RESEARCH

PAPERS

Rethinking the Social Impact of the Arts: a critical-historical review

Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett

2006

Centre for **Cultural Policy Studies**

Abstract

This extended paper focuses on contemporary debates around the social impacts of the arts and the problem of their measurement and evaluation. It attempts to put forward a new framework for the understanding of the so-called 'transformative powers' of the arts, by suggesting that a historical-critical approach is needed to tackle this research topic. The paper therefore presents a detailed critical analysis of the numerous claims that have been made in the West over time, from Classical Greece (V century BC) to the present day, for the ways in which the arts can affect individuals and transform society. It offers a taxonomy of these suggested impacts, both positive and negative, with a view to establishing an appropriate conceptual basis for the discussion and investigation of what the social impact of the arts might mean. At the same time, the paper attempts to reconnect contemporary policy debates with a complex intellectual history, from which these debates have become detached. It is suggested that the impacts of the arts cannot be properly understood, measured or evaluated without reference to this history.

Acknowledgements

Table of contents

Introduction

It is today generally accepted that the British debate around public support and funding of the arts and culture is caught in a bit of an *impasse*. On the one hand, the government has made its commitment to evidence-based policy making quite clear. Decision-making and the introduction of new measures in public policy are expected to be based on clear and solid evidence of their effectiveness in achieving a range of predefined targets. All public sectors must contribute to the achievement of New Labour's overall objectives as part of the implementation of 'third way politics'. In so far as it represents a sub-sector of public policy-making, the public cultural sector has partaken of such developments and has had to share with other realms of the welfare state pressures to convincingly demonstrate its 'usefulness' to the greater cause. More specifically, the arts sector has been expected to contribute to governmental strategies for local economic development, place marketing, and – more recently – social inclusion. In 1999, the Policy Action Team 10 (PAT 10) report argued that participation in the arts and sport can and should effectively contribute to neighbourhood renewal by improving communities' performance in the four key areas of health, crime, employment and education (DCMS 1999).

Importantly, in the context of reduced spending on culture by central government,[2] it is precisely on the basis of such a contribution that public expenditure on the arts has

---

[1] For an extensive historical discussion of the principal cultural policy rationales in the British context, see Bennett 1995 and Minihan 1977.

[2] Throughout the 1990s and into the first years of the new millennium, funding for the arts in the UK grew in real terms. However, following the 2004 Spending Review, the Arts Council England received a standstill settlement as a result of which, the Council's grant-in-aid remained at £412m between 2005/06 and 2007/08. This equated, in real terms, to a cut in funding, which, by necessity, impacted on many of the organisations that the Council supported. In a press release entitled *'Hard choices in a tough climate' - Arts Council announces three year funding strategy* (17 march 2005), the Council announced that it had "chosen to fund fewer organisations better, as a result, by March 2008, a total of 121 organisations will have ceased to receive regular funding. Fifty four organisations will receive annual increases of below 2.75 per cent or no increase at all".

[3] Throughout the 1990s and into the first years of the new millennium, funding for the arts in the UK grew in real terms. However, following the 2004 Spending Review, the Arts Council England received a standstill settlement as a result of which, the Council's grant-in-aid remained at £412m between 2005/06 and 2007/08. This equated, in real terms, to a cut in funding, which, by necessity, impacted on many of the organisations that the Council supported. In a press release entitled *'Hard choices in a tough climate' - Arts Council announces three year funding strategy* (17 march 2005), the Council announced that it had "chosen to fund fewer organisations better, as a result, by March 2008, a total of 121 organisations will have ceased to receive regular funding. Fifty four organisations will receive annual increases of below 2.75 per cent or no increase at all".

increasingly come to be justified. Such developments have resulted in widespread concerns within the arts constituency, and a growing criticism of the explicitly instrumental nature of contemporary cultural policy. For instance, according to David Edgar's (2004) reconstruction of events, in his 1998 book, entitled *Creative Britain*, Chris Smith, the first Secretary of State for the cultural sector in the New Labour era, "celebrated the power of art in cementing community identity, drawing people together and overcoming isolation and rejection". Edgar also points out that this very same argument was echoed and even emphasized by the then new Arts Council Chair, Gerry Robinson, in a speech delivered in 1998, in which "he celebrated the role of the arts in urban rejuvenation, reskilling, strategies for disablement and even healthcare".

On the other hand, what about the so-called 'intrinsic value' of the arts? Many commentators have argued that the developments briefly overviewed above have turned the arts into a mere tool for the achievement of governmental targets. An indictment of the present state of affairs by the ex-academic and now cultural commentator Robert Hewison (in Kettle 2002) illustrates this very well: "They're a pretty philistine lot […]. They see the arts instrumentally, as a means to help achieve social and urban regeneration. They are only interested in the arts in so far as they can see them achieving the New Labour vision". Criticism of this development in British cultural policy has fuelled acrimonious articles in the media[4] as well as academic questioning of the foundations of New Labour's rhetoric and cultural policy (Belfiore 2002; Selwood 2002, Mirza 2006).

The indignation aroused by this alleged 'instrumentalization' has motivated a number of cultural commentators and professionals to call for a 'restoration'[5] of the so-called

---

[4] This passage from an article published by James Fenton on the *Guardian* in the summer of 2004 is indicative of the tone of the media polemic; commenting on New Labour's rhetoric around arts funding, he writes: "It descends from Stalinism, from the old questions of the form: "What has your string quartet done, comrade, to further the cause of revolution?" One might have expected such perverse rhetoric to die with Stalinism. Instead it morphed into a social-democratic "instrumentalism" – the arts were to be judged as instruments of social change. The oboe concerto was expected to help young mothers escape the poverty trap".

[5] The inverted commas are justified by the fact that 'art for art's sake', or the 'intrinsic value' of the arts were, in fact, never the guiding principle for cultural policy-making in Britain nor anywhere else. Indeed, the very notion of a public policy for the cultural sector necessarily implies a view according to which the state supports the arts on the grounds of its perceived 'usefulness' to achieve a welcome outcome (though such expected outcomes are bound to change with the times) (Gray 2006).

'art for art's sake principle' as the guiding rationale for cultural policy. In John Tusa's (2002) words:

> The language of government policy towards the arts does not recognise their special nature, but treats them as if they were no different from any other economic sector. It is no accident that museums, galleries and theatres are rolled up by government ministers into the one economic/industrial category – the 'creative industries'.[…] The arts are probably instruments for social improvement, agents for social change, for social equality, or for community harmony. Yet each of these demands singly, and all of them collectively, set a list of challenges which are not intrinsic to the arts, are distant from their true nature, and all of which could be antithetical to their basic functions and purposes.

Significantly, government itself has recently come to acknowledge the tension between 'instrumental' and 'intrinsic' values that dominates the public debate over arts funding in Britain. So, in 2003, Estelle Morris, then Minister for the Arts, speaking at the Cheltenham Festival of Literature, confessed:

> I know that Arts and Culture make a contribution to health, to education, to crime reduction, to strong communities, to the economy and to the nation's well-being but I don't always know how to evaluate it or describe it. We have to find a language and a way of describing its worth. It's the only way we'll secure the greater support we need.

A year later, Tessa Jowell, caused a general stir when she published a personal essay entitled *Government and the Value of Culture*, where she made what many felt to be a startling declaration:

> Too often politicians have been forced to debate culture in terms only of its instrumental benefits to other agendas – education, the reduction of crime, improvements in wellbeing – explaining – or in some instances almost apologising for – our investment in culture only in terms of something else. In political and public discourse in this country we have avoided the more difficult approach of investigating, questioning and celebrating what culture actually does in and of itself. There is another story to tell on culture and it's up to politicians in my position to give a lead in changing the atmosphere, and changing the terms of debate (Jowell 2004, 8).

The paper was hailed in the media as a sign of support for 'art for art's sake' (Fenton 2004). As the un-named author of an article in the *Guardian* entitled "For art's sake" declared, commenting on Jowell's essay, "[i]n the 40 years since Jennie Lee was appointed by Harold Wilson, in his brief innovative phase, to become the first arts minister, the belief that a socialist government should promote the intellectual as well

as the material well-being of its citizens by supporting the arts for their own sake has rarely been so clearly made". None other than David Edgar (2004) commented that "set against the cultural politics of the past 20 years, Jowell's piece represents a pretty major sea-change. Certainly it is a departure from the perceived instrumentalism of recent government thinking".

And yet, we would argue, Jowell's paper, though significant in many respects that will be discussed later, is far from being a coherent call for the adoption of the so-called 'art for art's sake' principle as the guiding rationale for British cultural policy. As a matter of fact, Jowell's essay, with its inconsistencies and contradictions, is a typical representation of the stumbling block the arts policy debate is presently facing. For, together with the emphasis on the need for 'improved access to culture *for what it does in itself*' (page 8; emphasis in the original) and for an understanding of culture 'on its own terms' (page 13), a number of residual instrumentalist concepts still find their way into Jowell's argument[6], and her language is still very much inscribed into the post-1980s rhetoric of the public 'investment' in the arts (as opposed to the old-fashioned and now supplanted notion of 'subsidy'): "By accepting culture is an important investment in personal social capital we begin to justify that investment on culture's own terms" (*Ibid.*, 16).

In her essay, however, Tessa Jowell does indeed put forward an important observation. She fundamentally agrees with the view of Estelle Morris cited above when she says:

> We lack convincing language and political arguments for how culture lies at the heart of a healthy society. This might be a peculiarly British thing, and it might be part of a reaction on the one hand against the totalitarian regimes of the past who have tried to enrol culture as a tool of political oppression. On the other hand it might stem from a national distrust of intellectuals.

In other words, Jowell here raises the question of how to develop an articulation of the value of culture and the arts that is able to sidestep the sterile dichotomy between

---

[6] See Belfiore (2006a). See also David Edgar's (2004) comment that "Jowell edges uncomfortably close to a new social mission for the arts when she argues that culture has an additional part to play 'in defining and preserving our cultural identity – of the individual, of communities, and of the nation as a whole'".

'instrumental' and 'intrinsic' values that seem to prevail at the moment[7]. She moreover makes it clear (as Morris also did) that facing up to this challenge requires the construction of a new language that can articulate what the arts do 'for themselves' – in other words, how they affect people and societies and, thus, their place and role in today's society. However, it is interesting to observe that the notion of 'complex culture' - which Jowell herself puts forward as an antidote to more simplistic and instrumental views of the arts – though often referred to in the essay (nine times in eighteen pages, to be precise) is in fact never defined.

This paper represents a first step towards meeting the challenge that Jowell has laid down, by striving to articulate in some detail the notion of the 'transformative powers' of the arts. This is an area where the humanities can make a useful and distinctive contribution to what has clearly become an intellectually impoverished debate. We hope to show that it is not so much 'a new language' that is required, but a reconnection with what is in fact a very old language, a language that has been exploring the nuances of the social impact of the arts since antiquity.

---

[7] Indeed, towards the end of her essay, Jowell (*Ibid.*, 18) poses the often quoted question: "How, in going beyond targets, can we best capture the value of culture?".

Chapter 1: Towards a new approach to researching the social impacts of the arts

The notion that engagement in the arts can produce deeply transformative effects for the individual and society has both a honourable and dishonourable intellectual history. On the one hand, the very idea that the arts can produce changes in the consciousness of the collective is forever bound up with the experiments in social engineering pursued so relentlessly by the Nazi, Fascist and Communist states. On the other hand, there is an enlightened European tradition, stretching back through strands of Modernism, to Matthew Arnold, English Romanticism and the Weimar theories of culture propounded by Goethe and Schiller, that sees the arts as the source of an 'ethical vision' and a repository of human values in an increasingly mechanistic world (Bennett, 2001). This tradition, whose roots ultimately lie in classical thinking on the functions of the arts, is integrally connected with the education of feelings and the development of a particular idea of civilization. However, the values of this tradition have also been extensively critiqued from various postmodern perspectives as a historical relic, intimately associated with outdated forms of Eurocentric power, privilege and patronage. In its place has been posited a far more eclectic vision of the arts, embracing popular culture, sub-cultures and the myriad forms of cultural diversity. This, in turn, has been seen by some observers as indistinguishable from a slide into an uncritical cultural relativism (Hoggart, 1995; Scruton, 1998).

The present paper aims to investigate precisely such belief in the 'transformative powers of the arts' – whether positive or negative – that seem to be at the very heart of the Western and mainly European intellectual and philosophical tradition. The goal of the exercise is ultimately to produce a taxonomy of impacts and a classification of the various claims that have been made, over time, for how the arts affect people and society as a whole. A clearer understanding of the intellectual origins of contemporary claims for the arts would help to restore an element of depth to the present debate. The understanding thus gained would ultimately contribute to a more genuine grasp of what the arts' role in today's society is, and help towards the elaboration of their importance 'in their own terms', to quote Tessa Jowell again.

The time-span covered by our review corresponds to the duration of Western civilization itself. The range of claims will be explored by using – as evidence – texts from the literary, philosophical and political literature produced within the Western, but mainly European, intellectual field (the rationales for this delimitation of sources will be fully expounded in a later section of the paper) from the times of classical Greece (V-IVth century BC) to the present day. For obvious reasons, the list of thinkers consulted is not exhaustive, and aims at being representative rather than comprehensive. Furthermore, the intellectuals and writers included in the survey range from major figures such as Plato and Kant, to minor figures whose contribution might not have been particularly original, but whose writings, by re-working themes and ideas that had gained currency in their own times, provide evidence for the popularity and influence of certain ideas and for the extent to which they have become, over time, commonly accepted assumptions.

In so far as this paper attempts to trace historically the evolution of commonly held beliefs on the effects of the arts on individuals and society, it constitutes, in the first instance, a study of 'public intellectuals', and is inscribed within a research area that broadly corresponds to that of the 'history of ideas', or 'intellectual history'. According to Allan Megill (2004, 549-550) "intellectual history focuses on ideas that have some substantial degree of explicit, consciously thought-out and often conceptually inclined development and expression, rather than on beliefs and practices that appear as quasi-natural aspects of the 'form of life' of a particular group, or even of an individual". The latter Megill sees as the objects of fields of research that are distinct, if adjacent, to intellectual history: history of mentalities, history of everyday life and 'new' cultural history[8]. According to William J. Bowsma (1990, 340-1), intellectual history is best understood as an attempt to reconstruct 'the history of meanings', putting forward, thus, the idea of a discipline rooted "in the conception of man as an animal who must create or discern meaning in everything that he does".

---

[8] For a discussion of 'new' cultural history and what differentiates it from classical cultural history, see Burke 2004, chapter 3. In short, the difference between the two can be identified in the adoption, by new cultural historians, of a broader understanding of what culture is, based on an anthropological definition of culture.

In many respects, the present work follows in the footsteps of the analysis of the English intellectual tradition offered by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* (1990 [1958]). Here Williams drew an intellectual map of the development of some key concepts – industry, democracy, class, art and culture – through their usage in the literary works of a number of writers and thinkers (or, indeed, 'public intellectuals') in the period between the last decades of the XVIII century and the first half of the XX century. The significance of Williams' historical reconstruction of the meaning of these words lies in the importance of these concepts in 'our modern structure of meanings' and the fact that "[t]he changes in their use, at this critical period, bear witness to a general change in our characteristic ways of thinking about our common life; about our social, political and economic institutions; about the purposes which these institutions are designed to embody; and about the relations to these institutions and purposes of our activities in learning, education, and the arts" (*Ibid.*, xiii).

Although the intellectual inspiration for the present exercise derives in large part from the influence of Raymond Williams' legacy, there are nonetheless a number of significant differences that distinguish the research presented here from Williams' *Culture and Society.* Firstly, there is a profound difference in time-span and geographical focus. Whereas William's analysis concentrated itself around a clearly identified time bracket, as was mentioned earlier, the present review spans the duration of Western civilisation itself. The geographical scope of the survey is also broader: where Williams focused on the English literary tradition, the present study concerns itself (albeit, inevitably, not exhaustively) with the investigation of ideas and writings generated within Europe, with occasional references to other Western countries (mainly the US)[9].

The second difference is related to Williams' attention to the work of 'men of letters'. Williams indeed developed his notion of culture as a distinctive way of life from within the discipline of literary criticism, through an investigation of the desire, common among British men of letters - from Ruskin and Arnold to Eliot and Leavis - to study and understand works of art and literature in tight relation to the society

---

[9] In other words, Europe will be used throughout this essay to mean a broader entity than contained within its geographical boundaries, or, to borrow Wallerstein's (1997, 63) expression, "more as a cultural than as a cartographical expression", so as to encompass jointly Europe and North America.

within which they had been produced. In fact, according to Williams (1958 in McIllroy and Westwood, 1993, 58):

> …this extension of a critic's activities in the judgements of works of art to the study and thence the judgements of 'a whole way of life', has been a marked element of the English tradition. These critics, and others like them, have certainly always been concerned with the arts, and beyond them with 'the intellectual side of civilization', but from Ruskin's ideas of wealth to Eliot's ideas of class there has been this distinctive tradition of influential social thinking by men who took their experience of the arts as a starting point.

And this 'distinctive English tradition' is indeed the main object of analysis in *Culture and Society*. On the one hand, the present research too encompasses the work of authors of literary criticism, on the grounds that this, according to Posner (2003, 223-4), "has long been the medium for public-intellectual work", so that "commentary on literature or on particular works of literature is one way of commenting on political or ideological questions to a general audience"[10]. On the other hand, however, the survey presented here also includes other types of writings belonging to a much wider and diverse range of genres, from philosophy to political economy, from psychology to cultural theory. After all, an interdisciplinary approach to tracing the history of ideas is but the reflection of the varied interests of intellectuals themselves. Terry Eagleton (2003, 81) clearly explains this when discussing the notion of the 'classic intellectual' (whom he distinguishes from the 'cultural theorist', a label that has become prevalent, in his view, since the second half of the 20th century): "[i]ntellectuals were not simply narrow specialists. […] Intellectuals were concerned with the bearing of ideas on society and humanity as a whole. Because they were engaged with fundamental social, political and metaphysical questions, they had to be adept in more than one academic arena"[11].

