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Introduction

George Donaldson and Corinne Mandel

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Introduction*

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> He that would truly promote Art must insist as much on the confutation of false opinions delivered by others, as in the declaration of truth.
>
> Cardanus

> Today we should make poems including iron and steel
> And the poet should also know how to lead an attack.
>
> Ho Chi-Minh

> The sentence was seven years' hard labour, to be followed by five in exile. I was not frightened. I was even flattered to get such a long term, which was the first official acknowledgement of my work in the country.
>
> Irina Ratushinskaya

> There is a halfway house between the Ministry of Propaganda and the Ivory Tower and this is the safest address for a poet.
>
> Clive Sansom

In a hostile critique of the campus novels by both David Lodge and Malcolm Bradbury, Terry Eagleton challenges the ways in which these academic novelists represent intellectuals:

> intellectuals are seen as faintly sinister figures, bohemian and nonconformist, treasonable clerks whose heartless celebrations pose a threat to the unreflective pieties of ordinary life. But they are also pathetically ineffectual characters — crumpled figures of fun pursuing their ludicrous abstractions at a remote distance from the bustle of daily life. The anxiety and resentment they inspire can thus be conveniently diffused by a sense of their farcical irrelevance.[1]

Eagleton is less interested in the aesthetics of such novels as *Changing Places*, *Small World*, *The History Man*, or *Rates of Exchange*, than in the ways in which they reflect, reinforce and promote some cultural assumptions about the nature and social role of writers, artists and intellectuals. It is not so much that Philip Swallow or Howard Kirk happen to be politically impotent as that these novels "heavily underwrite . . . the old English empiricist prejudice that ideas are one thing and life another."[2]

Throughout much of history, most artists would surely be mystified by the idea that art occupies a domain which, properly, is separate from that of politics. It is not just that many painters, sculptors, poets and musicians depended on patronage, but that artists, in representing the world, have always also been in a position to change it or, equally, to prevent it from changing. As politics forms the conditions of production for art, so politics may equally be seen in the perception of art. As Robert Hewison argues,

> we like to think of our great cultural institutions as somehow neutral, mere facilities for the presentation of individual acts of creation, yet they profoundly affect our perception of what is judged to be history or art. As institutions they help to form the culture which they are assumed merely to reflect. A display in a museum may simply be telling a story, but the existence of a museum has a story to tell.[3]

Perhaps Matthew Arnold, more than anyone else, is responsible for the modern, liberal divorce of the artist from the hurly-burly of political rhetoric. In *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*, Arnold paradoxically insists that the artist must both know life and be apart from it. On one hand, "every one can see that a poet, for instance, ought to know life and the world before dealing with them in poetry."[4] However, "the mania for giving an immediate political and practical application to all these fine ideas of the reason was fatal [in the French revolution]."[5] In Arnold's view, the great error of the French revolution was that artists and intellectuals sought to enact their ideas prematurely in the political domain. The proper role for artists and intellectuals is to show "*disinterestedness*" by which he means

> keeping aloof from practice; by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches; by steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them.[6]

Though the function of art is to produce a criticism of life,

> its business is to do this with inflexible honesty, with due ability; but its business is to do no more, and to leave alone all questions of practical consequences and applications, questions which will never fail to have due prominence.[7]

The intellectual has become a secular *vates*. He views this world rather than the next one, but his contemplative, separated, disinterested relation to it is not dissimilar to that of the intellectual monk who contemplates the nature of the eternal. Indeed, both figures are to be found within simi-

lar, cloistered architecture, divided from the world by high walls and locked gates. Certainly, the intellectual should no more seek to influence the world he contemplates than the Jesuit should seek to influence heaven. The characters to whom Eagleton objects in the Lodge and Bradbury novels, perhaps have one of their origins here in the bifurcation Arnold makes between "the world of ideas . . . and . . . the world of practice."[8]

Artists and intellectuals have not always been conceived in terms either so politically harmless or so etherial. The earliest documents in the Western tradition which address the nature and role of the artist and of art, at once assume that art does have social and political consequences and that it therefore needs to be regulated, characterized and evaluated according to these results. These assumptions initially derive from varying views about art's subject matter and ontological condition.

Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus all agree that art is mimetic. They differ, however, in their accounts of what it is that art imitates. For Plato, the artist is but the imitator of imitations, a figure thrice removed from reality who imperfectly copies something from the sensible world which, itself, is but an imperfect copy of the Form. Plato makes no ontological distinction between art as a subject and the subject matter of art, so that he pejoratively compares Homer's knowledge of battle to that of a general, or the painter's knowledge of a bed to that of a bed maker, in the sense of a craftsman. From such a view of artistic mimesis, it follows that art, by its nature, expresses what Socrates calls an inferior degree of truth. From the point of view of the relation between art and propaganda, what is interesting here is that Plato considers this inferior truth in affective terms, just as he considers poetry's tendency to encourage what is called the lachrymose in terms of its effect on the army. Plato argues that because art is deleterious, the artist should be excluded from the ideal republic. This conclusion depends on his assumption that art does imitate the world but that the nature of its imitation is untrue, so that its effect will be misleading and so dangerous. Unlike Arnold, Plato sees no difference between the world of ideas and the world of practice and so evaluates art in terms of its social and political consequences.

Though Aristotle conceives artistic imitation in active, creative terms, not in the same passive sense of copying as Plato employs, he is similarly concerned with art as part of social and political reality. It is not simply that tragedy produces catharsis that interests Aristotle, but that catharsis through art is socially desirable rather as purgation is medically desirable. And because Aristotle views artistic mimesis in terms of the way the artist selects, sifts and orders raw reality, he praises art over history: while history shows merely what happens, the artist is more universal and so more philosophical in that he shows what might happen. To do this, the artist needs to understand why things happen and so must know human nature.

Though Plato and Aristotle reach different conclusions, they do so within similar frames of reference. In particular, Plato and Aristotle take for granted that the relation between a work of art and its audience is a central consideration of artistic theory. And within this broad affective analysis, both men believe that art should instruct. Plato believes that art instructs badly and dangerously by giving a false picture of what is true; Aristotle, by contrast, believes that art's truth is more profound than mere facts. What is implicit in the work of both philosophers, however, is that there is a relation between one's conception of mimesis and the character one gives to the social and political worth of art. Though neither Plato nor Aristotle could have used the term propaganda, their definitions of the truth of any representation fundamentally depend upon their differing theories of mimesis.

Like Plato and Aristotle, Horace describes art in mimetic terms through the familiar phrase, *ut pictura poesis*, a poem is like a picture. Again, like Plato and Aristotle, he also emphasizes art's didactic aim and obligation: *aut prodesse aut delectare*, to teach or to delight. But what is the relative importance of these goals? Is it more important to be faithful to one's subject or to teach desirable morals? And if the two conflict, which should be sacrificed? This is the question which divided rhetoricians.

Rhetoric as a separate art with codified and classified rules and practices, originates among the Greeks in Sicily in the fifth century B.C., though of course a sense of the persuasive power of eloquence is far older. According to Cicero in *Brutus*, Corax and Tisias are the fathers of rhetoric. They were employed by Sicilian landowners who were in dispute with recently expelled tyrants. In preparing the landowners' case, Corax produced what is now seen as the first systematic account of the art of persuasion. Tisias is thought to have taught the art to Gorgias who, in turn, introduced it to classical Greece. Gorgias clearly separates an orator's knowledge of, and skill in, the art of persuasion from the goal(s) towards which these talents are directed. For Gorgias, a rhetorician need not be concerned with the truth, or otherwise, of the case he advances: what matters to the rhetorician is the art of persuasion itself. At best, this may seem irresponsible. At worst, it may appear immoral. The view which both Jonathan Swift and Charles Dickens take of lawyers as hired liars perhaps descends from Gorgias' separation of art from art's aims. Yet, does one think less of Handel's *Water Music* because it is

probable that it was composed less out of sincere admiration for George I than as an expedient peace offering from a composer whose chronic absenteeism from his employer's court when George was Elector of Hanover led to strained relations? Is the effect of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* lessened owing to the artist's leanings towards agnosticism? Is Michelangelo's work for the Medici inferior to his work for the Florentine Republic, given his political leanings? In like manner, is Rubens' achievement in the Whitehall Palace ceiling diminished by the discrepancies between the painter's own religious beliefs and those his Protestant patrons held?

