, 15 September 1988)

Commerce has increased its financial participation in the arts dramatically in recent years. In 1984 the sum stood at £600,000 and by 1991 had grown to a figure estimated at £2 million.<sup>2</sup> This growth has been triggered by the introduction of tax concessions in June 1984 under Section 32 of the Irish Finance Act 1984. This provides full tax relief for companies and individuals providing 'gifts' between £100 and £10,000 to approved arts organisations. Initially the Department of Finance was reluctant to approve many organisations: only three were approved in the first year. Since then, and in line with government policy to attract significant private capital to the arts, to date, eighty organisations have been approved.

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2 Ciaran Carty. 'Business Sponsors put £2m into Arts', Sunday Tribune, 6 August 1991.

These subventions are almost entirely directed toward institutions and events which are the most prestigious, the most conventional and the most secure. The 'gifts' may also be in the form of a block-booking of theatre or concert tickets so as to entertain clients which is in fact tax deductible corporate hospitality. Tony Ryan, chief executive of Guinness Peat Aviation (GPA), extensive arts sponsors, stresses that it is important:

that the company reputation will not be damaged by failure or controversy associated with the event.

(Irish Press, November 1985)

Sponsorship has also prevailed outside of the walls of particular institutions, and captured sites in more public spaces. ICI, the Insurance Corporation of Ireland, spent £20,000 on a bronze memorial statue of the poet Patrick Kavanagh, sited on the canal bank at Wilton Terrace, believing it to be:

in ICI's interest to be associated with something that could be permanently enjoyed . . . and not just a once-off event that people would have forgotten a few days later.

(Sunday Business Post, 9 June 1991)<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Michael Smurfit was able to situate his 'present' to the people of Dublin, the 'Anna Livia fountain' in the prime site of O'Connell Street in Dublin. The sculptor responsible for this, Eamonn O'Doherty, was also commissioned by the Central Bank of Ireland to erect 'The Golden Tree' (Figure 6), the meaning of which was declared in the bank's internal bulletin 'Bank Notes' to be a symbol of the Republic's wealth 'not locked and hidden, but shared by all the Irish people' (Irish Times, October 1991).

3 Ian Hutchinson, chairman and managing director of ICI Ireland.





FIGURE 6



FIGURE 2



This manipulation of opinion and creation of favourable consent to the social order has only rarely been exceeded by overt censorship. Coras Iompair Eireann (CIE), the state transport company, commissioned eighteen murals for its train station in Bray in 1987. One of these depicted a dejected Black and Tan, in a scene from 1922, trailing a Union Jack behind him as he prepared to board a train; CIE management considered that the mural might offend British tourists and so covered the depicted flag with sheets of paper. CIE was again responsible for direct censorship a year later when a picture by Martin Turner, as part of the 'Art on the Dart' scheme, was pasted over because of its explicit political theme.

In 1991, CIE was one of the companies featured in Cothu's showcase exhibition 'Art Inc.'. Held in the Guinness Hop Store and opened by the then Taoiseach Charles Haughey HRHA, it was accompanied by a glossy catalogue reproducing particular works alongside statements by their respective corporate owners concerning not the works but the owners' activities. In the preface, Aidan Dunne outlines how the headline-making prices achieved in the international art market in the 1980s were initiated by A. Alfred Taubman. Dunne writes of how Taubman's 'aggressive deal-making ethos of the property developer' (Art Inc., p. 14), was thus introduced to Sothebys in his takeover of the auction house. Dunne merely refers to 'his methods' and



lists some of the most remarkable sales, including Alan Bond's 1987 bid of over \$50 million for 'Irises' by Van Gogh. He therefore neglects to elaborate on the fact that Taubman's methods in achieving such high prices were chiefly the provision of credit schemes and personal loans. It has been pointed to elsewhere that this takes the form of a type of insider-dealing and that in the case of Bond's purchase of 'Irises' it was instrumental in encouraging investment in art in the wake of a stock-exchange plummet known as 'Black Monday':

Once they had set Bond's credit Sotheby's must have known how much he was going to spend. If they were then advising the seller about where to set his reserve . . . 4

This emphasis on the financial rather than supposed aesthetic attributions of art is played down by corporate collectors who would wish to foreground their association with 'artistic excellence'.