---

[10] There are three reasons, according to Posner (2003, 223) why literary criticism has consistently proved to be a privileged medium of expression for public intellectuals, which he summarises thus: "First, the general educated public, which is the audience for that work [public-intellectual work], is also the audience for works of literature, and it takes some interest in what experts have to say about them. Second, many works of literature deal with political, social, or economic questions; there is a clue to this in the number of writers among the most prominent public intellectuals […]. Third, the cultural significance of literature – in education, in relation to other subjects, particularly of a scientific or social-scientific cast, and in relation to popular culture – is itself an ideological issue". See also Eagleton 2003, pp. 80-1.

[11] This view of the intellectual's ability to deal with a number of different academic areas is consistent with the adoption of a methodological framework based on the discipline of 'intellectual history'. As Megill (2004, 550) explains: "[e]specially in its closely related variant, 'the history of ideas',

It is indisputable, however, that this paper concerns itself with the analysis of a number of texts produced mainly within the humanities. The emphasis on the humanistic field is also consistent with a trend - whose origin Eagleton locates in the period beginning with the late XIX century - that sees the role of the intellectual as progressively being taken over by the humanities. Eagleton explains this shift on the grounds of the marginal role that the humanistic disciplines were forced to in a modern world increasingly dominated by the values of science and commerce. It was precisely this marginalised position that afforded the humanities the necessary distance and the critical stance necessary to investigate and question the contemporary social order: "[i]ronically, then, it was their growing superfluousness in a philistine society which lent the humanities a new kind of spiritual centrality" (*Ibid.* 83).

Finally – but most importantly - many developments have taken place, at the level of cultural theory, in the almost fifty years that have passed since the publication of Williams' masterpiece. Postmodern theory and its sensitivity to issues of discourse and the silencing of minority views in the traditional understanding and reconstruction of 'History', as well as the criticism of the very roots of the cultural authority of Western cultural institutions, have made a strong inroads into the academy, and raise a number of concerns that need to be addressed.

We therefore need to respond to potential objections that might be moved against the present exercise (some of which are indeed linked to the postmodern understanding of culture and history mentioned above). The issues that we feel require some further explorations can be summarised as follows:

- A problem of definitions: what are we to understand by the words 'arts' and 'culture'? They are hardly crystallized and fixed concepts, but rather, they have been constantly evolving and changing over the centuries. Equally, when we talk about the distinction between various arts forms - theatre, poetry, the novel, and music – we are in fact making distinctions that are the result of a

intellectual history has more often than not appeared as a hybrid genre crossing disciplinary boundaries". The need for an interdisciplinary approach is indeed a belief shared by scholars working in both the 'intellectual' and 'cultural' history sub-fields (Kelley 2002, 5).

process of cultural evolution and that are far from being valid for all historical times. How are we to account for such complexity? Do we incur the risk of juxtaposing modern concepts onto older (and possibly incompatible) world-views?

-   Having discussed problems of definitions, and established that the taxonomy of the impacts of the arts presented in the following sections of this paper is based on a review of a European intellectual tradition, the issue arises of how to avoid the pitfalls of a Eurocentric perspective.

-   Finally, the question arises of whether a focus on a study of intellectuals does of necessity exclude popular and commercial art forms from the present analysis. The following section will show how the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture is in fact a lot more complex than is sometimes acknowledged, and that awareness of the many interactions between 'learned' and 'popular' culture will be an important aspect of the present investigation.

These issues will be discussed in greater detail in the next sections of this chapter.

Defining the terms of the debate

As already mentioned above, the present study requires a definition of the terms under examination. In other words, what do we mean by 'arts' and 'culture'? How do we construct a solid argument about the effects of artistic artefacts of a very diverse nature by separating them into genres, (such as the novel, poetry, various musical genres) that are historically specific? Postmodern theory has shed light on the construed nature of artistic and cultural forms, especially those that the cultural establishment ratifies as 'art'. The efforts made within the sphere of aesthetics to provide a valid and coherent definition of art exemplify this very well. The question 'what is art?' has been puzzling theorists since the beginnings of philosophical enquiry, and early definitions of art assumed an 'essentialist' view, whereby the aim was to be able to capture, in a definition, the qualities and characteristics that

constitute art[12]. This, in turn, would make it possible to distinguish art from non-art, just by assessing whether the artefact in question does or does not possess the 'essential' qualities of art. Capturing the 'essential nature' of art, however, has proven to be a task of incredible difficulty, to the point that Morris Weizt, in the mid-1950s, adapting a concept derived from Wittgenstein's writing, suggested that it might be more useful to think of works of art as sharing a web of family resemblance, rather than a common essence that can be captured in a definition (Davies 2001, 169-171; see also Harrington 2004, 23).

Attempts to elaborate a satisfactory definition of art have coalesced, since the 1960s, around two opposite positions within aesthetic theory: functionalism and proceduralism, of which 'institutional' theories of art are the most important example[13]. It is not possible to present an exhaustive discussion of the difference between the two views here, and the following survey must necessarily be terse. However, it is important, we feel, to give a sense of the complexity at stake in this debate, for such a difficulty in arriving at a convincing definition of what art is (and, hence, what it does) obviously bears important repercussions on the discussion that will follow. In brief, functional definitions of art are based on the notion that art serves a purpose, so that an object is a work of art only if it achieves the objectives and purposes of art (which can be diverse and change over time). Functional definitions of art, then, try to identify the functional property possessed by all works of art. These functions might be, for example, the property of imitating nature or expressing emotions; however we define them, however, these properties are *intrinsic* to the work of art[14].

An important ingredient in 'institutional' definitions of art is the concept of the 'artworld', or the ensemble of institutions (museums, art galleries, academia, etc.) and people (art critics, art administrators, established artists, etc.) that make up the art establishment and that have the power to confer 'arthood' on an object (Danto 1964).

---

[12] For a more detailed discussion of the limitations of essentialist definitions of art see Dean 2003.

[13] For a more detailed discussion of the strength and weaknesses of both functionalist and institutional definitions of art, see Davies 2001.

[14] Young (1997, 58) defines an intrinsic property as "a property a thing possesses independently of any relation it bears to anything else".

Speaking about visual art, Mary Anne Staniszewski (1995, 28) has clearly shown the centrality of the artworld's influence on our understanding of visual art:

> Art as we know it, is a relatively recent phenomena and is something made to be seen in galleries, preserved in museums, purchased by collectors, and reproduced within the mass media. When an artist crates a work of Art it has no intrinsic use or value; but when this artwork circulates within the systems of Art (galleries, art histories, art publications, museums and so on) it acquires a depth of meaning, a breadth of importance, and an increase in value that is greater proportionately than perhaps anything else in the modern world.

Staniszewski is here directing our attention to the role that official cultural institutions have in shaping our understanding of what art and culture are, and in determining what is 'in' and what is 'out' in the canon of human expressions that a society accepts as valid artistic forms.

Harrington (2004, 34-5), however, contests the notion that conferral of 'arthood' and hence status by an institution is, in itself, a sufficient condition for things to be accepted as works of art. Young (1997, 57) similarly points out that, "the acceptance of something as an artwork by an artworld does not force everyone to accept the thing as a work of art". This questioning of the authority of artworld institutions resonates in the argument recently put forward by John Carey (2005) in his book *What Good Are the Arts?* Here Carey argues that the faith in the artworld is much attenuated in our present society, and this – together with the realization of the difficulties in penetrating other peoples' emotions and feelings - makes arguments in favour of the art's capabilities to have an emotional impact suspect:

> The question 'Is it a work of art? – asked in anger or indignation or mere puzzlement – can now receive only the answer 'Yes, if you think it is; no, if not'. If this seems to plunge us into the abyss of relativism, then I can only say that the abyss of relativism is where we have always been in reality – if it an abyss (p.30).

Another important objection to institutional theories of art, and the notion of the artworld has been raised by Davies (2001, 174), which flags up what he terms 'the Artworld relativity problem". The problem here resides in the fact that the concept of the artworld as expounded by Danto and others, is founded on the presupposition of a

continuous and homogeneous tradition that finds expression in a historically and culturally unified body of artworks, in relation to which any new creation needs to be evaluated. However, as Davies points out, there is more than one artworld, since all over the world a number of different traditions of making works of art can be found. He concludes that institutional definitions of art based on the notion of the artworld risk being too 'parochial', "by focusing narrowly on the Western context in which 'high art' is made while ignoring 'low' art and non-Western art" (*Ibid.*). We will come back to this problem in later sections of the paper. However, at this stage, it is important to underline that, not only is our understanding of what the arts are *time-specific* (that is, related to our present understanding of what the functions of art ought to be, and to the present configuration of the artworld), but also *place-specific* (the elaboration of the functions of art and culture in a society and the nature of its artworld change from one geographical area to another, and from one culture to another)[15].

The time-specificity of definitions and understanding of how art and individual art forms are to be conceived is a particularly delicate and relevant issue for a research project that deals with such a broad time-span as the one we have adopted in this study. For instance, in V century BC Athens, the differentiation that we have discussed earlier between essentialist, functionialist and institutional definitions of art would have made little sense. At that time, the very notion of the quest for a definition of art would have probably appeared altogether puzzling. For there is no word, in ancient Greek language, whose meaning corresponds to our 'art' or 'arts'. The closest approximation is represented by the word *techne* (and the Latin equivalent *ars*) which covered, however, a much broader array of meanings, ranging from poetry, painting and sculpture (that is, our notion of 'art') to shipbuilding, carpentry, shoemaking and other activities based on craftsmanship. This is because the distinction (both linguistic and conceptual) between the 'fine arts' and crafts,

---

[15] Harrington (2004, 25 ff.) highlights the role of anthropological studies of art in indigenous societies in contributing to show "the extent to which western metaphysical conceptions of art and beauty reflect specific intellectual developments of their time and milieux and do not necessarily possess transcultural validity". This type of study also contests the notion, first developed in XVII century Europe, that the aesthetic experience belongs to a sphere quite separate from that of everyday life. Anthropological studies, conversely, aim at looking at the types of activities that we consider artistic in relation to 'total cultural systems' – that is, in relation to a broad range of other social activities such as hunting, eating, rituals and festival, agriculture, etc.

which is at the very basis of our modern understanding of art, simply did not exist in antiquity (Murray 1997, 1). Consequently, our differentiations between art forms would also have meant very little to the contemporaries of Plato.

Nussbaum (1986, 123) makes an interesting point with regards to the distinction *we* make today between fictional texts that are read for entertainment or educational purposes and philosophical texts which aspire to a much higher degree of rigour, when she explains that "before Plato's time there was no 'philosophical' and 'literary' discussion of human practical problems. The whole idea of distinguishing between texts that seriously pursue a search for truth and another group of texts that exist primarily for entertainment would be foreign to this culture'[16]. This goes a long way in explaining why poets, at that time, were often cited as authorities on ethical matters. Greek poetry (in particular the Homeric poems and the tragic theatre) enjoyed a role within the democratic government of Athens on a par with that of the city's laws, to the extent that passages from Homer, Euripides and the other 'classic' authors of the Greek tradition could be used as evidence in court cases, and they are often cited as such in the surviving works of the great Greek orators (Dué 2003, 1).

Furthermore, Shiner (2001, 5) warns us of the ambiguities that surround the notion of art in post-classical times too, and which largely persist today. This ambiguity was borne out of the breakdown of the concept of *techne* discussed above. According to Shiner, this transformation occurred in the XVIII century, when "a fateful division occurred in the traditional concept of art":

> What has been effaced in ordinary usage is not only the fracturing of the older
> idea of art/craft into art *versus* craft, but a parallel division that separated the

---

[16] The distinction Naussbaum here refers to begins to take shape with Plato. Naddaff (2002, 6), defines the exile of the poets at Plato's hand as an exercise in the creation of an autonomous space for philosophical enquiry through "an attempt to break down the poets' exclusive control, their totalising cultural, social and literary power. Stated differently, the exile counteracts the poets' own exclusion and the silencing of all other voices. The censorship of poetry opens up rather than closes down the possibility of new forms of discourse". The form of discourse that Naddaff here refers to is obviously that of philosophy as an independent and autonomous field of intellectual enquiry. As Andrea Nightingale (1995, 11) further explains, "in order to create the specialised discipline of philosophy, Plato had to distinguish what he was doing from all other discursive practices that laid claims to wisdom. [...] It should be emphasised that gestures of opposition and exclusion play a crucial role in Plato's many attempts to mark the boundaries of "philosophy". Indeed, it is precisely by designating certain modes of discourse and spheres of activity as "anti-philosophical" that Plato was able to create a separate identity for "philosophy"".

artist from the craftsperson and aesthetic concerns from utility and ordinary pleasures.

Following this split, the fine arts came to be seen as the fruit of a special inspiration and of genius, and they became something to be enjoyed for themselves "in moments of refined pleasure", whereas crafts and popular arts are based on mere skills and formulas to be replicated indefinitely, and their aim is simple entertainment. Furthermore, Shiner (*Ibid.*) observes, "this historic change of meaning became difficult to remember after nineteenth-century usage dropped the adjective 'fine' and spoke only of art versus craft or art versus entertainment or art versus society", thus reinforcing the separation between the two elements of these dichotomies. By the end of the XVIII century, then, 'artist' and 'artisan' had become opposites. 'Artist' now meant the creator of works of fine art whereas 'artisan' or 'craftsman' now indicated the mere making of something useful or entertaining. Before this shift, the word 'artist' was routinely applied not exclusively to painters and poets, but to 'makers' in the broadest meaning of the term. Around this same period - according to Shiner - another crucial transformation took place that originated a second 'fateful division'. The pleasure that comes from contact with arts was now divided into two different categories: on the one hand a special, contemplative and refined pleasure was ascribed to the fine arts; on the other, the category of ordinary pleasures that was ascribed to the sphere of the either useful or entertaining. So, Shiner (*Ibid.*, 6) explains, "The refined or contemplative pleasures came to be called by the new name 'aesthetic'. The older and broader view of art as construction was compatible with enjoyment in the functional context: the new idea of art as creation called for a contemplative attitude and a separation from context".

The full extent of the significance of such a shift is captured by M. H. Abrams (quoted in Shiner 2001, 6), who refers to the range of transformations discussed above as a 'Copernican revolution' in the concept of art:

> In the course of a single century … the construction model … was replaced by the contemplation model, which treated the products of all fine arts as … objects of rapt attention.

By the early nineteenth century, through the work of the Romantics, another important division became accepted, this time in the realm of the functions of art, whereby the 'fine' arts (or, as we would say in today's language, the 'high' arts) were attributed a transcendental and spiritual purpose as a source of a higher truth and healing for the soul: "Heretofore, the idea of disinterested contemplation had been applied primarily to God; now art, for many of the cultured elite, was about to become a new arena of spiritual investment" (Shiner 2001, 6).

As this necessarily brief discussion of the changing boundaries of the notion of 'art' clearly shows, the question arises of whether we can legitimately over-impose our modern notion of what the arts and specific art forms are and 'do' when discussing older civilizations, or whether this necessarily entails an arbitrary and dangerous anachronism. This is indeed an issue that historians have been discussing for quite some time, especially as a result of the so-called 'postmodernist challenge' to the discipline of history and traditional historiography (Graf 2003)[17].

Jenkins (2004, 366), a leading exponent of a postmodern approach to the study of history, exemplifies the 'challenge' as such: "Some historians and some theorists [...] have and still do insist on studying *their* 'past' for themselves and on *their* terms rather than on the past's own terms" (emphasis in the original). This is, according to Jenkins (*Ibid.*), a highly suspicious practice, in that it masks what is, in fact, an ideologically charged exercise: "For when any kind of thinking establishes itself as the *doxa*, when it trips right across a social formation; when its naturalness and its knowledge claims are quite literally taken for granted, are hegemonic, then we can confidently say that we are in the presence of an insidious *political ideology*" (emphasis in the original) [18].

---

[17] For an extensive treatment of the responses to postmodern challenges to the methods and legitimacy of the historical disciplines, see Zagorin 1999.

[18] The postmodern challenge to History and traditional historiography is heavily indebted to the theories of Michel Foucault. In particular, in his *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*, Foucault (1980) presents an indictment of the values of the Enlightenment, which was charged with the introduction of new and unseeming modes of oppression. Foucault also shows how, in each and every society, power and knowledge intermingle, so as to give shape to 'regimes of truth' and dominant discourses that shape the boundaries of what it is possible to say or know. This is Zagorin's (1999, 9) interpretation of the influence of Foucaldian thought over the historical disciplines: "In historiography and other fields these postmodernist themes, often tinged with an admixture of Marxism, have been widely incorporated in radical versions of feminism, multiculturalism, and affirmation of ethnic or sexual identity. Among them are opposition to humanism and to the idea of

As a result of such postmodern questioning, the very possibility of reconstructing the past with any degree of reliability and scientificity has been doubted, to the extent that it has been suggested that history is, in fact, just a narrative, so that it effectively cannot aspire to any degree of truthfulness and objectivity. One of the sharpest aspects of the postmodern charge against the historical disciplines is that - by claiming that all historical work is, as a matter of fact, a process of construction - its scientific and knowledge-creating claims are necessarily undermined. The Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm has indeed expressed his fear that the destabilising effects of postmodernism might ultimately result in a threat to the critical role of the historian as 'myth slayer' (quoted in Johnson 2001, 281).