In Greece, it is Isocrates who first challenges the original conception of the rhetorician as simply πειθουζ δημιουπγοψ, an artificer or producer of persuasion, with what he calls η των λυγωυ παιδεια, the art of speech. By this, Isocrates means an art which includes reason as well as simple rhetoric, and reason directed in particular towards moral conduct. The aim in studying the art of speech, therefore, is to learn how to instruct listeners about forming correct judgements. To do that, one must be a figure of high morality oneself, so that Isocrates' art is one which countenances no division between the skills used to persuade and the aim of persuasion. Indeed, in *Antidosis,* Isocrates contends that by learning to speak well, a man will also learn to be good.

These issues lie at the heart of the historical relation between art and propaganda. First, there is the question of definitions. By 'art,' does one mean simply the technical skill and knowledge of the artist, musician or writer, rather as Corax and Tisias do? Or, does 'art' include the substance and aim as well as the means, as Isocrates contends? The first definition obviously precludes the possibility that art could ever be propaganda; following the second definition, the distinction between propaganda and truth may lie in the theory of mimesis. Plato and Aristotle, who both include form and substance within their definitions, discuss the nature of art itself rather than the truthfulness of specific works. For Plato, all art by virtue of being art, tells lies. For Aristotle, art can tell the truth, though presumably there must be instances when particular works of art fail to express such truths.

But questions remain, not simply about what is true, but about what sorts of truths art ought to express. Let us suggest just two aspects of this question. The first can be illustrated with the example of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a writer with the stature of a prophet. On one clear level, the sort of truth Solzhenitsyn ought to tell is unproblematic, for his setting is the concealed reality of events in Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union. But from the time of Isocrates, truthfulness in subject matter includes one's purpose or aim, for that too has always been seen as part of the truth of a work of art. This must be so for, as the pre-Socratic philosophers note, there is a difference between events themselves and the relation of events in art: events themselves lack purposive narration whereas art, in whatever form, is always made through decisions to include and to exclude, to place at the centre or to place at the side, and these decisions cannot but be made with an end in mind. And so, when one comes to work such as Solzhenitsyn's, it is not enough to ask whether there actually were Gulags of the sort he describes as a way of saying whether his novels are true or, as many communists at the time said, are propaganda. As Aristotle might say, these mimetic works do not copy Stalin's Soviet Union on to the page, but rather they represent it with the purpose of expressing truths more universal than those contained in the historical facts of the labour camps. One such truth might concern the nature and value of freedom, and one might say that Solzhenitsyn is in a position from which he is particularly able to address such a topic. In many ways, of course, he is. But does it follow, therefore, that he gives us the truth? Here is just one example of how difficult it is to answer that question:

> Solzhenitsyn declared himself unable to comprehend how the West can possess freedom and not value it. This was a telling rhetorical point but as a tenet in his position — which it is, recurring throughout his work — it has some awkward logical consequences. For example, if freedom is valued most when it is nearest to being extirpated, and least when it is most prevalent, then perhaps freedom needs to be threatened in order to be conscious of itself. It's a high price to pay for consciousness. There is no possibility of over-valuing freedom, but there is the possibility of valuing it wrongly, and I think that to a certain extent Solzhenitsyn does so. He is on sure ground when he warns against tyranny but weak ground when he laments that liberty has not made us morally aware. Liberty can't do that: political freedom means nothing unless it is extended to those who are incapable of valuing it. Warning the West against the East, Solzhenitsyn can hope to be of some effect. Warning the West against itself, he is surely addressing himself to the wrong object. The West lacks a common moral purpose *because* it is free, so there is no point in his attacking our lack of moral purpose unless he attacks freedom too.[9]

The second and last example also concerns the difficult relationship between facts and truth. In 1978, The Royal Shakespeare Company staged a production of Peter Flannery's *Savage Amusement.* The play is set in the near future and deals with the political reasons for the conditions of the poor, unemployed and homeless in England. The specific setting is Manchester. In his review of the per-

formance, Bernard Levin takes issue with the details of Flannery's political analysis, but more importantly with the sort of truth which the play purports to tell:

> what is it that gives, has always given, human beings their ability to undergo the most frightful privations, sufferings, persecutions and even tortures, and remain, deep in their hearts where the world, the flesh and the devil cannot penetrate, serene? . . . It is, first and last, that though the capitalists may be infinitely wicked, and so for that matter may the communists . . . the part of life they can affect by their wickedness is, however horribly they affect it, the unimportant nine-tenths, while the vital —literally vital — tenth is as far beyond the danger of being corrupted by the things of this world as the problems of the nine-tenths are beyond solution by the methods of the same world. In other words, what is wrong with this play and scores like it is that though all the facts may be correct, and all the charges valid, yet in terms of the qualities that make a work of art the plays suffer from the one defect that fatally vitiates art: *they are not true.* Most of the playwrights in question, and certainly this one, show no sign of even suspecting the existence of that tenth of life that alone gives life and art their truth and their meaning.[10]