For the late Peter Fuller, a one-time Marxist after his conversion to capitalism:

If art is to flourish in a modern, liberal, capitalist state, it is vital to strengthen those institutions which have an interest in the arts distinct from and unsullied by that of the marketplace.

(Modern Painters, Winter 1989, p. 7)

Yet, as argued earlier, a radical distinction can no longer be made between the private and public cultural

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4 This quotation comes from an unnamed dealer in Peter Fuller. Editorial. Modern Painters. Winter 1989, pp. 5-7.

sectors. Public institutions contribute significantly to the process of circulation necessary to the realisation of value. It is therefore rare to find cultural institutions unsullied by the market-place and thus the determinations of a hierarchical class structure in a capitalist state.

There is evidence to demonstrate that in Ireland the state has insisted on the preservation and support of a culture of bourgeois class interests. It supports the same areas of 'excellence' that corporations attend to; any contributions to marginal or community cultural practices have been little more than token gestures. In 1983 a body was established to co-ordinate a community arts programme, CAFE - Creative Activity for Everyone. But its importance to cultural officialdom is expressed in the paltry funding it receives from the Arts Council; in 1989 it was granted a sum of £9,100 which compares unfavourably with the £115,000 that the Douglas Hyde Gallery received in the same year. In that year, out of a total fund of £7,149,000 (£4.201m in grant-in-aid voted by Dail Eireann and an additional £2.948m from the National Lottery) available to the Arts Council, £1,632,000 alone was given to the Abbey Theatre (Arts Council Annual Report, 1989).

Only recently, in November 1991, the Regions Officer of the Arts Council, Emer McNamara resigned her post over a series of events which serves to highlight the nature of state cultural policy. The present

director of the Arts Council, Adrian Munnelly, had shredded two hundred copies of a book Dreams and Responsibilities, a history of the Irish state's involvement in the arts, which the Arts Council had commissioned in 1989. The reason given was one of 'good housekeeping'. Yet, Emer McNamara has made it apparent that the reason was rather that the government and the Taoiseach's cultural advisor, Anthony Cronin, were unhappy about the book's description of specific events in 1982. At a recent conference, 'The Art of Managing the Arts', the book was displayed with a brochure detailing Cronin's version of the same events attached to it by an elastic band (Circa, Jan/Feb 1991, p. 15).

These events concern a period in 1982 when Colm O'Briain was the director of the Arts Council. The Council, while attempting to remain within its limited budget, had decided to develop a commitment to the funding of regional, peripheral sites of cultural expression, such as small theatre companies and community arts. This was to be done at the expense of curtailing or withdrawing its funding of established institutions such as the Gate Theatre, the Dublin Theatre Festival and the Douglas Hyde Gallery. The then Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, had a particular interest in such institutions; in 1981 he had established the National Concert Hall independently of the Arts Council, with its own twelve-member board



chaired by Harry Boland, a long-time friend of Haughey's and formerly a partner in Haughey, Boland, accountants.

James White, then the chairman of the Arts Council, stated, in an interview in 1988, that Anthony Cronin had contacted him at the time to convey the Taoiseach's wish that O'Brien be asked to resign as director. This request was refused, and compromises were reached regarding the recipients of funding.<sup>5</sup> The compromises, as indicated by the distribution of funding above, were in favour of the establishment.

The present government has prided itself on the 'cultural achievements' it has fostered; in 1991 the Arts Council grant stood at £9.956m. This must, though, be seen in the parallel reduction of monies allocated to the library services, from £3.15m in 1991 to an estimate of only £2m for 1992 (Irish Times, 8 February 1992).

This is further exemplified by the state's devotion to the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham; by 1984 the government had spent £21 million on its restoration, which, by that date, was only £2 million less than the total monies received by the Arts Council since its foundation in 1951. The Royal Hospital has since been further renovated and now houses the Irish Museum of

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<sup>5</sup> This interview with James White was conducted by Brian Kennedy in Dublin, 23 Feb. 1988 and is referred to in Kennedy, 1989, p. 204.