Another (and correlated) effect of the 'postmodern challenge' has been the increasing popularity of the designation of History (here with a capital H, to indicate the practice of historians as ratified by the academic establishment) as 'fiction'. In this view, historical narrative has been compared to fictional narrative, and the idea has been put forward of 'history as literature and literature as history' (Young 2002, 105). This claim is based on the assertion that the reconstruction of the past as carried out by historians through the collection of facts and data about the past does not, in fact, add up to history, but rather to a form of narrative in the form of a chronicle. This logically results in the denial of any real difference between historiography and literature, that is, between factual and fictional texts: neither can make any substantiated claim to truth and objectivity (Graf 2003, 389-90). As Jenkins (2003, 376) explains: "[w]hat is really excellent about historians' historical representations is that they always fail. There is no possibility that any historicization of 'the past' can ever be literally true, objective fair, non-figural, non-positioned and so on, all of which opens up that which has happened 'before now' to interminable readings and rereadings".

Conversely, Eric Hobsbawm (1997), who represents one of the most staunch critics of what he sees as an attempt at "fudging the border between historical fact and fiction" (*Ibid.*,7) observes that historians "have a responsibility to historical facts in general,

---

mankind and a common human nature as pernicious myths; the assurance that what passes for reason or truth is invariably the product of the ideological and political interests of hegemonic groups whose domination shapes discourse; and the pervasive suspicion of an insidious cultural imperialism, ethnocentrism, or sexism implicit in all statements of moral principles".

and for criticizing the political-ideological abuse of history in particular" (*Ibid.*). As a matter of fact, he further argues, "[t]he deconstruction of political or social myths dressed up as history has long been part of the historian's professional duties, independent of his or her sympathies" (*Ibid.*, 361). If historians are to fulfil their responsibility, however, the crucial difference between facts and fictions needs to be at heart of their work. As Hobsbawm further explains:

> … the rise of 'postomdernist' intellectual fashions in Western Universities, particularly in departments of literature and anthropology, … imply that all 'facts' claiming objective existence are simply intellectual constructions – in short , that there is no clear difference between fact and fiction. But there is, and for historians, even for the most militantly anti-positivist ones amongst us, the ability to distinguish between the two is absolutely fundamental. We cannot invent our facts. Either Elvis Presley is dead or he isn't. The question can be answered unambiguously on the basis of evidence, insofar as reliable evidence is available, which is sometimes the case (*Ibid.*, 7-8),

Hence the centrality of what Hobsbawm calls 'the supremacy of evidence' in his elaboration of the role and vocation of the historian, and the consequent rebuttal of the postmodern challenge to the possibility of a solid reconstruction of the past:

> Without entering the theoretical debate on these matters, it is essential for historians to defend the foundation of their discipline: the supremacy of evidence. If their texts are fictions, as in some sense they are, being literary compositions, the raw material of these fictions is verifiable fact. Whether the Nazi gas ovens existed or not can be established by evidence. Because it has been so established, those who deny their existence are not writing history, whatever their narrative techniques. If a novel were to be about the return of the living Napoleon from St Helena, it might be literature but could not be history. If history is an imaginative artf, it is one which does not invent but arranges *objects trouvés* (*Ibid.*, 358-9).

Despite the importance of Hobsbawm clarification of the centrality of evidence in the historian's work, there is also a positive side to the renunciation of claims to truth and objectivity that postmodern theory encourages. Jenkins (2003) highlights how the fact that the historian finds himself in the situation of dealing contemporaneously with what constitutes at the same time 'one past' and 'many histories' (and the necessary open-endedness of historiography that derives from this) is not just a logical necessity, but – in fact – "ethically, morally and politically desirable". Jenkins (*Ibid.*) argues that the impossibility, for the postmodern historian, to reach 'interpretive

closures' is, in fact, "to be celebrated because it is a positive democratic value when everybody can at least potentially author their own lives and create their own intellectual and moral genealogies, that there is no credible authoritative or authoritarian historicized past that one has to defer to over one's own personal history, or indeed even acknowledge".

What are the implications of these debates for the present study? To go back to the question posed earlier, is anachronism a tangible risk when engaging in a historical survey of ideas that covers two thousand and five hundred years of European history?

We would argue that the main contribution of postmodern critiques of traditional historiography is to remind us of the importance of what Paul Ricour refers to as 'historicity', that is, the awareness that living in time is a fundamental characteristic of human life. For Ricour, the term 'historicity' signifies "[t]he fundamental and radical fact that we make history, that we are immersed in history, that we are historical beings" (quoted in Johnson 2001, 268).

A possible solution to the 'postmodern challenge' to History might be to accept the broad attitude of epistemological pluralism that it promotes, and to follow Graf's (2003, 395) call for a 'plurality of descriptions'. He accepts that postmodern theory has made it impossible to deny the fact that many stories may be told about one set of events, and that this means that there cannot be only one true story. However, he also forcefully maintains that it does not follow from this that there can be no true description at all, but, rather, that there can be many[19].

Furthermore, it would appear that cultural history is a discipline best placed to deal with the complexity of our contemporary understanding of the past as made up of 'one past' and 'many histories'. This is why, according to Peter Burke (2004, 25-6):

> The idea of culture implies the idea of tradition, of certain kinds of knowledge and skills handed down from one generation to the next. Since multiple traditions can easily coexist in the same society – lay and clerical, male and female, that of the pen and that of the sword, and so on – to work with the idea of tradition liberates the cultural historians from the assumptions of the unity and homogeneity of an 'age'.

---

[19] For a differently argued, yet fundamentally similar position, see Zagorin 2000, 205-6.

With regards to the issue of the potential anachronism that might originate from juxtaposing modern categories and concepts with past civilizations, it is important to bear in mind these observations by the leading historian Perez Zagorin (2001, 381):

> […] in trying to understand and analyse the beliefs and ideas of past societies and culture, historians and philosophers must not only learn to comprehend the language and concepts by which these societies and cultures understood themselves and reflected upon the world, but also are often obliged to apply to them other and later concepts of which they were ignorant or only partially and inadequately possessed. […] Indeed, historians of whatever field would find their task impossible if they were barred from using concepts and terminology unknown to those whom they study. In such cases of conceptual translation from the present to the past, I believe that historians and philosophers need not worry about misleading readers by anachronism provided they take care to make the necessary semantic distinctions and to remain clear about what they are doing.

This is indeed the broad line taken in the present study. This approach, however, still leaves open the issue of how to best avoid the danger of Eurocentrism. The question of whether our focus on the European intellectual tradition to understand cultural policy in Britain (which is one of the more culturally diverse countries within Europe) might be susceptible of accusations of Eurocentrism needs to be dealt with.

On the pitfalls of 'Eurocentrism'

This is how, in an influential book by the same title, Samir Amin (1988, vii) defined Eurocentrism:

> Eurocentrism is a culturalist phenomenon in the sense that it assumes the existence of irreducibly distinct cultural invariants that shape the historical paths of different people. Eurocentrism is therefore anti-universalist, since it is not interested in seeking possible general laws of human evolution. But it does present itself as universalist, for it claims that imitation of the Western model by all peoples is the only solution to the challenges of our time. […] Eurocentrism is a specifically modern phenomenon, the roots of which go back only to the Renaissance, a phenomenon that did not flourish until the nineteenth century. In this sense, it constitutes one dimension of the culture and ideology of the modern capitalist world.

Amir also analyses Eurocentric constructions of culture, which he sees as a set of values (which, in fact, amount, in this perspective, to a coherent ideology) rooted in

25

the spirit of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, rationalist and secular in spirit, which, albeit presented as particularly European, also claim to be universally valid. The questionable aspect of Eurocentrism, thus, resides in the belief that the West has a special kind of historical advantage over other communities, or, as Blaut (1993, 1) explains, "some special quality of race or culture or environment or spirit, which gives this community a permanent superiority over all other communities, at all times in history and down to the present". It was during the Enlightenment and the Napoleonic years that a combinations of characteristics that were felt to be common to the whole of Europe gradually begun to crystallize into a sense shared by European elites of the distinctiveness of Europe and Europeans, and their superiority over all other regions and peoples of the world. Woolf (2003, 323-4) argues that this feeling of superiority became attached to the concept of 'civilization' as it developed in that very same period. He explains that:

> '[c]ivilisation', a noun that entered French and English usage in the 1760s, was synonymous with Europe, as was 'progress. The two words incorporated the different facets of the idea of Europe, any of which could be emphasised, according to place and circumstance, as the European powers carried their mission and duty to less fortunate parts of the world. The triad – Europe, civilisation, progress – are commonplaces in the rhetoric of nineteenth-century imperialism.

Indeed, later sections of this paper will discuss precisely how, around this time, the arts and culture (and their civilising powers) were appealed to in order to help justify the colonial and imperial enterprise.

This notion of the 'superiority of the West' is therefore a central tenet of a Eurocentric view and its rooted in an idealised version of ancient Greece and its values[20]. In this perspective, the achievements of democratic Athens purportedly demonstrate how Europe (here seen as an equivalent for the West) had successfully elaborated progressive, liberal and democratic values, as well as rational political and cultural institutions from a very early stage. These achievements, in turn, made possible the birth of 'the rational individual', whose inexorable ascent gave us the Renaissance and, subsequently, the Enlightenment, and prepared the way for

---

[20] Samir (1988, 90-91) calls this appropriation of an idealised notion of classical Greece 'the myth of Greek ancestry'.

capitalist modernity (Hobson 2004, 7-8). This interpretation of events also requires that the East should be declared as clearly inferior, shrouded in the darkness of despotism and irrationalism, as Said (1995) has shown in his influential book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient.* Again, Samir (1998, 89-90) exposes this West/East relation very clearly:

> The dominant culture invented an "eternal West", unique since the moment of its origin. This arbitrary and mythic construct had as its counterpart an equally artificial conception of the Other (the "Orients" or "the Orient"), likewise constructed on mythic foundations. The product of this Eurocentric vision is the well-known version of "Western" history – a progression from Ancient Greece to Rome to feudal Christian Europe to capitalist Europe – one of the most popular received ideas.

This idea of the 'eternal West' has been shown to be founded on seriously distorted interpretations of the characteristics of ancient Greek culture, the denial of the true extent to which it was influenced by the Near East, and an arbitrary connection between Christianity and this construct of Europe and of a European cultural unity (Amin 1988; Hobson 2004). Yet, the Eurocentric perspective has, this notwithstanding, proved very resilient. The American Paul Monaco, for instance, in his book *Modern European Culture and Consciousness, 1870-1970*, published in 1983 (p.3) declares:

> Today, more than ever before, ideas that originated (and which continue to originate and to be elaborated) in the heartland of industrialised Western Europe – France, the British Isles, Germany-Austria, and Italy – prevail everywhere in the world. All the notions that are fundamental to contemporary life may be traced to western European origins. These include democratization, secularization, progress through science and technology, the organizing of economic activity into industrial systems, inspired change through reform or revolution, individual liberty, social justice, national sovereignty, national citizenship, and human rights.

The relevance of a discussion of Eurocentrism to the present study and to cultural policy debates is obvious. Jordan and Weedon (1995, chapter 1 and 2) argued that cultural institutions and arts funding bodies in Britain - though the same can be said of most European countries - were originally structured (and they largely still are) according to a dominant *Liberal Humanist discourse of culture*, which, in turn, they helped to reproduce. This Liberal Humanist notion according to which culture is

associated with an ideal of perfection has been championed, in the English cultural tradition, by Matthew Arnold. Such a concept of culture as 'the best that has been thought and said in the world', has been the intellectual base for the humanist tradition that has been most influential in determining what was to be included within the boundaries of culture and, thus, in shaping postwar cultural polices all over Europe[21].

In his history of the Arts Council, Andrew Sinclair (1995, 76) openly establishes a link between the founding of the Arts Council, and the intention to promote artistic activities consistent with "Matthew Arnold's Aristotelian conception of culture". Indeed, according to John Storey (1993, 22) "Arnold established a cultural agenda which remained dominant in debate from the 1860s until the 1950s". Liberal Humanism, taking up some of Romanticism's assumptions and developing Schiller's notion of the civilising power of art, privileges 'The Individual' over social factors or social determinants. Art is thus the product of individual talent and represents the expression of the noblest aspects of human nature. A crucial tenet of the Liberal Humanist ideal is the belief that art can speak to every human being, whatever his/her social and educations background, if only given the chance[22].

It is important to observe, however, that the notion of Liberal Humanism is a deeply controversial one. As Tony Davies (1997, 2) points out, a number of different and often contradictory meanings can be attributed to the label 'humanism' on account of the complex and long history of the term and the ideas that have coalesced, over time, around it. He summarises the multifaceted nature of the concept of 'humanism' thus (*Ibid*, 5):

> On one side, humanism is saluted as the philosophical champion of human freedom and dignity, standing alone and often outnumbered against the battalions of ignorance, tyranny and superstition. For Matthew Arnold, whose work has exerted incalculable influence in shaping educational thinking in the English-speaking world, it is synonymous with the 'culture' to which we must

---

[21] For an exhaustive discussion of the arnoldian legacy of post-war British cultural policy, see Bennett (2005).

[22] The Liberal Humanist ideal is based on what the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1993, 34-5) refers to as 'the Enlightenment view of man'. The trouble with this view is, he explains, "that the image of a constant human nature independent of time, place, and circumstance, of studies and professions, transient fashions and temporary opinion, may be an illusion, that what a man is may be so entangled with where he is, who he is, and what he believes in that it is inseparable from them".

look as the only bulwark against the materialistic 'anarchy' of contemporary society. On the other, it has been denounced as an ideological smokescreen for the oppressive mystifications of modern society and culture, the marginalisation and oppression of the multitudes of human beings in whose name it pretends to speak, even, through an inexorable 'dialectic of enlightenment', for the nightmare of fascism and the atrocity of total war[23].

The critical account of Liberal Humanist ideals and cultural values provided by Jordan and Weedon in their *Cultural Politics* (1995), which they dissect and scrutinize from the vantage point of postmodern theory, indeed confirms the highly contested nature of the tenets of the Humanist philosophy. They argue that "despite the clever disguise, the content of liberal 'universals' is never universal. The 'Humanity' – or, as it has often been put, 'the Man' – of which it speaks is always historically specific, always fractured by power relations of inclusion and exclusion based on class, gender, race, ethnicity or some other invidious distinction" (*Ibid.*, 33).

Nevertheless, aesthetically, 20th century culture has been shaped by the hegemony of Liberal Humanist values. This view of culture, deeply reliant on hierarchical aesthetic values, allows one to distinguish clearly between what counts as art and what does not and its effect can be seen in the constitution of cultural traditions as well as in the practice of the arts funding bodies. In this view, Culture transmits the best ideas and values of a particular period, ideas and values that transcend social and cultural differences. This is the reason why 'access' has been the main focus of Liberal Humanist cultural politics, as the experiences of British, French and generally European cultural policies between the 1950s and 1970s prove.

The Liberal Humanist tradition indeed views culture as "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activities" (Williams, 1976, 80), and has therefore tended to limit 'Culture' (now rigorously with a capital C) to a selective body of literary and artistic texts which were said to embody universal truths and values, to express a fixed and recognizable 'human nature' and which now constitute the kernel of the 'great' European cultural tradition.

---

[23] Davies is referring here in particular to the writings of Theodor W. Adorno, who raises some of these themes in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002), which he co-authored with Max Horkheimer (especially the chapter entitled "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment").

As will be discussed in greater detail, the Eurocentrism intrinsic to this elaboration of what the boundaries of acceptable culture are has been criticised by postmodern (particularly post-colonial) theory, thus posing the cultural authority of traditional cultural institutions of the West under increasing strain (Owens 1990). Austin Harrington (2004, 39-41) in his book *Art and Social Theory* sums up this criticism and highlights four main problems inherent in the liberal humanist conceptions of value in art. Firstly, as was noted above, humanistic scholarship tends to be highly selective in its attribution of cultural and artistic value to certain objects, and this process of value assignation is not always a transparent one. As Harrington remarks, "[i]ts preferred cultural objects are invariably the work of men, most often from a white European background, and most often from the more privileged social classes; and usually the objects are self-contained works of 'fine' or 'high' art preserved in a definite material medium, rather than popular practices or ways of life" (*Ibid.*, 40).

Secondly, Liberal Humanism conceives the arts in terms of a highly selective canon of works that are seen to be connected to each other by a mechanism of stylistic descendancy. In other words, in the Liberal Humanist view, it is possible to trace a *fil rouge* that connects artists to one another across time and space. A typical example of this conception of artistic development is represented by Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artist*s, written in mid-16th century. The bibliographical essays offer a discussion of the canon of Renaissance painting from its origin in Giotto, following its development with Masaccio, and culminating in the masters of the High Renaissance (Leonardo, Michelangelo, etc.). A more recent example in the literary field would be F.R. Leavis' *The Great Tradition* (1948), where the development of the English-language novel is reconstructed through a discussion of some of its canonical authors: from Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad via intermediaries such as George Eliot and Henry James.

A third limitation of the Liberal Humanist understanding of art and culture is, for Harrington, the fact that attention is focused on the appreciation and evaluation of the more formal aspects of the work of art. This means that elements of the social, economic, and political contexts in which the work is created tend to be overlooked, as they are not seen as the main object of aesthetic criticism. Finally, Harrington argues that humanistic scholarship tends to assume that the meanings and values

embodied in the work of art are valid for different social groups, thus masking the fact that the attribution of cultural value to certain objects is in fact closely linked to conditions of power and hegemony within society. Issues of domination and dissent, then, are equally obfuscated:

> [Humanistic scholarship] assumes value in works of art to be self evident and everlasting, irrespective of past changes and all possible future changes in social structure; and it focuses on cultural forms more or less exclusively from the point of view of their existence as self-subsistent works, not from the point of view of their consumption by social audiences or from the point of view of the contribution of these audiences to the construction of their significance (*Ibid*., 41).

How can we then avoid the pitfalls of Eurocentrism and a narrow Liberal Humanist conception of the arts and culture (or, in this case, the 'Arts' and 'Culture')?