Does this mean that *Savage Amusement*, though perhaps factually accurate is, nonetheless, propaganda? Is the same to be said of Solzhenitsyn's novels? Unlike Handel and Leonardo, Michelangelo and Rubens, neither Flannery nor Solzhenitsyn's sincerity is in question. Perhaps one is to conclude, rather uncomfortably, that truth is not something of which an artist has knowledge combined with the ability to express that knowledge, but is instead something which, in a Foucauldian sense, the artist either has, or has not, the power to create.

The essays in this special issue of *RACAR* address the ways in which rhetoric has been pressed into the service of propaganda. They span the sixteenth through the twentieth centuries, and concern painting, sculpture, architecture, theatre, and the written word. Implicitly and explicitly, they recognize that any work of art with propagandistic import of necessity conveys the attitudes of a particular patron, whether aristocratic, middle-class, or institutional, or of a particular societal, or national leaning.

Cordula Grewe explores the ways in which epideictic rhetoric was used to characterize images of female spinners in the sixteenth century in northern Europe. In an effort to keep women in their places in the home, Grewe argues, male artists devised images that praised the good and honourable house-wife, distaff in hand. In order to inveigh against women's equally vital role as labourer, male artists resuscitated the traditionally negative associations between spinners and whores. As the numbers of spinners working in cities increased, so, it would seem, artists' depictions of them became progressively more laden with invective.

Keeping a woman in her rightful place also figures in Gabrielle Langdon's study of Pontormo's Baltimore portrait of circa 1540 of *Maria Salviati and Giulia de'Medici*. By considering the rhetoric of portraiture, particularly *decorum*, or the appropriateness of an image to the sitter, Langdon proves that the depiction of Duke Alessandro de'Medici's illegitimate daughter Giulia has been erroneously identified by most commentators as a youthful Cosimo de'Medici with his mother. Further, she shows that Pontormo's seemingly straightforward portrait of Duke Cosimo's mother with his cousin Giulia was a demonstration of Medicean lineage, and, more importantly for the as yet childless Cosimo, of his allegiance to the offspring of the first Duke of Florence.

Issues of *decorum* likewise inform Barbara Arciszewska's essay on the revival of Palladian architecture in Hanover at the end of the Baroque era. Through a consideration of the building styles and types available to George Louis, Elector of Hanover, and future King George I of England, and of his family's Venetian ancestry, Arciszewska demonstrates that the Palladian villa was chosen to encapsulate the rising stature of the Protestant Hanoverian dynasty. Far from a specifically British style, reintroduced into England following George I's accession to the throne in 1714, she argues that the neo-Palladian movement had German origins, and a rhetoric intimately related to the increasingly venerable House of Hanover.

The ways in which different audiences may read an image are central to the study on Joseph Wilton's 1765 marble bust of *George III* by Joan Coutu. Commissioned by a wealthy British businessman, Jonas Hanway, the marble bust of the King of England was shipped to Montréal, and installed in the square before the Catholic Church of Notre Dame in the *Place d'Armes*, complete with an inscription written in English. Coutu explores the ways in which Protestant sovereignty over the Catholic majority collided, quite literally head on, when the bust was put in place. In so doing, she charts the vicissitudes of this sculpture, from the idealistic commission of a fervent Protestant with a blind spot to French Catholic reality, to its ignominious end at the bottom of a well at the hands of Americans.

Jennifer McKendry considers the architectural idiom of George Browne, Government Architect of Kingston, the capital of Canada East and Canada West, between 1841 and 1844. In examining three Kingston villas executed in the Tuscan style, Hawthorne Cottage, Roselawn, and

Bellevue House, McKendry recognizes the style of Browne, heretofore misunderstood in the literature. Further, she considers the appropriateness of Browne's Tuscan style to middle-class Canadians. Much as the Americans were reviving the British picturesque movement at this very moment in time in order to create a national style, so Browne imported British and American notions, and transformed them into a particularly Canadian idiom. Much as the Hanoverians had chosen the Palladian style to aggrandize their station, so Browne recognized the appropriateness of the Tuscan villa for his middle-class clientele.