Modern Art. An opening speech was provided by Charles Haughey in which he asserts his belief in a trans-historical and trans-geographical art. The museum has a function to:

fulfil the socially and culturally important role it will now have in our national consciousness . . . The result will be an enrichment of a high order.

(Portfolio, 1991, p. 34)

Here we have a self-styled friend of the arts, a generous patron of artists such as Louis le Broque and Anne Madden, situating art as an element in the consciousness industry, and further, elaborating its function to society's 'high order: that of enriching and validating the prevailing pattern of man's domination by man, that of perpetuating the reigning social and economic order. This is the intangible benefit for both state and corporation alike, of entering into the art life of a society.





FIGURE 7





CONCLUSION

Within this essay it has been necessary to investigate the social significance of the art category as a whole, as distinct from investigating the social significance of particular works of art. It is the economic and political determinations on its organisational forms that have been under scrutiny.

The process by which something is established as a work of art, or someone established as an important name, is not one of a sifting by experts, but is rather, as was said in Chapter One, 'social determinations operating upon a given type of product in an imprecise way' (Miege, 1989, p. 26). Yet art is nothing over and above what has been socially established as art:

it is the social arena in which the instance is taken up that confers the status of art upon the instance.

(Taylor, 1978, p. 47)

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, in contemporary society this social arena constitutes one of the industries of the society. In this industry art is not simply used as productive labour in the valorisation of capital, it is also used as unproductive labour by capital in the production of an intangible good. This intangible good is persuasive communication, whether it be called public relations or political propaganda. Art is a dominant cultural model which serves the interests of powerful groups in society and in doing so helps secure their position against challenge.



A process of public opinion management is also prevalent in the other culture industries which have a mass consumption. Such a process allows the dissemination of useful information or knowledge but importantly, it keeps the social groups concerned at a distance, away from the preparation of decisions, while giving them the illusion of participation. This participatory illusion, which is merely consumption, takes the place of real democratic debate.

Art, though, is a distinct cultural industry with its own specific conditions, and one may believe that these conditions allow it to elude the determinations of the dominant ideology. Rudolf Baranik, an American artist who has made an extended series of paintings based on the Vietnam conflict, entitled 'Napalm Elegy', has said:

Art both serves and subverts the dominant class of every society. Even the most passive or subservient art is not the precise carrier of ruling class ideas, though in every way the ruling class makes an effort to make it so.

(Lippard, 1984, p. 161)

Yet though the 'art-work' may not be the 'precise carrier of ruling class ideas' it is, nevertheless, carried into a ruling class social arena. This arena is attended to largely by those from a bourgeois social group. The work's potential subversiveness is then contained within an arena of bourgeois society, in which a supposed freedom of divergent thinking is one of its 'high ideals'. That art institutions present a

'safe' chamber for divergent ideas is evidenced in the previous chapter on Irish culture. The two examples of direct censorship, both concerning CIE, were only enforced when the potentially subversive work was placed in a public arena used by various social groups.

To the largest social groups in our society (the 'masses' who are, of course, heterogeneous) the traditions of art appear as being remote from their lives. In our educational system, which places great value on 'high' culture and which inculcates a history of Western civilisation conducted in terms of its so-called cultural achievements, this produces a feeling of ignorance. The feeling of ignorance and inadequacy may be shrugged off for most people by concluding that the activities from which they are debarred are all rather useless. 'High' culture forwards the belief that there is an objective superiority of those things deemed to be art and thereby that the form of life which celebrates them is superior, and thus also the social group which is implicated. If then, democratic cultural participation is to be encouraged, a cultural democracy which values equally the importance of all people to express themselves in their own terms would require that the value of 'art' be resisted. Art is a term of dominant 'high' cultural values, a conferring of a discriminatory social status, a badge of the elite worn by the elite and by which the elite recognise themselves.

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