Wallerstein (1997, 101 ff.) has observed how the many forms and aspects of the critique of Eurocentrism do not, in fact, amount to a coherent picture. Some of the claims made in the name of anti-Eurocentrism, indeed, appear not only flawed, but also rooted in the mental prejudices and in the investigative tools devised within European scholarship. Discussing this problem in the field of social science, Gregor McLennan (2000, 282) calls this 'methodological eurocentrism':

> The question here is: is it not Eurocentric to try and pass off particular cultural and ideological preferences, even at the methodological level, as sanctioned by the authority of history and social science themselves? The assumption behind the question, furthermore, is that although couched in the language of sophisticated scholarship, modern sociological investigations remain bound to a teleological God's eye view of the social world, one which favours Western categories and images of effective causality.

Wallerstein (1997, 104) suggests that the best starting point in the process of building a solid foundation for a genuinely non-Eurocentric social science is that we have to start by questioning the assumption that what Europe did was always and necessarily a positive achievement. This is precisely what the review of claims made for the impacts of the arts in society that will follow attempts to highlight. For instance, by showing how the notion of the 'civilising mission' of the arts – which has been, throughout Europe, the guiding principle in the establishment of post-war cultural

policies – has had disturbing applications in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, this paper will attempt to demystify the simplistic notions of the transformative powers of the arts appear so central to contemporary cultural policies. Similarly, by explaining how the very same belief in the civilising potential of art was also exploited to provide a moral justification for the colonial enterprise in XIX century England, we will bring to light the implicit Eurocentrism that might be seen to be, in fact, still latent in much of the present cultural policy rhetoric.

Present-day British cultural policy rhetoric is still deeply embedded in notions of what the arts are, what effects they have on individuals, and what their role in society is, which are an inheritance of a debate that has engaged European thinkers for centuries. In other words, by re-connecting the present debate over the social impacts of the arts to a long and complex strand of Western thought, we will be able to demonstrate not only how the terms of the present debate constitute a reductive version of a much more complex intellectual dispute over the functions of art in society, but also the underlying, unquestioned assumptions on which cultural policy-making is based. Furthermore, we will be able to highlight how some of these accepted notions of the impacts of the arts on individuals and society are, in fact, based on dubious principles and beliefs, a number of which, indeed, might be termed Eurocentric. The intellectual spirit of the present exercise, hence, reflects that articulated by the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre:

> It is one of the marks of a community of enquiry and learning that, while it cannot but begin from the standpoint of its own cultural and social traditions, what it is able to learn, in order to sustain itself includes knowing how to identify its own incoherencies and errors and how then to draw upon the resources of other alien and rival traditions in order to correct these (quoted in Carr 2004, 55).

On the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture

A discussion of the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture is relevant to the present study of claims for the arts, because the way the opposition high/low culture has been elaborated in contemporary cultural theory discourse has coalesced around the notion that, whilst 'high' art can be expected to improve people in a number of

different ways, 'low'/'popular'/'mass' art has the opposite effect, and is generally charged with being 'bad for you'.

This common view of the relationship between 'high' and 'low' culture is deftly outlined by Joli Jensen (2002, 1) in her book *Is Art Good For Us?* which begins with the statement: "Of course the arts are good for us. Exactly how and why they are good for us isn't clear, but we firmly believe that the arts are good, and that the media are bad". She clarifies her statement by explaining that the 'high' arts are seen as a tonic, whereas 'popular' arts and the media as the poison, so that "[t]he presumption is that we need the good influence of the arts to offset the bad influence of the media". That Jensen's diagnosis is right is confirmed by a number of books published mainly in the last quarter of a century that have tried to redress the balance, and put forward a less negative view of popular and mass culture[24]. A recent example is provided by the aptly titled book, *Everything Bad is Good For You: How popular culture is making us smarter*. In it, Steven Johnson (2005) presents a survey of the recent developments that have been taking place in the world of computer gaming, television drama and reality TV, the internet, etc. and comes to the conclusion that:

> [t]he most debased forms of mass diversion – video games and violent television dramas and juvenile sitcoms – turn out to be nutritional after all. For decades, we've worked under the assumption that mass culture follows a steadily declining path toward lowest-common-denominator standards, presumably because the "masses" want dumb, simple pleasures and big media companies want to give the masses what they want. But in fact the opposite is happening: the culture is getting more intellectually demanding, not less (*Ibid.*, 9).

In his *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, John Carey (1992) traces the history of this negative view of mass art in England, and comes to the conclusion that modernist literature and art was, in essence, a hostile reaction to the development of a new, larger reading public created by the educational reforms of the late nineteenth-century. According to Carey's argument, the ultimate purpose of modernist writing, then, was to exclude these newly educated readers, with a view to preserve and reinforce the intellectual's distinction from the 'mass'. He further explains that the

---

[24] For a philosophical discussion and confutation of the arguments commonly employed to discredit mass art in relation to high art, see Noël Carroll's *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (1998).

idea of 'mass' is in this instance a pure fiction: "its function, as a linguistic device, is to eliminate the human status of the majority of people – or, at any rate, to deprive them of those distinctive features that make users of the terms, in their own esteem, superior" (Carey 1992, preface).

Starting from the disparaging comments on the masses that can be found in Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* – whose central message is that a "declaration of war on the masses by higher men is needed" – Carey (*Ibid.*, chapter 1) goes on to argue that the very popularity of Nietzschean ideas among XX century intellectuals proves the extent of the anxiety that the rise of the masses had caused among members of the European literary intelligentsia. So, for instance, W. B. Yeats suggested that Nietzsche was to be read as "a counteractive to the spread of democratic vulgarity". Carey's extensive review of the position of the principle personalities of the European literary intelligentsia in the period between 1880 and 1939 demonstrates the extent to which Nietzsche's view of the masses was commonly shared by many of them. Some of the illustrious names included in Carey's survey are Ibsen, Flaubert, Knut Hamsun, Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, André Gide, Isaac Bashevis Singer, T. S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and F. R. Leavis, to name but a few. The tonic/poison metaphor proposed by Jensen, is echoed in the beliefs of many members of this great pantheon of European writers. F. R. Leavis for example, launched a fierce attack against the newspaper and the related poison of advertising. In an essay co-written with Denys Thompson, Leavis (1950 [1933], 3) lamented that the mass media arouse "the cheapest emotional responses", so that "films, newspapers, publicity in all forms, commercially–catered fiction – all offer satisfaction at the lowest level".

It is not surprising that such prejudices against popular and mass art should be still seen at work in contemporary discourse, for – as Carey (2005, 54) tells us, preconceptions of this kind are slow to die: "Taste is so bound up with self-esteem, particularly among devotees of high art, that a sense of superiority to those with 'lower' tastes is almost impossible to relinquish without risk of identity-crisis". It is not surprising then, that 'low' manifestations of culture should have waited until the second half of the XX century to be deemed worthy objects of academic analysis. As Burke (2004, 17) points out, the idea of 'popular culture' or *Volkskultur* originated in the same place and time as 'cultural history', that is, in Germany in the late XVIII

century. Around this time, middle-class intellectuals discovered and became interested in researching folksongs, folktales, dances, rituals, and arts and crafts. However, the task of writing the history of these forms of popular culture was left to antiquarians, folklorists and anthropologists. It was only in the 1960s that academic historians gradually became interested in the academic study of popular culture, as demonstrated by the pioneering book by Eric Hobsbawm, *The Jazz Scene*, published in 1959. Burke (*Ibid.*, 18) ascribes this newly discovered interest in the study of popular cultural forms and activities to the long-lasting influence of Edward Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Classes* (1980 [1963]), which inspired a growing number of historians "to write history (including cultural history) from below".

In adopting a historical perspective of the type this paper advocates, however, the limitations of the tonic/poison metaphor become immediately apparent. Firstly, a cultural history approach reveals that this opposition is a modern phenomenon. Thus, the idea that popular culture will have negative impacts on its consumers, whilst 'high' culture will lead to a path of intellectual and moral improvement, are not related to intrinsic qualities of the cultural forms themselves, but are rather the result of intellectual elaborations and value-judgements that ascribe positive or negative qualities to them. So, Burke (2004, 27) explains:

> What makes exclusion problematic is the fact that people with high status, great wealth or a substantial amount of power are not necessarily different in their culture from ordinary people." […] it may be argued that the elites of Western Europe in early modern times were 'bicultural', participating in what historians call 'popular culture' as well as in a learned culture from which ordinary people were excluded. It was only after the middle of the seventeenth century that the elites generally withdrew from participation in popular culture.

Furthermore, as later sections of this paper will show, before the tonic/poison opposition was developed, a number of works of art that have pride of place in the Liberal Humanist canon of European culture, were believed to have had the very same negative effects that are today ascribed to mass culture. The so-called 'Werther effect', which will be discussed later on, is a typical case in point. (Phillips 1985).

For this reason, the survey of the claims made, over the centuries, for what the arts 'do' to people, will look at claims made for both for the 'high' and the 'low' arts indifferently, although the discussion will also highlight the way in which, in modern and contemporary Europe, matters of taste and cultural habits have become a means to fashion and shape identity, whilst also marking social and class distinctions.

Identifying categories of 'functions' of the arts

In attempting to produce a classification of the claims made over the course of time for the effects of the arts on people, we are trying to go beyond the narrow understanding of the social impacts of the arts that prevails in today's cultural policy discourse. We will be looking at claims made, over a period of about two and a half millennia, for what the arts 'do' to individuals, how they can transform them – for the better or the worse – and the role they ought to have in society, and in relation to the state. The paper will deal with the notion of impacts in their broadest sense, which are probably best referred to by the more wide-ranging concept of the *functions* of the arts, and their *effects* on people.

Before we set out the categories of claims we have identified, a few clarifying notes need to be made. First of all, it is important to explain that the various categories of claims that we will discuss shortly have been identified through an *inductive* method, that is, through a process that consists of inferences that go from the particular to the general (Cohen 1989). Inductive reasoning is a form of 'bottom up' approach to the collection of information, whereby one begins by making specific observations which allows one to detect patterns and regularities and, thus, to formulate tentative hypotheses. These can then be explored further, so that more general conclusions or even theories can be eventually developed. Compared to deductive reasoning (a 'top-down' form of reasoning whereby the starting point is a theory that gets narrowed down to a set of hypothesis to be tested), inductive investigation is characterised by a more open-ended and exploratory nature, especially in the beginning of the process.

In the specific case of the present study, then, the adoption of an inductive methodology meant that the relevant literature was analysed with a view to

identifying recurring themes and claims relating to the social function of the arts and the effects of the arts on people. Those claims that seemed to recur with consistent regularity where then harnessed together under an appropriate 'category of claim'. Furthermore, since the present paper arises from a research project that is concerned, in particular, with the social impacts of poetry, the novel and theatrical performance, the examples referred to in the main body of the text be drawn mainly (through by no means exclusively) from these art forms[25].

The categories of functions here identified therefore represent generalisations inductively obtained from examining the work of over 150 philosophers, writers, intellectuals, poets, artists, etc. (though, due to obvious limits of space, not all will be reviewed here). The categories in this taxonomy of impacts, then, are to be seen independently of each other, as they bring together arguments and claims made over a broad time-span by individual thinkers with very different interests, cultural backgrounds, and worldviews. Nevertheless, as the discussion will show, some of them are effectively connected and are borne of similar, either negative or positive, views of the nature of the effects of the arts on individuals and societies. On the other hand, other categories will be in obvious opposition to each other, in that they represent very different and irreconcilable conceptions of the effects of the arts.

Considered all together, however, the categories here identified give a fairly comprehensive taxonomy of possible impacts, and an overview of the complexity and variety of claims that have been made. The implications of these findings for present-day cultural policy-making, and, more specifically, for the debate over the 'impacts' of the arts and their measurement and evaluation, will be discussed in the concluding section of the paper.

The inductive approach described above led us to the identification of eight main categories of claims:

---

[25] It is worth reiterating here the 'constructed' nature of our contemporary understanding of the different art forms and the boundaries between them. For instance, the discussion of Plato's attack of the theatre and poetry, which we will consider shortly, was in fact, in the mind of the Athenian philosopher, simply a censure of 'mimetic poetry'. Indeed, in his understanding of the term, he included both art forms, on the grounds that both tragedies and epic poems where in fact 'performed' by actors and rhapsodes respectively.

- Corruption and distraction

- Catharsis

- Personal well-being

- Education and self-development

- Moral improvement and civilization

- Political instrument

- Social stratification and identity construction

- Autonomy of the arts and rejection of instrumentality

A number of sub-categories are contained within these main groups, and they will all be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 2: Corruption and distraction

The reason for starting with the negative view of the effects of the arts on individuals and society, are twofold. Firstly, the arguments that have provided the kernel of the 'negative point of view' were first developed at a very early stage in the period of time under consideration in the present paper. The fist systematic and coherent articulation of the tendency of the arts (poetry and theatre in particular) to corrupt was indeed put forward by Plato in V century BC Athens. Secondly, many of the theories purporting the morally uplifting powers of the arts were developed precisely to counteract the influence of Plato's harsh indictment. As the work of Aristotle shows, the arguments that the arts are 'good for you' originally started off as a 'counter-argument' to Plato's, only to develop in a fully fledged and predominant view much later on - mainly thanks to the intervention of a number of Renaissance theorists whose influence ultimately would appear to have overshadowed Plato's. The general assumption today that 'the arts are good for you' would appear to confirm this.

The main themes identified and developed by Plato have generated a rich and lively intellectual tradition and the elaboration of a range of distinctive, yet connected arguments. Consequently, this category can be divided into a number of sub-categories, of which we have identified three man strands that can be summarised as follows:

- **Metaphysical arguments for the negative effects of the arts**
    - The arts provide a flawed imitation of reality.

- **Epistemological arguments for the negative effects of the arts**
    - The arts are misleading when considered as an adequate source of knowledge and understanding.

- **Psychological arguments for the negative effects of the arts**
    - The arts corrupt by stimulating the irrational side of man.
    - The arts incite immoral or, more generally, dangerous behaviour; this argument has been made especially with regards to theatre and it is at

the root of what Jonas Barish (1981) famously referred to as the 'antitheatrical prejudice'.

- o The arts distract from worthier matters.
- o The arts can make people unhappy.

As we will attempt to show, these broad sub-categories can be seen as a derivation of the Platonic view of the effects of the arts, which appear to have put forward a standard ensemble of claims that have been subsequently further elaborated by later thinkers[26]. Many of the arguments to be found in this category, as well as the identification of the three sub-categories listed above, can ultimately be ascribed to the indictment of poetry and theatre, and their ban from the ideal polity, that Plato elaborates in book III and X of the *Republic*.

Metaphysical Arguments

The fundamental contribution of Plato to this negative tradition and, more generally, to Western aesthetic thinking, is his theory of art as imitation, which is the central notion from which his other arguments on the corrupting effects of the arts derive. Plato's theory of imitation, in turn, is dependent on Plato's metaphysics, and more precisely from his 'theory of Forms (or Ideas)' and the conception of a hierarchical structure of reality that derives from it. Very briefly, the Forms are, according to Plato, an ensemble of abstract properties or qualities, perfect and immutable entities that exist independently of our world and constitute a sphere of being distinguished and separated from the human one (Abbagnano and Fornero 1986, 123-4). The world we experience in our everyday existence is nothing but a pale imitation of the world of the Forms. As a form of imitation of the world, both poetry and painting constitute an inexact copy of what is already an incomplete version of the Forms. As such, artistic imitation is twice removed for the true essence of things, and therefore intrinsically and inevitably flawed.

---

[26] For a more detailed discussion of Platonic arguments on the impacts of the arts, see Belfiore 2006a.

This idea of the presence of something inherently false (and thus corrupting) in artistic representation will become a recurrent theme in the Christian suspicion of the arts, and theatre in particular, and soon became connected to notions of idolatry. For "idolatry" - as St. Cyprian of Carthage (c.200-258) clearly puts it when commenting on the theatre – "is the mother of all public amusements" (quoted in Ward and Waller 1932, 375). On similar grounds, in the early XVI century, Tyndale and Coverdale, who translated the Bible into English, proclaimed the perniciousness of poetry and popular romances on the grounds that the truth they convey is only partial, whereas the Bible is the one and only source of universal truths. Worse still, by gripping their imagination, what Tyndale refers to as "histories & fables and of love and wantones, and of ribauderie" have the pernicious effect of distracting readers from the one very source of knowledge, understanding and ethical insight: the Bible (Fraser 1970, 3-4).

Epistemological Arguments

The postulate of Plato's argument on the mimetic nature of poetry is indeed crucial: the production of images on the part of the artist does not require any genuine knowledge of the real things being represented. And it is precisely this argument that allows us to step into the second-subcategory we have identified, under the heading of the 'epistemological' arguments on the negative effects of the arts. On the grounds of their imitative (and hence flawed) nature, in the Platonic view, it would be mistaken to seek enlightenment or understanding through poetry. This argument is unequivocally made in Plato's *Republic* (1993, 352; 600e):

> So shall we classify all poets, from Homer onwards, as representers of images
> of goodness (and of everything else that occurs in their poetry), and claim that
> they don't have any contact with the truth?

Socrates' following remarks leave no doubt as to Plato's position on the topic:

> An image-maker, a representer, understands only appearance, while reality is
> beyond him.

Crucially, this argument is also extended to the theatre (Plato 1993, 348; 597e):

> The same goes for tragic playwrights, then, since they're representers: they're two generations away from the throne of truth, and so are all other representers.

By re-defining poetry as mere image-making, Plato declares its consonance with the poet's ignorance about what is real and what is true (Janaway 2001, 6). Consequently, mimetic poetry is dangerous to the intelligence of those of its hearers who do not have the privilege of being aware of the illusive nature of poetry (that is, to the non-philosophers) and who might therefore be caught up in the illusory belief that they might acquire from it understanding and moral teachings. What we see here is the very essence of the great 'quarrel' between literature and philosophy that Plato introduces within Western philosophy and that is fundamentally about which of the two disciplines can rightfully claim to be a tool of moral education. Plato is making his position on the matter very clear: neither literature nor art can teach man anything of worth, since teaching requires the existence of some kind of knowledge to be taught in the first place, and – as was shown above - Plato believed that neither poets nor artists could realistically provide that.