The response of French and American audiences informs Maureen Ryan's essay on Jules Breton's 1884 *Chant de l'alouette*. Consideration of the French reviews of the work, penned following its showing at the 1885 Salon, and of Breton's own writing following the execution of the painting, enables Ryan to postulate that the image celebrated the mythical peasant as opposed to the modern one. Whereas subsequent American audiences could read the work as a celebration of "everyman" labouring in a democratic, "classless" society, Breton's French commentators recognized a subversive element that countered Third Republican desires to entrench the peasant in a modern society, hence expunging the lingering ties to a specifically Catholic, Gaulish, and anti-democratic past.

Angelika Pagel also treats the *topos* of the city versus the country in her article on the *Jugendstil* movement. In examining the theoretical underpinnings of *Jugendstil*, Pagel demonstrates that it rested on a surprisingly racist, and specifically anti-Semitic foundation. She shows that, through a rhetorical tour-de-force in the tradition of Gorgias, contemporaneous exponents of the German national cause, like their Romantic forebears, profoundly influenced *Jugendstil* artists, and set the stage for the art and ideology of the Third Reich. Focusing on the work of the artist Hugo Höppener, called Fidus, Pagel explores the ways in which artists raised honest, primeval peasants to the status of demi-gods in direct opposition to the modern Jewish city dweller.

The rights of the working class also infiltrated the theatre arts, as Virginia Hagelstein Marquardt demonstrates in her study of American performances staged in the 1920s and 1930s. Garnering evidence from contemporaneous journals, and revolutionary theatrical performances, Hagelstein Marquardt explicates the ways in which playwrights, and especially proletariat actors, sought to inculcate communism in a capitalist bastion. She puts into relief ongoing discussions that pitted issues of aesthetics and dramatic technique - concerns of bourgeois theatrical productions - against agitprop strategies. Ultimately, the formal vocabulary would remain, but the revolutionary content would be assuaged by the government, and subsumed into the bourgeois norm.

Governmental control of the arts is the subject of the study by Alexandra de Luise on the Italian art historical journal *Le Arti*. Founded in 1938, during the hey day of fascism, this magazine was dedicated to the history of art and archaeology, music and the theatre. De Luise points out that in the hands of Giuseppe Bottai, the Italian Minister of National Education, *Le Arti* was also a vehicle for inculcating fascist ideology, and for controlling contemporaneous artistic output. Bottai placed articles on the importance of creating a pure, Italian art side by side with art historical studies written by such leading figures as Cesare Brandi, Pietro Toesca, and Giulio Carlo Argan. Not unlike Nazi rhetoric, *Le Arti* promulgated an Italian nationalism that eschewed "modern," international tendencies.

In his essay on the correspondence between the youthful Jack Chambers, and the Montréal lawyer and philanthropist Charles Greenshields, Tom Smart elucidates another instance in which "modernism" was viewed as a pernicious, empty rhetoric. As the recipient of one of the first scholarships provided by the Elizabeth T. Greenshields Memorial Foundation for 1955-56, and a subsequent stipend offered by Greenshields himself in 1956, Chambers had to pledge allegiance to mastering technique, and to avoiding abstraction at all costs. Smart traces the way in which, ultimately, Chambers' foray into the theory of art in the early 1960s left him unable to abide by Greenshields' dictates. Technique had to cede to the creative process; Plato, it would seem, was again superseded by Aristotle.

* I gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Faculty of Arts, The University of Western Ontario, during my tenure as Managing Editor (1992–94), and as Acting Editor (1993–94) of *RACAR*. C.M.

1 Terry Eagleton, "The Silences of David Lodge," *New Left Review* 172 (November/ December 1988), 93.

2 Eagleton, "Silences," 102.

3 Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*. (London, 1987), 9.

4 Matthew Arnold, *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*, in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R.H. Super, XI vols. (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1960-1977), III, 261.

5 Arnold, *Function of Criticism*, 265.

6 Arnold, *Function of Criticism*, 270.

7 Arnold, *Function of Criticism*, 270.

8 Arnold, *Function of Criticism*, 265.

9 Clive James, *Visions Before Midnight: Television Criticism from the Observer 1972-76* (London, 1977), 157.

10 Bernard Levin, Speak*ing Up* (London, 1982), 39-40.