This epistemological understanding of the corrupting or distracting power of the arts was later adopted by writers and thinkers who have elaborated on the original Platonic theme and adapted it to their own times and their own philosophical constructs. Even poets and artists themselves occasionally subscribed to this position, as exemplified by Baudelaire who wrote, in his critique of Gautier, "Truth and songs have nothing to do with one another"; this was because "the artist depends on nobody but himself … He is his own king, his priest and his god" (in Passmore 1991, 106). In other words, the artists' works, according to Baudelaire, refer to nothing beyond themselves, and therefore cannot guarantee access to any superior sphere of knowledge and understanding[27].

The most common result of this process of appropriation of Platonic themes is a translation of the alleged limitation of art's claims to truth on the moral plane, and the consequent criticism of the negative effects of the arts in the moral sphere. This,

---

[27] John Passmore (1991, 107) refers to this belief that art has nothing important to say about ourselves and the world around us (based on the notion that art is aware of nothing else but art) as the 'all art is about art' doctrine.

indeed, represents the main strand of the 'negative' intellectual tradition and will be discussed in a later section of this chapter. With regards to suspicions of the cognitive and epistemological powers of art, Eileen John (2001, 329) has commented that, whilst the idea that it is possible to gain knowledge from the arts is relatively uncontroversial amongst non-philosophers, it is actually a most controversial one within philosophy. As the present discussion will attempt to show, the reason for such a high degree of controversy around the links between art and knowledge depends on the difficulty of accounting for the content and ways of knowledge-production that is assumed to derive (or not) from aesthetic experiences. John (2001, 329) offers a clear articulation of the two opposite approaches that one could take when thinking about art as a source of knowledge:

> In the first, art is embraced enthusiastically but rather loosely as a source of insight and fresh awareness. Sometimes this approach includes the view that the special insight cannot be put into words, but perhaps allows us to perceive the world in a new way. In the second, opposed approach, art or experience with art is rejected as not meeting requirements for the production of knowledge, knowledge being defined along traditional lines as true, justified belief[28].

The present section of this paper will focus on the latter of these two approaches, while the former will be discussed later, in the context of the exploration of the category of *Bildung*.

Lamarque and Olsen (1994, 369-370) explain that those who argue in favour of the cognitive function of literature (though the argument could be extended to the other arts[29]) are, in fact, proposing a shift of focus from the external and objective point of view from which generalisations can be made and be expected to have universal validity, to an internal and subjective point of view. This latter position can be referred to as the *experiential aspect* (in that every person has mental experiences that are strictly their own, and have meaning just within that one person's own subjective imagination), or as the *perspectival aspect* (every individual sees the world for their

---

[28] It is worth referring here, to Jerome Stolnitz's (2004, 337) words of caution about easy discriminations in this field: "So far as one can characterize the vast, succeeding literature, the cognitivists have predominated against the sceptics, through we must always bear in mind their profound intra-mural differences over the nature of artistic truth, the vehicles of embodying and communicating such truths, and indeed the appropriate and therefore unorthodox meaning of 'truth'".
[29] For a discussion of issues of truth in art with regards to the visual arts, see Kieran 2005, 121 ff.

particular point of view, at that particular point in time, and that particular place, and under the influence of specific and individual circumstances). In this view, which is centred on individuals and their subjective points of view, particular experiences and situations are seen as resulting in a special kind of knowledge[30]:

> One can come to share this knowledge through an act of 'subjective imagination' in which one occupies in imagination the point of view of another self. Literature, according to this theory, is particularly suited to effecting this imaginative participation, by means of which practical wisdom is increased and moral knowledge expanded. In this view, although, a literary work is held to yield the knowledge it does because of its distinctive literary features, nevertheless genuine knowledge and genuine truth are at stake and literature is seen to keep the same company of philosophy and even the sciences. Indeed inasmuch as one task of philosophy is to seek a better understanding of moral matters in its own terms, so literature, with a similar task, becomes a companion to philosophy or even a branch of philosophy (*Ibid.*, 370).

The present discussion concerns itself with the arguments put forward against this understanding of the cognitive powers of the arts, and therefore with the modern articulation of the Platonic position that seeking enlightenment and access to the sphere of truth through the arts would be a misleading exercise, and that the educational function of the arts is but an appealing delusion. Noël Carroll (2002) has recently reviewed in great detail the main epistemic arguments put forward in contemporary times against the notion that the arts, and literature in particular, can represent an instrument of education and a source of knowledge[31]. He usefully categorises such arguments in three broad groups: the *banality* argument; the *no-evidence* argument and the *no-argument* argument[32].

---

[30] On the subjective and emotive aspects of the cognitivist position, see Matravers (1998) *Art and Emotion*, especially chapter 7, "The Cognitive Theory".

[31] As later parts of this paper will show, this belief in the arts as a privileged route to knowledge and understanding is quite strongly rooted in Western culture. In Christopher Butler's (2004, 16) words: "This urge to find meaning is the end result of a great deal of adaptive evolution, and brings with it an (often indirect) desire for the acquisition of knowledge; that is, the truth. This is a vital part of our experience of works of art".

[32] Carroll's own position is not to be identified with any of these options, since the broader aim of his paper is to highlight the shortcomings of the three leading philosophical objections to the idea that art and literature can represent a source of knowledge. The second half of his paper, thus, is devoted to a confutation of the three arguments, based on the observation that "it is extremely peculiar that philosophers would raise these particular objections against literature, since philosophy employs a gamut of techniques to produce knowledge and learning that are analogous to those found in literature" (*Ibid.*, 7).

The banality argument does not deny the possibility that art and literature may convey general, or even universal truths; however, it negates the claim that art and literature can *educate* their public and thus be a source of knowledge. The very notion of the creation of knowledge through contact with the arts necessarily entails the idea of the acquisition of new truths and ideas that were not there before contact with the artistic forms took place. However, the proponents of the banality argument maintain that, in reality, the truths that are commonly held to be communicated by works of art are usually very broad in nature (as they usually are very general truths that relate to human nature and life), to the point of often representing little more than truisms. In other words, in this perspective, a novel that conveys the general truth that murder is evil can hardly be said to be teaching anything of significance; no new knowledge is being created, rather, commonly held truths are being reiterated. As Carroll (*Ibid.*, 4) summarises:

> They [art and literature] recycle truisms that readers already know. Consequently, since it makes little sense to claim that people learn the truisms they already know from literature and art, there is little point in regarding the arts as educational.

This conclusion is further reinforced by the observation that, quite often, for the truth contained in art and literature to become explicit, the readers or spectators must play an active role, by bringing to the artwork their own set of beliefs and knowledge in order to be able to understand the artwork and interpret it correctly.

On the one hand then, it is beyond doubt that many statements occurring in poetry and fiction (and in the arts in general) are true, and it therefore follows that the arts can give us truth in this broad sense (Hospers 1960, 37). On the other hand, however, the work of art does little more than bringing to light and *revealing* ideas and truths that were already present within the reader or spectator – though admittedly, he or she might not be fully aware of his or her possessing that knowledge already. Consequently, no new knowledge or real learning is produced through the artistic experience - because one cannot learn what one already knows (Currie 1998, 161). The function of the arts, thus, is at best to 'activate' already possessed knowledge, rather than its creation *ex novo.* Writing about music and painting in particular,

Monroe C. Beardsley (1981 [1958], 379) – one of the most prominent exponents of this position - calls this the *Revelation Theory* of the cognitive status of the arts[33]. He (*Ibid.*, 386) further argues:

> It is surprising, in a way, that those who write about the fine arts and music, tend to lay so much stress upon the cognitive value of those arts, even if … they are forced to contend that paintings and musical compositions become valuable to us partly because they exemplify for us qualities that we have already found in the world, or that we could find if we looked far enough.

We can therefore conclude that what Carroll refers to as the 'banality argument' ultimately aims to invalidate the educational view of the arts as a source of understanding and learning, since it postulates that readers and audiences in fact already possess any truths that might be expressed through art. A further position is represented by what Caroll (*Ibid.*) calls the 'no-evidence' argument, which moves the challenge against the cognitive and epistemological powers of the arts one step further. At the root of the 'no-evidence argument' is the rejection of the idea that the type of truth that can be found in art and literature can be appropriately subsumed under the category of knowledge. The rationale behind such rejection lies in the observation that, as it is commonly accepted within the scientific and academic worlds, knowledge must not only be 'true', but also corroborated by convincing evidence. Most art, however, does not contain within itself any form of acceptable evidence for the knowledge claims it makes and the hypotheses it puts forward.

This view has been forcefully proposed in particular with regards to the novel, where – as the argument goes – most of the statements made by authors are not documented enough for us to be able to verify their truth according to any reliable scientific standard. One of the main representatives of this position is John Hospers (1974 [1946], 156), who, in his book *Meaning and Truth in the Arts,* raises a number of concerns about the misleading nature of attempts to seek enlightenment through

---

[33] In Beardsley's (*Ibid.*, 379) own words: "According to some aestheticians, a painting or a musical composition is not to be understood by comparison with a verbal statement, but rather by comparison with a gesture, or a dramatic act, or the moon coming out from behind a cloud. It does not make assertions about, but *reveals*, the nature of reality, and hence, though it may not strictly be called "true", it may be called "illuminating", "enlightening", or "instructive". This view I shall call the *Revelation Theory* of the cognitive status of painting and music" (emphasis in the original).

poetry and the belief in the superior wisdom of poets, which reflect quite closely the Platonic argument discussed above:

> Insofar as people have gone to literature to learn facts about the world, and accepted literature's statements, not on the basis of evidence, but just because they were literature, they have made a serious mistake; they have accepted such statements as they would accept a sugar-coated pill. The mere fact that some idea happen to be written nicely does not entitle it one whit more to be considered true, although the fact of its being nicely written might increase the emotional urge to accept it as true; and it is just here that literary pronouncements uttered as truth can be the most misleading, for they can sometimes persuade us to believe what we have no grounds for believing; and as long as what we are invited to believe is in the realm of empirical *facts* and *statements*, we should unswervingly believe the hard, tested fact which the scientist offers us (emphasis in the original).

It logically follows that it would be foolish to identify the value of literature with its knowledge-creating potential, and again, Hospers' (*Ibid.*, 157) position is unequivocal:

> Certainly it must be obvious by this time that the function of literature is not to state facts, either of science or of history, or of philosophy or theology or any field whatever. These truths belong to these separate fields, and not to literature. Works of literature may incidentally state truths which are enlightening in these other fields, but *only* incidentally – it is not in virtue of the fact that they contribute, for example, to sociological knowledge that they find their way into anthologies of literature.

More recently, Christopher New (1999, 120-1), has dubbed the notion that works of fiction can convey moral, political, religious or any other kind of truths, as a 'myth'. Here is why:

> The novel may well imply that the views are true, and do so very forcefully, but it cannot itself authenticate the views it conveys – whether the view is a sound one depends on what the (moral and religious) facts are, not on how the author's fiction represents them. This does not mean, of course, that we cannot gather truths from fiction, only that they are not *shown* to be truths by virtue of being persuasively conveyed in a novel, story, poem, film or play. In this sense, claims that fiction has some kind of special route to moral (or any other) truth must be rejected as fanciful.

Bruce Russell (2006 [2000], 390) has suggested similar arguments with regards to film, concluding that "a film might remind us of the evidence we know already, but it cannot supply the relevant evidence itself. Imaginary situations cannot supply real data".

On the basis of the arguments here listed in support of the 'no-evidence' case, should we then dismiss all art and literature as "non-cognitive"? Interestingly, none other than John Hospers (1960) himself suggests otherwise. Admittedly, according to the theory here discussed, art and literature cannot provide genuine knowledge, since their claims - independently of whether they are true or not - are never adequately justified and do not come with sufficient evidential support for generalisations to be made[34]. However, what the arts *can* do is put forward *hypotheses* about the world that is then up to the reader/spectator/audience to test and verify appropriately:

> Works of literature are able, through the delineation of character and the setting forth of situations which are followed through in the details of the plot, to suggest *hypotheses* about human behaviour, human motivation, human actions, and sometimes about the social structure (Hospers 1960, 45).

This sub-division of the 'no-evidence' argument, which we will call the 'hypotheses argument'[35], has been interestingly developed by Peter Mew (1973), with a view to contesting what he saw as the most extreme and excessive aspects of Hospers' 'anti-truth theory'. Mew builds his argument by discussing a remark that Tolstoy makes in *Anna Karenina*, where the narrator comments: "This playing with words, this hiding of a secret, had a great fascination for Anna, *as it has for all women*" (in Mew 1973, 330). Tolstoy's claim offers Mew (*Ibid.*, 331) a chance to put forward his main argument, namely that "[m]any, and probably most, of the universal factual statements in literature are about that kind of human behaviour [of the sort that is revealed in natural, as opposed to engineered, situations], and there could be no such thing as the setting-up of test situations in which to observe it".

---

[34] The understanding of 'genuine knowledge' in this context is clarified by John (2001, 330): "Knowledge is supposed to have withstood some kind of scrutiny: it is supposed to be tested, well-considered, based on relevant evidence".

[35] One of the most prominent advocate of this view in the last twenty years has been Peter Kivy (1997), who refers to this position as the 'propositional theory of literary truth'.

Mew is also careful to underline the importance of suggesting hypotheses and putting forward claims for further testing and investigation; for, how could knowledge advance (and this is true of the sciences too) if nobody ever put forward new ideas that might not have been tested *yet*, but are amenable to be verified? Furthermore, the hypotheses put forward in literature also have the important role of stirring ideas and opening up new possibilities of enquiry:

> Both the acknowledged hypotheses of science and those universal factual statements in literature which I think it right to take as hypotheses have a *provocative function*: they stimulate others to reconsider certain elements or parts of the world (Mew 1973, 333; emphasis added).

Fiction, in particular, is presented as the ideal way to express hypotheses in the shape of a "universal factual statement which is not obviously true, or better, which has not received maximal confirmation, and which has thus not achieved the status of a commonly accepted truth" (*Ibid.*). A good example of this type of statement is represented by this remark in Jane Austen's *Emma*: "Human nature is so well disposed towards those who are in interesting situations that a young person who either marries or dies is sure of being kindly spoken of". As the narrator's remarks in *Anna Karenina* quoted above, Jane Austen's statement would be hard, if not impossible, to verify through an empirical process[36]. However, Mew observes, a good way of testing it would be for each and every reader to compare the author's statement to his or her own experience, with a view of establishing whether personal experience confirms or falsifies it. Mew (*Ibid.*, 335) further argues that precisely because they rely on the reader's personal experience for verification, "the hypotheses of literature may be more informative or revelatory than many of the factual statements made in other media". This is because, contrary to the kind of knowledge that is acquired through studying and reading scientific material, the knowledge that is obtained by checking literary hypotheses against our own experiences is firsthand knowledge, and – as such – perceived as more secure and reliable (as it does not rely on a blind faith on the accuracy and reliability of scientists and textbooks' authors) (*Ibid.*, 336).

---

[36] Similar arguments are also proposed by Stolnitz (2004).

Carroll (2002, 5-6) however, observes that a problematic aspect of this view is represented by the generally 'woefully vague' nature of the hypotheses suggested by arts and literature:

> For if we are unable to ascertain how far the hypothesis reaches, then talk of confirming the hypothesis seems so much arm waving. Indeed, since extracting hypotheses from art and literature generally involves interpretations, and interpretations themselves may often be indeterminate and contestable, it is far from clear that the hypothesis/confirmation/ model of artworks is very promising. For we may rarely find ourselves with a hypothesis solid enough even to attempt to confirm.

The third and final position identified by Carroll (*Ibid.*, 6) is the one that he identifies as the 'no-argument' argument, which he summarises as maintaining that "even if artworks contained or implied general truths, neither the artworks themselves nor the critical discourse that surrounds them engages in argument analysis, and debate in defense of the alleged truths". As we will see, this argument is based precisely on the supposed lack of argumentation, analysis and debate in art and literature.

The starting point for this argument resembles rather closely the 'no-evidence' one, for the supporter of this view argues that whenever artworks suggest truths (whether explicitly or by implication) they do not accompany them with a coherent and articulated discussion that might support them. Truths and claims are just put forward with little effort at putting together a convincing argument in their favour. What really characterises the 'no-argument' position, then, is the logical consequence of this first observation: the lack of interest displayed by works of art for the construction of a coherent argument to support the worldview and the claims they make is reflected in the little interest displayed by the critical discourse generated by those artworks in arguing for or against the truths that they allegedly divulge. This argument has been made particularly in relation to literature, where it has been observed that establishing the correctness of truth claims made in literary works is not a feature of the literary institutions, since both authors and critics alike seem generally rather uninterested in the matter. The logical progression of the argument therefore entails that, if neither writers nor critics are particularly concerned with the verification of the truth of claims made in literature, then this must mean that the authentication of truth claims is not a primary function of literature. This, in turn, forces us to conclude that if the

verification of the truthfulness of its claims is not a significant part of what literature and literary practice are all about, then literature must of necessity have very little to do with the production and communication of 'proper' knowledge[37].

The main proponents of the 'no-argument' position in literature are Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen (1994, 1) who, in their book *Truth, Fiction and Literature*, claim to present "a 'no-truth' theory of literature". In the book they reiterate the point that one of the most striking characters of discourses of literature (both in criticism and general conversation) is the dearth of debate over the truth-value of propositions that are found in novels and other texts:

> Though the works of critics may contain statements to the effect that a literary work represents a certain view of life, and though it may be intimated that this view is shared or endorsed by the critic, critical treatments of literary works almost never present arguments in support of the view, or against the view in those cases where the critic intimates disagreement with it. Literary criticism is not defined by a series of speculative issues (of a psychological, sociological, philosophical, or historical nature) which are debated with reference to canonical standards of truth and correctness. Nor is there a part of criticism which deals with the truth or falsity of works, as there are parts which deal with, for example, narrative technique, themes and motifs, genres, and so forth (*Ibid.*, 332).

After a perceptive discussion, and confutation, of possible explanations for this lack of interest in the verification of truth claims in literary works (such as for example, the suggestion that readers – or at least, mature readers – might immediately recognise the truth or falsity of the claims they encounter in literature), Lamarque and Olsen (*Ibid.*, 333) conclude:

> The lack of debate in literary criticism and critical discourse in general about the truth of such general propositions must therefore be understood as a feature of the literary practice itself. In this respect literary practice is quite different from, say, philosophy where interpretation of the masters is subordinated to the question where they failed and where they succeeded in achieving real insight.

The obvious conclusion of such arguments is that it becomes impossible to straightforwardly construe literary works as one particular type of discourse (among

---

[37] For the meaning, here, of the expression "proper knowledge", please refer to note n. 33.

others) with the primary intention of advancing truths (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 368). Consequently, the notion of the cognitive powers of literary works is necessarily undermined.

Certain strands of postmodern cultural theory, as reflected, for instance, in the writings of Jean Baudrillard, do express similar scepticism with regards to the notion that any meaningful knowledge or clearer understanding of the world around us can be gained through the arts. Baudrillard's approach to understanding contemporary culture and society can be seen as centred around the notion of 'the loss of the real'. At the centre of this perspective is the idea that, in an age dominated by TV and the other mass media, the pervasive nature of images has resulted in the blurring of the boundaries between representation and reality, to the extent that any meaningful distinction between the two has become impossible (Barry 1995, 87). Whilst in the past signs referred to and where founded upon a solid underlying reality, our present age in but a 'simulacrum', Baudrillard insists, whereby 'representation' has been substituted by *simulation*. In Baudrillard's own words, the age of simulation is characterised by the "liquidation of all referentials" (Baudrillard 1988, 167). As a result, "simulation threatens the difference between 'true' and 'false', between 'real' and 'imaginary'" (*Ibid.*, 168): "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself" (*Ibid.*, 167). It is to this deception of simulation that Baudrillard refers to when he speaks of the *hyper-real*.

Baudrillard's writing on 'hyperreality' and 'simulation' evolve around discussions of contemporary popular culture, the mass media and the overflow of images and information that they cause. For instance, Disneyland is offered as a good illustration of the predominance of simulation in the present age:

> Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle (Ibid., 172).

It logically follows that if there is no reality behind the representation, no signified behind the signifier, neither the arts nor the media can in any way be bearers of deeper truths (for, as we have seen, the very possibility to discern true from false has collapsed) nor be a source of cognitive or ethical enlightenment. As Baudrillard himself (*Ibid.*, 211) observed, in an essay on the masses and the media, "the masses are also made of this useless hyperinformation which claims to enlighten them, when all it does is clutter up the space of the representable and annul itself in a silent equivalence". The consequences of Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality have been lucidly summarised by Zygmunt Bauman in his *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992, 152-3):

> Baudrillard brooks no hope, as the all-powerful simulation destroys all opposition to itself. Everything colludes to hide the fact that reality has been banished. The brave *Washington Post* journalists only added to the illusion that Watergate was a *scandal*, that away from Watergate there are some binding principles and some 'real', solid, reliable politics. […] Simulation hides the fact that everything is part of the same game; it offers the reality principle another lease of life – this time as a zombie. One cannot step outside simulation. Whatever one does to pierce through its veil, will only thicken the camouflage. Fighting simulation is itself a simulation (emphasis in the original).

Thus, in this perspective, TV and media images contribute to the simulation that dominates hyperreality by representing nothing more than themselves, yet maintaining the illusion of a reality beyond them. As such, any educational or enlightening poetential on their part is necessarily denied. It is however in the next subsection of this chapter - on the psychologically and morally corrupting effects of the arts - that the view of art's negative effects reaches its apogee, and where the tone of the polemic intensifies.

<u>Psychological Arguments</u>

The primary source for this argument is also to be found in Plato's discussion of the representational arts – and poetry in particular - in books III and X of the *Republic*. Here Plato (1993, 359; 605c) warns us that poetry "has a terrifying capacity for deforming even good people. Only a very few escape". The target of Plato's attack

here is ultimately the powers of art and poetry to make an impression over suggestible people (a category which – as we have seen - in Plato's opinion, included all the non-philosophers). The sinister powers that Plato attributes to poetry and tragic theatre derive from his bipartite notion of the soul: the rational part of the soul, and the most noble, is guided by rational thinking and strives to achieve the overall good (politically and in matters of personal ethics). The second and decidedly inferior part of the soul is the irrational and emotional one which represents the 'appetive' side of human nature, on which poetry and the stage have the stronger effect. Consequently, when we are exposed to poetry and theatre, the rational component of the soul is over-ruled by the irrational, and that is when the arts become a corrupting force:

> And the same goes for sex, anger, and all the desires and feelings of pleasure and distress which we're saying, accompany everything we do: poetic representation has the same effect in all these cases too. It irrigates and tends to these things when they should be left to wither, and it makes them our rulers when they should be our subjects, because otherwise we won't live better and happier lives, but quite the opposite (Plato 1993, 360; 606d).

On precisely this ground, Plato declares that poetry and the stage should be banned from the ideal city:

> […] given its nature, we had good grounds for banishing [poetry] earlier from our community. No rational person could have done any different (*Ibid.*, 361; 607b).

However, what Plato envisaged was not a complete ban of poetry from the ideally just city, for a corollary of the notion that poetry and tragic theatre can have such a strong impact on morality and behaviour is Plato's belief that this transformative power - if appropriately controlled by the Philosopher Kings that would be in charge in the ideal city - could be harnessed for the public good. In Plato's *Republic*, indeed, we find the first coherent articulation of the principles of state censorship of the arts, and of the use of poetry and theatre for ends of political propaganda. For the arts to be put to good use and their hold on man's emotion to be harnessed for the good of the state, however, their *content* must be subject to close scrutiny by the philosophers in charge of public education, especially wherever young and impressionable audiences are concerned. The dubious content, from a moral perspective, of much of Greek epic poetry, thus, becomes a point of contention for Plato:

No young person is to hear stories which suggest that where he to commit the vilest of crimes, and were he to do his utmost to punish his father's crimes, he wouldn't be doing anything out of the ordinary, but would simply be behaving like the first and the greatest gods. [...] All things considered, then, that is why a very great deal of importance should be placed upon ensuring that the first stories they hear are best adapted for their moral improvement (*Ibid.*, 72; 378b and 73; 378e).

The impressionability of young minds has since been at the core of many arguments in favour of censorship and the limitation of access to cultural goods that are seen as having the potential to affect negatively their audience. Such arguments are still relevant in the modern world. After all Britain had a rather strict system of theatre censorship until 1969, and concerns for the welfare of impressionable minds are still the main rationale behind the work of bodies such as the British Board for Film Classification, the independent regulator of the film and video industry in the UK[38].

The Platonic notion of the deep, and generally negative, emotional impacts of the arts, and the influence that the representative arts (especially poetry and the theatre) can have on morality and behaviour initiated a lively and rich intellectual tradition purporting the potential of the arts to corrupt. In particular, an important and influential aspect of Plato's suspicion of poetry and theatre was his belief that the enjoyment of those artistic forms necessarily brings with it a heightened disposition to imitate in real life the actions they depict. This belief was embraced by Christian philosophers of various intellectual standing, ranging from Tatian (c. 60 AD), through Tertullian and St. Cyprian of Carthage (II-III century AD) to St. Augustin (IV century) - to name but a few - and the other Middle Ages writers of Patristic philosophy[39]. The corrupting effect of artistic representations soon became a central motif in the early Christian distrust of the representative arts, and theatre in particular[40]. As Barish (1981) has shown in his compelling book *The Antitheatrical*

---

[38] The British Board for Film Classification (BBFC) openly states that one of the main considerations when making decisions about classification is whether the film or video in question is, at the age group concerned, "likely to be harmful" (From the BBFC's official web site: http://www.bbfc.co.uk/policy/index.php; accessed on 28th January 2006).

[39] For a more detailed discussion of the arguments put forward by each of these authors against the theatre, see Barish 1981, Bruch 2004, and Spingarn 1908.

[40] Despite the suspicion displayed by the Fathers of the Church for the theatre, not all art was deemed perverse. An obvious example of acceptable art forms is represented by religious art, that is, art that not only represents religious objects, but does so for explicitly didactical purposes. As Rockmore (2004, 21) explains, "[f]or Christianity [...] art, meaning sacred art, including paintings, sculpture, architecture, illuminated manuscripts, tapestries, meaning art with a specially disclosive function

Prejudice, the Fathers of the Church were instrumental in producing a Christian re-elaboration of Platonic misgivings on the emotionally corrupting effect of performances. The attitude of the early Church towards theatrical performances is powerfully summarised by St. Cesarius, Bishop of Arles, in France, who, in one of his famous sermons, declared that "omnia spectacula pompae diaboli sunt": all spectacles are a celebration of the devil (Kohansky 1984, 23). This unequivocal and wholesale rejection of the theatre remained an important ingredient in the attack that was waged against the stage for centuries and culminated, in England, in the venomous writing of the Puritan anti-theatrical pamphleteers whose work stretched from the XVI to the XVIII century[41].

Despite the different levels of sophistication displayed by the various thinkers involved in the Christian attack on the stage, the arguments they put forward tend to be always the same, and often the influence of Plato's writing is explicitly acknowledged (Barish 1981 and Thompson 1966, chapter 1). Tatian (I century AD), for instance, is the author of the earliest example of Christian antitheatrical writing, but already displays the signature vehemence and the stock accusations of the genre. The target of Tatian's rage is the actor who "outwardly counterfeits what he is not", and whom he accuses of being "the epythome of superstition, a vituperator of heroic deeds, and actor of murders, a chronicler of adultery, a storehouse of madness" (in Barish 1981, 44). It is however Tertullian, who, in his *De Spectaculis* first gives a Christian spin to many of Plato's arguments against the theatre, reaching a conclusion that was to become a deep-rooted conviction throughout the Middle Ages: that creative literature excites the emotions *more* than actual life, and it is therefore

within the religious context, plays a rather different, more clearly cognitive role in not simply characterizing the sacred in human terms, but more precisely in enabling us to "know" sacred reality".

[41] See: Ward and Waller 1932; Rice 1997; Thompson 1966; Anthony 1932; and Lake and Questier 2002, chapter 11. It is also worth mentioning that, although the attack on the stage at the hand of Puritan writers reached in England a particularly venomous apex, the Roman Catholic Church too, by the XV century had begun to express concerns for the despicably low levels of morality in which the theatre (and religious theatre in particular) appeared to have descended. Hence campaigns for the closure of theatres in Paris, as well as London in the mid XVI century (Glyn-Jones 1996, 255-6). Rousseau's invective against the theatre in his *Letter to d'Alembert Concerning Spectacles* (1758) – which presents an outright rejection of the idea that the theatre can contribute to the cultural and moral improvement of the populace - reflects many of the arguments that had been elaborated by the Puritan commentators in England, and that had, by then, become canonical in the repertoire of the anti-theatrical polemic (see Barish 1981, chapter 9 and Osipovich 2004). Similarly, O'Connor's (2000) essay offers an exhaustive discussion of the antitheatrical polemic in early modern Spain, where charges against the theatre centred around its corrupting power and the undermining of the *buenas constumbres* (good mores) that it allegedly encouraged.

extremely dangerous - to the extent that reading about or watching a crime take place on the stage does not only become equated with committing the crime itself, but comes to be seen as morally *more* contemptible than the crime itself – on the accounts of its potential to corrupt, and hence harm, a large audience.

An exemplary instance of such a perplexing hierarchy of sins is represented by Salvianus (V century), a disciple of St. Augustine. In his treatise entitled *On the Government of God*, Salvianus points out that whilst any other sin usually entails the moral perdition of the perpetrator alone, a theatrical performance has the remarkable power of corrupting anybody that merely sees or hears it, not just the performers (Barish 1981, 80). A crucial moment in the 'canonization' of the scepticism against the theatre is represented by the stern words of St. Augustine (354-430), probably the most influential of the Fathers of the Church. In Book III of his masterpiece, *Confessions*, Augustine puts forward what would soon become central tenets of the antitheatrical prejudice. Recalling his student days in Carthage, Augustine (1991, 35) declares:

> I was captivated by theatrical shows. They were full of representations of my own miseries and fuelled my fire. Why is it that a person should wish to experience suffering by watching grievous and tragic events which he himself would not wish to endure? Nevertheless he wants to suffer the pain given by being a spectator of these sufferings, and the pain itself is a pleasure. What is this but amazing folly? For the more anyone is moved by these scenes, the less free he is from similar passions. Only, when he himself suffers, it is called misery; when he feels compassion for others, it is called mercy. But what quality of mercy is it in fictitious and theatrical inventions? A member of the audience is not excited to offer help, but invited only to grieve. The greater his pain, the greater the approval of the actor in these representations. If the human calamities, whether in ancient histories or fictitious myths, are so represented that the theatregoer is not caused pain, he walks out of the theatre disgusted and highly critical. But if he feels pain, he stays riveted in his seat enjoying himself.

The polemical and highly aggressive tone of the more incensed Christian writers and orators, such as Tatian and Tertullian (as opposed to the more reflective and balanced attitude of Augustine) was adopted by the Puritan writers in Elizabethan England, who - on the basis of now well-worn yet still popular arguments - strived to have the stage outlawed. Indeed, on this account, they proved more successful than their predecessors. Thus, the proclamation of 16 May 1559 forbade the handling of

religious and political themes on the stage; the statute of 1572 imposed heavy penalties for all those actors who were not formally employed by a nobleman (Ward and Waller 1932, 380). Fuelled by the work of the Puritan pamphleteers, the antitheatrical polemic progressively grew more intense, culminating with the closing of the theatres in 1642 (Barish 1981, 88).

The arguments put forward by the pamphleteers vary little; they all saw the theatre as a form of direct negative influence on the spectator's behaviour, and consequently saw the stage as a corrupting force in society. According to Bruch (2004, 13), "[t]o the Puritans, crimes of the theatre included emptying the churches, perpetuating pagan custom, distorting truth, showing forth profane, seditious and bawdy stories, teaching knavery and lechery, causing God to visit the plague on London, leading youth into idleness and extravagance, affording meeting places for harlots and customers, aiding the Pope, and corrupting maidens and chaste wives". Not only were the charges against the theatre remarkably broad ranging and unsubstantiated, but very often all these accusations would be clumped together in what appears as a tactic of piling on the charges to strengthen the impetus of the censure. This passage from John Northbrooke's *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes* (1577) is a good example of the Puritan 'argument' against the theatre:

> In their plays you shall learn all things that appertain to craft, mischief, deceits and filthiness, etc. If you will learn how to be false and deceive your husbands, or husbands their wives, how to play the harlot, to obtain one's love, how to ravish, how to beguile, how to betray, to flatter, lie, swear, forswear, how to allure to whoredom, how to murder, how to poison, how to disobey and rebel against princes, to consume treasures prodigally, to move to lusts, to ransack and spoil cities and towns, to be idle, to blaspheme, to sing filthy songs of love, to speak filthily, to be proud, how to mock, scoff and drive any nation … shall you not learn, then, at such interludes how to practice them? (in Bruch 2004, 14).

On the grounds of such premises, the conclusion can only be one, as Northbrooke himself makes quite clear:

> I am persuaded that Satan hath not a more speedie way and fitter schoole to work and teach his desire, to bring men and women into his snare of concupiscence and filthie lustes of wicked whoredome, that those places and playses, and theatres are (in Truman 2003, 57)

Despite the attempts on the part of some of the pamphleteers - such as Stephen Gosson in *School of Abuse* (1579) - to argue that the true target of their attack was not the proper use but the *abuse* of theatre, there is little doubt that the predominant feeling for the theatre amongst them was one of contempt and suspicion, as proven by Jeremy Collier's definition, in 1698, of the theatre as the 'single source of all filth' (Self 2000).

The arguments of the Puritan pamphleteers, that, for reasons of space, cannot be discussed in more detail, are largely irrelevant and outdated in the now prevalently secular contemporary European society. However, the basic idea that the arts might have harmful effects on impressionable minds, and the notion that contact with an artistic representation might instigate emulation is far from having disappeared altogether. We have already seen how the concern over the potentially dangerous and harmful effects of films is the very *raison d'etre* of bodies such as the British Board for Film Classification[42]. The Platonic belief that fictional events might well lead to emulation has indeed proved a resilient one in Western civilization and can be seen, for instance, at the root of the so-called 'Werther effect' (Phillips 1985). This label derives from the name of the main character in Goethe's novel, published in 1774, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. The novel tells the story of a doomed love-triangle, and concludes with the suicide of Werther over a case of 'impossible' love for the young Lotte, already engaged to his close friend Albert. The novel soon became extremely popular generating, in fact, what has been referred to as a 'cult following' not dissimilar to the one ascribed to pop stars and footballers in contemporary times, whereby young readers of the novel were reported to dress and act like Werther (Bokey and Walter 2002, 397; Pirkis and Blood 2001, 155). As the story goes, the imitative frenzy did not stop at the external appearance of the novel's protagonist, and a number of young men supposedly pushed their emulation of Werther to the extreme, so that following an alleged spate of suicides among young readers of the

---

[42] It is interesting to remark how, despite the existence of a body such as the Board of Film Classification - which effectively reflects the belief, on the part of the British government, that certain films might have a negative impact on young and impressionable audiences – film policy too has seen the development of an instrumental rhetoric that defends public spending on the British film industry on the grounds of the alleged beneficial impacts of film on the socially excluded. John Hill (2004) has indeed shown how UK film policy has been in fact harnessed to contribute to New Labour's social inclusion agenda. Consequently, the rhetorical focus in the debate over public funding of the film sector is on the perceived social benefits of the cinematic experience, with no reference at all made to any potential negative impacts of film.

book, the novel was banned in many European countries, on account of being a negative influence on young and impressionable minds[43].

Interestingly, the idea behind the notion of the 'Werther effect' has been gaining an increasing amount of attention on the part of clinicians and media scholars preoccupied with the 'copycat effect' that might be engendered by depictions of suicide and violence in the popular media. Bokey and Walter (2002, 397) indeed conclude that, as a result of research into the 'Werther effect' and 'social contagion', "greater judgement and caution is now sometimes exercised by the media in the way real or fictitious violence, especially suicide, is depicted on screen or reported in newspapers" (see also Bondora and Goodwin 2005).

In a most influential paper published in 1985, the sociologist David P. Phillips, who coined the expression "Werther effect" and was instrumental in renewing the interest of the academic community in issues of social contagion, concluded:

> … the evidence assembled strongly suggests that perpetrators of violence who receive widespread exposure do indeed become role models – and that rewarding or punishing their behaviour does indeed encourage or discourage further violence. When murderers are executed or sentenced to life in prison, others are deterred from committing murders. When professional boxers are lavishly rewarded for inflicting pain on their opponents, others are encouraged to maim and kill. It appears, in short, that publicised violence, whether directed against oneself or against others, can beget more violence unless it is conspicuously punished (Phillips 1985, 35)[44].

The practical implications of these conclusions for the funders of the arts and the regulators of the media are obvious. Understandably, then, this idea of the profound impact of performances on behaviour has been at the root of much discussion over the issue of the increasing depiction of violence and sex on TV and the media and its psychological effects on the viewer, a typical example being the body of literature that purports a correlation between the consumption of pornographic material and

---

[43] Thorson and Öberg (2003) however, having reviewed the existing historical evidence, have questioned the popular belief that a suicide epidemic really took place after the publication of Goethe's novel.

[44] The methodology used by Phillips to establish this suggestion-imitation model for the explanation of suicidal behaviour has been subjected by criticism and scrutiny (see for instance Hittner 2005), although the others sources cited seem to agree on the positive correlation between exposition to material of violent content and an impact on behaviour in predisposed individuals.

sexually violent behaviour (see, for instance, Adams 2000; Seto *et al.* 2000; Shope 2004) [45].

In conclusion, can the arts affect behaviour? Can they corrupt? The questions are still open ones, as argued by James Harold (2005, 174):

> Now these kinds of causal claims – and pornography is the most studied example – are famously difficult to prove. The correlation, if there is any, between viewing or reading a fiction about an evil character and real changes in habit, attitude or behaviour on the part of the audience is extraordinarily difficult to measure, in part because it is so difficult to rule out other possible causes, and in part because it is so difficult to establish the *direction* of causation[46] (emphasis in the original).

Choosing fiction as a case study, Harold (*Ibid.*) suggests that in order to solve this conundrum it might be useful to think in terms of 'controlled' and 'automatic' mechanisms by which narrative imagination might affect us morally. The first perspective assumes an element of deliberation in our engagement with fictions: in this view, our higher cognitive faculties are always alert and actively engaged when we read literature. As a result, anything that is deemed to be morally unacceptable is rejected, and no unwanted or immoral new belief is accepted unwittingly. In the case of 'automatic' mechanisms, on the other hand, we are dealing with a number of processes that take place without our conscious control. For the proponents of this viewpoint, fiction might influence us in ways of which we have no awareness and no control over. 'Social contagion' and the 'Werther effect' obviously belong to this category. In reality, as Harold (*Ibid.*, 175) argues, the most interesting aspect of the study of 'artistic infection' is the interaction between these two mechanisms, and a study of their combined functioning might ultimately lead us to conclude that some fictions may indeed have mixed moral effects.

In his novel *Elizabeth Costello*, the South African writer J.M. Coetzee (2004) explores some of the issues discussed so far, and suggests, not only that reading

---

[45] In particular, Catharine MacKinnon has been a most influential personality in arguing, from a feminist perspective, for the acknowledgement of the links between pornography and violence on women. See MacKinnon 1987, pp. 127-133.

[46] By the notion of the 'direction' of causation, Harold refers to the possibility that, rather than pornography causing violence, the opposite case might be true that naturally violent people might be drawn to consume pornography (and more so than non-violent people).

certain kinds of fiction might be harmful, but also that *writing* fiction is an enterprise that exposes the novelist to a range of dangerous moral consequences. The novel's eponymous character, Elizabeth Costello, is an elderly Australian writer whose thoughts and experiences Coetzee charts throughout the book. Elizabeth's numerous invitations to conferences and guest lectures offer the required opportunities that allow her (and Coetzee through her) to express her views on a disparate number of issues. Invited to speak in Amsterdam on the theme 'Witness, Silence and Censorship' in the context of a philosophical conference exploring the theme of the existence of evil, Elizabeth builds her paper around the criticism of an actually existing novel by the British writer Paul West, *The very rich hours of Count von Stauffenberg*, a fictional account of the final hours and cruel execution of the group of people who, in 1944, made an attempt on Hitler's life. The day before the conference opening, Elizabeth finds out that Paul West will be amongst her audience, and the fear to offend him makes her ponder over her lecture:

> … she is not sure that writers who venture into the darker territories of the soul always return unscathed. She has begun to wonder whether writing what one desires, any more than reading what one desires, is in itself a good thing. […] Can anyone, she asks in her lecture, wander as deep as Paul West does into the Nazi forest of horrors and emerge unscathed? Have we considered that the explorer enticed into that forest may come out not better and stronger for the experience but worse?

Elizabeth eventually decides to confront Paul West before delivering her accusatory speech:

> … 'what I contend, is that we must be wary of horrors such as you describe in your book. We as writers. Not merely for the sake of our readers but out of concern for ourselves. We can put ourselves in peril by what we write, or so I believe. For if what we write has the power to make us better people then surely it has the power to make us worse'.

Elizabeth Costello reiterates these points in the paper she delivers to her audience:

> That is my thesis today: that certain things are not good to read *or to write*. To put the point in another way: I take seriously the claim that the artist risks a great deal by venturing into forbidden places: risks, specifically, himself; risks, perhaps, all. I take this claim seriously because I take seriously the forbiddenness of forbidden places. The cellar in which the July 1944 plotters

were hanged is one such forbidden place. I do not believe we should go into that cellar, any of us. I do not believe Mr West should go there; and, if he chooses to go nevertheless, I believe we should not follow (emphasis in the original).

On a less radical note, the Platonic idea of the powerful emotional impacts of the arts has generated another important strand of intellectual enquiry exploring the power of the arts to *distract* from worthier ethical preoccupations. This position is characterised by significantly more balance than displayed by the proponents of the anti-theatrical polemic; it is usually accompanied by the awareness that assuming that the arts have the power of transforming people entails the possibility that they might corrupt as well as improve. As Ruskin explains in his *From Munera Pulveris: Six essays on the elements of political economy* (1872, 7):

> If he [man] produce or make good and beautiful things, they will Re-Create him; (note the solemnity and weight of the word); if bad and ugly things, they will "corrupt" or "break in pieces" - that is, in the exact degree of their power, Kill him.

Ruskin (*Ibid.*, 15) further argues, with regards to literature:

> The value of these [books] consists, First, in their power of preserving and communicating the knowledge of facts. Secondly, in their power of exciting vital or noble emotion and intellectual action. They have also their corresponding negative powers of disguising and effacing the memory of facts, and killing the noble emotions, or exciting base ones. Under these two heads we have to consider the economical and educational value, positive and negative, of literature; - the means and advisability of rendering good books generally accessible, and directing the reader's choice to them.

A powerful articulation of the potentially distracting powers of the aesthetic sphere reminiscent of Platonic arguments is to be found in Schiller's tenth letter in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Here Schiller express doubts for the popular belief on the civilising powers of art, and puts forward a much darker view of the connection between art and the ethical quality of society:

> True, we are always being told, *ad nauseam*, that a developed feeling for beauty refines morals, so that this would not seem to stand in need of any further proof. People base this assumption on everyday experience, which almost always shows that clarity of mind, liveliness of feeling, graciousness,

yes even dignity, of conduct, are linked with a cultivated taste, and their opposite for the most part with an uncultivated one. […]

But there are voices worthy of respect raised against the effects of beauty, and armed against it with formidable arguments drawn from experience. 'It cannot be denied', they say, 'that the delights of the Beautiful can, in the right hands, be made to serve laudable ends. But it is by no means contrary to its nature for it to have, in the wrong hands, quite the opposite effect, and to put its soul-seducing power at the service of error and injustice (Schiller 1967, 63 and 65).

As Schiller (*Ibid.*, 65 and 67) further explains, the 'soul-seducing' powers of the arts are related to their being concerned with form over content, and hence, with the exterior appearance of things rather than their true nature, with predictable negative consequences:

Just because taste is always concerned with form, and never with content, it finally induces in the mind a dangerous tendency to neglect reality altogether, and to sacrifice truth and morality to the alluring dress in which they appear. All substantial difference between things is lost, and appearance alone determines their worth. How many men of talent', they continue, 'are not deflected by the seductive power of beauty from serious and strenuous effort, or at least misled into treating it lightly? How many of feeble intelligence are not in conflict with the social order just because the fancy of poets was pleased to present a world in which everything proceeds quite differently, in which no conventions fetter opinion, and no artifice suppresses nature? What dangerous dialectics have the passions not learned since, in the portrayals of the poets, they have been made to flaunt themselves in brilliant colours and, when in conflict with laws and duties, usually been left masters of the field? What has society profited from letting beauty prescribe the laws of social intercourse, which formerly were regulated by truth, or outward impression determine the respect which should attach to merit alone?

Unsurprisingly after such a build-up, the conclusion Schiller comes to in his tenth letter is decisive:

And indeed it must give pause for reflection that in almost every historical epoch in which the arts flourish, and taste prevails, we find humanity at a low ebb, and cannot point to a single instance of a high degree and wide diffusion of aesthetic culture going hand in hand with political freedom and civic culture, fine manners with good morals, refinement of conduct with truth of conduct (*Ibid.*, 67)

Equally decisive was the conclusion reached by Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), who fundamentally associated the aesthetic moment with deception and vice. In his hierarchical view of man's possible modes of existence, Kierkegaard sees the aesthetic one as the first, and hence, the least perfect. Indeed, it should ideally be but a stepping stone towards the ethical and finally the religious modes of existence (whereby the religious moment, and more precisely the adoption of a Christian mode of existence, represents the ultimate point of arrival of this journey). This is because the aesthetic existence is dominated by sensuality, instinct, and by a blind quest for pleasure. As Hammermeister (2002, 130) explains, "[w]hile for Kierkegaard most human beings exist in the aesthetic state, it is nevertheless a mode of life characterised by despair because it is painfully self-absorbed and unengaged. It should by all means be a temporary state, akin to the childhood of man, and the inability to leave it must be considered a form of arrested development". The rationale behind this view is the observation that the aesthetic existence is based on a disengagement with reality, since the world becomes nothing but "a mere reservoir for poetic production" (*Ibid.*, 133). In a later work entitled *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, Kierkegaard (1980, 77; first published in 1849) expresses his sceptical view of art when he discusses the concept of the 'poet-existence', which is a mode of existence that encompasses both a religious dimension (in that the concept of God is present) and an element of the despair and resignation that characterises the lower modes of existence:

> Christianly understood, every poet-existence (esthetics notwithstanding) is sin, the sin of poetizing instead of being, of relating to the good and the true through the imagination instead of being that - that is, existentially striving to be that.

Kierkegaard here is expressing a concern that has proved historically persistent, and which Hanson (1998, 204) links to the assumption that "art is removed, or removes us, from life, and thus from the strictures and obligations that properly bind us". Hanson (*Ibid.*, 205) further elucidates this position:

> The grounds for censure seem always roughly the same: some circumstances or events require action, and art in those circumstances or about those events

not only does not count *as*, but in fact *blocks*, appropriate action (emphasis in the original).

This conception of the distracting power of the arts resonates throughout Tolstoy's *What is Art?* (first published in 1898), where the Russian writer launches a ferocious attack against what he perceives as the immorality of the art of his times, and the reductive notion that he saw as prevailing, which equated art with mere amusement and entertainment for the wealthier classes. In the book, Tolstoy makes the case for the corruption that art has undergone in his time. Art, he argues, has become a way for the leisured classes to mask the emptiness of their lives. The price for such *divertissement* is the exploitation and the human suffering on which the regular provision of their favourite entertainments is based. Tolstoy (1930, 178) argues:

> To live as do the rich, idle people […] would be impossible were it not for what is called art – for this occupation and amusement which hides from them the meaningless of their lives, and saves them from the dullness that oppresses them. […] Only occupation with what, among them, is considered art, renders it possible for them to continue to live on, infringing all natural conditions, without perceiving the emptiness and cruelty of their lives. And this support afforded to the false manner of life pursued by the rich is the […consequence …] of the perversion of art.

Tolstoy is obviously and explicitly discrediting the view according to which the arts have the power to humanise and improve their audiences. He himself had faith in the potential of the arts to transmit the values of Christianity and thus contribute to the establishment of a brotherhood of men, yet, in reality, he could not but condemn the present state of things[47]. As Tallis (1995, 79) explains, "[t]he dissociation between the experience of art and a propensity to good behaviour angered Tolstoy. He would have had no difficulty in accepting that art was of little use in solving the problems of hunger and material need but he could not accept its uselessness in the practical world of relations between people. Art that did not promote morality was not worthy of the name".

---

[47] The direction that Tolstoy wished art to take is indicated in the conclusion of *What is Art?* (p. 211-2): "The destiny of art in our time is to transmit from the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth that well-being for men consists in being united together, and to set up, in place of the existing reign of force, that kingdom of God, *i.e.* of love, which we all recognise to be the highest of human life".

More recently, the guilty separation of art and life, and the resulting rejection of the duties and responsibilities of practical life in favour of the mere aesthetic contemplation of society's ills has been investigated by Arthur C. Danto (1981, 21-2). He refers to the concept of *psychic distance*, "a special insulation that a transformation of attitude puts between us and the object of our attentions, which is meant to contrast with what is designated the *practical* attitude". The contemplative detachment that can occasionally result from the aesthetic experience is what concerns Danto (*Ibid.*, 22):

> My own view incidentally is that there would be cases in which it would be wrong or inhuman to take an aesthetic attitude, to put at psychical distance certain realities – to see a riot, for instance, in which police are clubbing demonstrators, as a kind of ballet, or to see the bombs exploding like mystical chrysanthemums from the plane they have been dropped from. The question instead must arise as to what one should *do*. For parallel reasons, I think there are things it would be almost immoral to represent in art, precisely because they are then put at a distance which is exactly wrong from a moral perspective. Tom Stoppard once said that if you see an injustice taking place outside your window, the least useful thing you can do is write a play about it. I would go further, suggesting that there is something wrong in writing plays about that sort of injustice in which we have an obligation to intervene, since it puts the audience at just the sort of distance the concept of psychic distance means to describe […] [48].

A similar scepticism over the civilising and humanising powers of the arts, and a concern over the ethically dubious nature of processes of psychic distancing have been consistently expressed, over the past three decades, by George Steiner who - in his *Language and Silence* (1967, p. 86) wrote:

> We do not know whether the study of the humanities, of the noblest that has been said and thought, can do very much to humanize. We do not know; and surely there is something rather terrible in our doubt whether the study and delight a man

---

[48] Hanson (1998, 207) puts forward an interesting counterargument to Danto's critique of psychic distance, and argues: "If we do not see the connection between the pitiful events portrayed on stage and the dreadful circumstances on the street, why blame the play or playwright and not ourselves? The idea is farfetched that a play might exhaust our capacity for sympathy and purge us of any inclination to behave responsibly in the face of real opportunities for doing so; but if there were such plays, isn't it we who should still be faulted for indulging in them, in preference to other works, as we might be faulted in choosing to dull our reactions to the misfortunes of others by indulging in drinks and drugs? It is, in any case, hard to see that – why or how – plays about *injustice* would *necessarily* have this deeply enervating effect". The distinction made earlier between 'controlled' and 'automatic' processes of ' infection' through the arts is obviously most relevant here, and it could be argued that if the work of art has an impact on our behaviour that we are *unaware of*, then this ought to be seen as a mitigating circumstance that would reduce personal responsibility for 'allowing' the artwork to impact on us and make us irresponsive to the injustices it depicts.

takes in Shakespeare makes him any less capable of organizing a concentration camp.

Like Danto, Steiner (1996) too has expressed his reservation for an aesthetic contemplation that supplants action. The most recent instance is represented by a public lecture delivered at the University of Edinburgh in occasion of the opening of the Edinburgh festival:

> Personally, I cannot shake the intuition that minds and sensibilities shaped by aesthetics, by their identification with fictions, by their enchantment with the past (an entrenchment which defines a humanistic pedagogy and culture), may be inhibited from any active, concrete involvement in the anguish and demands of the present. The cries of Lear might blot out those in the street outside your window; Gieseking [sic] at Debussy may make it well-nigh impossible to hear the terror, the thirst of the victims on the way to Dachau in the Munich suburbs. As the millennium comes to its close, the Periclean, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment identification of excellence in the arts and in their reception with political-social decency and progress looks to be dubious.

The moral preoccupations expressed by Danto and Steiner had already found expression on one of the lesser known writings by Theodor Adorno, a paper entitled "Commitment" published in 1974 in the *New Left Review*, that discusses the politically committed nature of the work of Sartre and Brecht and the very possibility of a genuinely committed form of literary writing. Here Adorno further elaborated on his famous earlier claim that "[t]o write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today" (Adorno 1981; first published in 1967, 34), and writes:

> I have no wish to soften the saying that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric; it expresses in negative form the impulse which inspires committed literature. The question asked by a character in Sartre's play *Morts Sans Sépulture*, 'Is there any meaning in life when men exist who beat people until the bones break in their bodies?', is also the question whether any art now has a right to exist; whether intellectual regression is not inherent in the concept of committed literature because of the regression of society. But Enzensberger's retort also remains true, that literature must resist this verdict, in other words, be such that its mere existence after Auschwitz is not a surrender to cynicism. Its own situation is one of paradox, not merely the problem of how to react to it. The abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting; Pascal's theological saying, *On ne doit plus dormir*, must be secularized. Yet this suffering, what Hegel called consciousness of adversity, also demands the continued existence of art while it prohibits it; it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still

find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it (Adorno 1974, 84-5).

Adorno goes on to discuss the inevitable aporia of committed works such as Schoenberg's *Survivor of Warsaw*, which by "turning suffering into images" (*Ibid.*, 85) seem to make sense of the morally unacceptable. Hence Adorno's significant conclusion (*Ibid.*), which is worth quoting at length:

> The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle boots contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. The moral of this art, not to forget for a single instant, slithers into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic principle of stylisation, and even the solemn prayer of the chorus, make an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of its horror removed. This alone does an injustice to the victims; yet no art which tried to evade them could stand upright before justice. Even the sound of despair pays its tribute to a hideous affirmation. Works of less than the highest rank are even willingly absorbed, as contribution to clearing up the past. When genocide becomes part of the cultural heritage in the themes of committed literature, it becomes easier to continue to play along with the culture which gave birth to murder. There is one nearly invariable characteristic of such literature. It is that it implies, purposely or not, that even in the so-called extreme situations, indeed in them most of all, humanity flourishes. Sometimes this develops into a dismal metaphysic which does its best to work up atrocities into 'limiting situations' which it then accepts to the extent that they reveal authenticity in men. In such a homely existential atmosphere the distinction between executioners and victims becomes blurred; both, after all, are equally suspended above the possibility of nothingness, which of course is generally not quite so uncomfortable for the executioners[49].

Karen Hanson (1998, 214) agrees that the discussion of the relationship of art to life, and of the controversial (though also widely diffused) notion of the arts' humanising role, is made incredibly complex by "the emblematic, but historically real and genuinely problematic figure of the cultivated Nazi officer". As Petropoulos (1996, 5)

---

[49] Despite his concerns about these ethical issues in contemporary art, and literature in particular, it would be misleading to imply that Adorno's view of culture is totally negative. Indeed, Adorno's concept of 'authentic' culture somewhat mitigates the scepticism of the statement above, by suggesting that truly great art has the power to transform a particular and individual experience into a universally meaningful statement. A full discussion of Adorno's thinking on the arts is unfortunately beyond the scope of the present paper, but an intelligent yet accessible exposition of the principal ideas elaborated by Adorno on the arts and the cultural industry can be found in Held 1990 (especially chapter 3), and in an interesting discussion of Adorno's notion of autonomous art can be found in Harding 1992. Similarly, the critique that Adorno builds against the idea of committed literature cannot be given full justice here, though it is important to mention that an important aspect of Adorno's position is represented by his belief that an explicit and deliberate political commitment in art is likely to compromise the autonomy which he felt to be the pre-requisite of any 'authentic' art (Haslett 2000, 104).

points out, the nationalist Socialist elite "represent[s] the union of barbarism and culture", thereby questioning the conventional wisdom in favour of the humanising powers of art.

John Carey (2005, 140, ff.) in his confutation of the argument that contact with the arts makes people better human beings, argues that not only was Hitler passionate about the arts, he was himself a convinced proponent of their civilising mission! Frederic Spotts (2002, 16) writes of Hitler:

> It is difficult to think of any other leader in history who attached such importance to culture and indeed talked so much about it. *Mein Kampf*, speeches at the party rallies, and on other occasions, conversations with his inner circle and endless post-prandial chats were filled with it.

Hitler, indeed, represents a good example of that particular view - which Barzun (1975) associates with the view of art as religion – whereby "worship of art made human beings expendable" (Carey 2005, 143) [50]. Never did human history provide a more compelling example for the failure of the arts to represent a civilising and humanising force in society.

If we move from the societal to the individual level, we must also register the work done in the psychology field by the area of research referred to as 'happiness studies'. For instance, a recent paper co-authored by the renown scholar of creativity Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2003) - the creator of the 'theory of flow' - reported the findings of a vast empirical research that showed, amongst other things, that young people who loved reading for pleasure and systematically spent a significant part of their leisure time reading, displayed lesser social skills and lower indicators of happiness than their peers who devoted their free time to playground games. Whilst it would be foolish to suggest that funding to literature programmes should be cut on the basis of this evidence (and indeed, in no way does the paper suggests anything of the sort), a

---

[50] Barzun (1975, 18) cites a passage by Ernest Hemingway that encapsulate this view: "A country, finally, erodes and the dust blows away, the people die and none of them were of any importance permanently, except those who practiced the arts. … A thousand years makes economics silly and a work of art endures forever". This Barzun (*Ibid.*, 19) takes to be a typical example of that view according to which "[h]human beings have no importance, they do no last a thousand years. Art has and does".

serious approach to social impacts assessment ought to at least acknowledge the possibility that the arts might have negative impacts. This is important issue that is routinely ignored in the discussion and measurement of the social impacts of the arts. The political and practical reasons for such neglect are obvious, and yet, as the present section of the paper has attempted to show, numerous and sophisticated arguments that question the humanising and positive transformative powers of the arts have been put forward over time, and a serious debate over the social impacts of the arts ought to take into account this 'negative' intellectual tradition too.

In conclusion, this chapter has presented a necessarily terse review of a distinctive 'negative' strand in the Western tradition of philosophical investigations around the powers of the arts to transform people. This strand of writing purports that the arts have potentially damaging effects on both individuals and society as a whole. According to the thinkers considered here, the ways in which the arts can exert such negative impacts can be very diverse, though they cluster around two main allegations. On a cognitive level, the concern of the writers discussed here focuses on the misleading nature of the common belief that we can acquire knowledge and insight into human nature from poetry and art. On the ethical level, the charges are that the arts may affect ethical beliefs and behaviour for the worse, or distract from worthier preoccupation or the need to take action when the circumstances require it.

Chapter 3: Catharsis

The concept of catharsis as the end result of tragic theatrical performance finds its first elaboration in the *Poetics*, a later work by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384/3-322/1 BC), a pupil of Plato. Commentators widely agree that, whilst an original work, the *Poetics* was meant to be a response to Plato's attack on poetry in book X of the *Republic*, and an attempt to put forward a more positive view of the arts, their emotional impacts and cognitive value (Dorsch 1965, 17; Cooper 1972, 9)[51]. As we will see, Aristotle's concept of catharsis, has proven extremely influential, inspiring, above all, the theories of the Italian Renaissance literary critics of the generation flourishing around the mid-XVI century, and extending its effects to the most disparate disciplines, including literary criticism, classical studies, philosophy, psychology and psychoanalysis (Hathaway 1962, 205-300)[52].

Aristotle's discussion of catharsis is, as a matter of fact, very limited in the *Poetics*, and, indeed, the term occurs only once in the entire work. Unsurprisingly then, a number of different interpretations have been put forward, over the centuries, that attempt to reconstruct Aristotle's thinking on the basis of his arguments and references to similar concepts in the rest of the *Poetics* (which, however, has come to us possibly incomplete) and other earlier writings by Aristotle, namely the *Rhetorics*, the *Politics* and *the Nicomachean Ethics*. Indeed, Hathaway (*Ibid.*, 206) has suggested that the vagueness and hence mysteriousness of Aristotle's concept of catharsis (which is never actually defined univocally) might have been one of the reasons for its immense popularity, especially with the literary critics of the Italian

---

[51] According to Kostic (1960, 65), the first to have this insight was the Italian critic Vettori, in his *Petrii Victorii Commentarii, in primum librum Aristotelis de Arte Poetarum*, published in Florence in 1560. The essence of Aristotle's response to Plato's suspicion of the power of poetry and theatre to arouse dangerous emotions (leading to them being banned from the ideal state) is then that these are in fact 'purged' and neutralised through tragedy. Hence, as Nuttall (1996, 7) puts it, "… Aristotle's point is that the civil authorities can relax; the emotions go away. In which case the poet may be permitted to stay in the city".

[52] Golden (1962, 51), for instance, refers to Aristotle's notion of catharsis as "one of the 'big' ideas in literary criticism". The eminent classical scholar Gerald F. Else, in his influential book, entitled *Aristotle's Poetics: The argument* (1963, 443-4), put forward a contrary, and more controversial, argument, by pointing out that it is the later commentators that have put so much emphasis on the idea of theatrical catharsis, though there is very little evidence that catharsis had a central role in Aristotle's thinking. Had it been a notion central to Aristotle *Poetics*, Else's argument goes, he would have referred to it more than one time, rather than mentioning in passing in chapter 6, never to go back to it again.

Renaissance, who were on the lookout for intellectual ammunition to combat the influence of the Platonic suspicion of poetry that was discussed earlier.

The importance of the claim for a cathartic function of theatre in particular, and the arts in general, lies in the fact that the idea of a personal growth and of a moral self-perfecting process, that are subsumed within it, have been historically very important rationales for the state promotion of the arts and the encouragement of public participation in cultural activities. In some way, Aristotle can be seen to offer one of the first 'instrumental' interpretations of the value of tragic performance. This point was first made, in the 1960s, by Baxter Hathaway (1962, 205) with reference to the influence of catharsis on theorists of the XVI century. Yet, as this section of the paper will show, the argument could in fact be extended to modern criticism too:

> For over four hundred years now, Aristotle's idea that the function of tragedy can be likened to a purgation has been a dynamic principle in literary criticism, for better or for worse. It has been a constant invitation to philosophers to apply standards to poetry that do not pertain to poetry as poetry and that make it function as instrumental assistant to some job or other of social or psychological welfare.

Today, the question is still far from being settled and the most popular interpretations of the notion of catharsis are still fighting for popularity and for the role of 'best' interpretation of the perplexing yet tantalizing Aristotelian passage on catharsis. The passage in question is represented by the opening paragraph of chapter 6 of the *Poetics*, where Aristotle proffers his own definition of tragedy. As Aristotle himself explains in the introduction of the essay, the *Poetics* is a work that concerns itself with the defining characteristics of the various kinds of poetry, that is, epic poetry, dramatic poetry, and lyrical poetry. Mention of the process of catharsis appears at the beginning of chapter 6, which deals with dramatic poetry of the tragic kind[53]. The crux of the problem is how to translate the term *katharsin*, which closes Aristotle's definition of tragedy, for the choice of one alternative over another implies the subscription to one of the many interpretations of tragic catharsis elaborated in the last two thousand years.

---

[53] In Aristotle's plans (as he mentions himself in the opening line of chapter 6), a second part dealing specifically with comedy ought to have followed this discussion of tragedy. This part, however, was either never written or lost forever.

For example, in his influential translation, Butcher (1951, 23) rendered the final part of the definition of tragedy so:

> Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete in itself, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in several parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; *through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions* (emphasis added).

This is, indeed, one of the most commonly accepted translations[54], based on the fact that the verb *kathairo* means, in ancient Greek, 'to cleanse' or 'remove impurities' (Lucas 1968, 276). Other commentators, however, have suggested very different alternatives for the crucial last part of Aristotle's definition of tragedy. So, for instance, Margoliouth (1911, 154) proposes: "indirectly through pity and terror *righting mental disorders of this type*". W. Hamilton Fyfe (1932, 23) suggests that tragedy, through pity and fear, "effects *relief* to these and similar emotions". Others[55] still, have chosen, rather, to play it safe, by using the word 'catharsis' in their translation; if on the one hand this choice might avoid the risk of putting words in Aristotle's mouth that he did not intend to utter, on the other, it leaves the interpretative problem open, without even suggesting a possible solution.

Whilst the philological debates that are behind these competing alternative translations are beyond the scope and the concerns of the present paper, the different interpretations of the process of 'catharsis' as envisaged by Aristotle to result from tragedies are of great relevance to the present study. For the different understandings of catharsis have proven, over the centuries, very influential, so that each of them has represented the seedbed for subsequent theories of the educational, purifying and emotional impacts of the arts. It is indeed the legacy of Aristotle's catharsis that will be at the centre of this discussion. The following analysis relies on Halliwell's (1986, 350-6) classification of the main interpretations of the concept of catharsis. Every single one of these has proved popular and influential over time, giving rise to entirely distinct and complex theories of the cathartic powers of the arts. The

---

[54] The controversial term *katharsin* is also translated as purgation by Dorsch 1965 and Potts 1962.
[55] Such as, for instance, Bywater 1909 and Halliwell 1995.

following discussion will therefore be necessarily terse and succinct and focus principally on the ramifications of Aristotle's thinking that are most relevant to the present discussion.

Halliwell (*Ibid.*) identifies six main interpretation of 'catharsis':

Moralistic/Didactic Catharsis

The first one, which prevailed in the period of neo-classicism, is the *moralistic* or *didactic* view of catharsis, which posits that tragedy (and the argument was eventually extended to theatre in general) has primarily a function of moral education. Through example and counter-example, theatrical performances teach the audience to restrain their own emotions, thus avoiding the consequences that would befall them if those feeling and passions had free rein on them. As Halliwell (1986, 351) explains, "we learn through *katharsis* to avoid those passions which can lead to suffering and tragedy". As mentioned above, this interpretation was the favoured one in the mid XVI century, and was particularly promoted in the writings of the Italian humanists, particularly by Francesco Robortelli, and Vincenzo Maggi (Kostic 1960 and Hathaway 1962)[56].

Francesco Robortelli, in the introduction to his commentaries on the *Poetics*, published in 1548, observes:

> If the imitation and performance on the stage is of horrible things and perils, the temerity and the insane audacity of men is diminished; but if things worthy of pity should be represented, the minds of the auditors are bent towards gentleness and pity. What more need I say? Every imitation and every poetic performance accompanied by action pulls, softens, drives, incites, touches, inflames the souls of men (in Hathaway 1962, 219-20).

---

[56] The importance of the attention that the notion of tragic catharsis roused during the Italian Renaissance should not be underestimated, for, as the unfolding discussion will attempt to show, the work of the Italian critics will prove most influential on later understanding of the didactic function of the arts. As Kostic (1960, 69) observes: "… generally speaking, Italian criticism is by far the most important body of Renaissance criticism; not only did the critical activity begin to develop in Italy for the first time, but the critics from other countries were in most cases content to follow Italian models".

Robortelli's views were echoed in the commentaries published just two years later by Vincenzo Maggi, who argued that tragedy works its magic on the audience by freeing "the mind of perturbations like pity and terror. Passions of the mind of this kind are precisely the concupiscible and irascible passions" (*Ibid.*, 222). What these passages represent is the crystallization of one of the most common interpretations of catharsis as 'purgation' of excessive or undesirable emotions through the theatrical experience. Hathaway (Ibid) and Halliwell (1986) argue that it is precisely this view which, first popularised by the Renaissance writers[57], and through later developments in Corneille, Rapin and Dacier, in France, and Dryden and Johnson in England, established itself as one of the orthodox interpretations of the cathartic process as 'purgation'. One of the clearest expositions of the moralistic/didactic view, is offered by Isaiah Smithson (1983), who argues that, in tragedy, pity and fear are ultimately 'self-directed emotions', in that the audience can fear for and sympathise with the heroes on stage purely because they are able to identify with them, and they can therefore envisage their misfortune happening to themselves. Smithson (*Ibid.* 16) thus concludes:

> This realization, that one is never exempt from pity and fear for one's own moral possibilities, is what I take to be Aristotle's meaning of catharsis. Catharsis clarifies (even purges or purifies) an illusion spectators have about their moral impregnability. The universal truth that members of the audience learn and relearn through the catharsis brought about by *Oedipus Tyrannus* and all tragedy is that life and action have moral aspects, and that at any time circumstances may force them into a position in which their character is assessed. The tragic pleasure the unified plot affords and that accompanies, intensifies, and completes the experiencing of tragedy is the observer's being forced momentarily to accept that his or her life has moral implications.

The notion of 'purgation' that is at the root of this view of the effects of tragedy has often been interpreted in therapeutic terms, for the moralistic interpretation of catharsis sometimes incorporates a 'medical analogy' (first put forward by Aristotle himself in *Politics* 8). The French classical scholar André Dacier (1651- 1722), for

---

[57] This passage from the English translation by Robert Peterson in 1576 of the *Galateo* of Giovanni della Casa (1503-1556) is emblematic of the influential view popular with XVI century Italian critics: "Albeit, not long since I heard it said to a worthy gentleman our neighbour, that men have many times more need to weep than to laugh. And for that cause, he said, these doleful tales which we call tragedies were devised at first, that when they were played in the theatre (as at that time they were wont) they might draw forth tears out of their eyes, that had need to spend them. And so they were by their weeping healed of their infirmity" (cited in Herrick 1926, 159).

instance, described tragedy as "une veritable medicine" (*Ibid.*, 351)[58]. The English poet, scholar and pamphleteer John Trapp (1679-1747) further developed this physiological metaphor into an 'homeopathic' one, whereby tragedy purges the passion by agitating them, in a process that is similar to the way in which, in medical practice, the 'humours' of the body are often agitated by medicines of the same nature (e.g. acids by acids, etc.) in order to be neutralised (Herrick 1926, 158). As the following analysis will show, this ramification of the Aristotelian view of the didactic function of tragic performance will prove most influential in shaping theories of the formative role of the arts.

Emotional Fortitude

The second position on catharsis, often overlapping with the first one, is the one that sees the effect of tragedy in the acquisition of *emotional fortitude*[59] through the witnessing, on the stage, of the greater sufferings of the tragic characters. In this view, then, the formative role of the theatre lies in making the audience less susceptible to the consequences of 'pity and fear' by making them accustomed to the disruptive effects of misfortune, so that, should they ever find themselves in similar circumstances, they might be in a position to bear them more easily. In many ways this view is also linked to the 'homeopathic' aspect of the notion of catharsis referred to above: the audience grows emotionally stronger by living through a theatrical experienced based on the very emotions (pity and fear) that are toughened in the process. Hence, in this view – which also gained popularity during the Renaissance and the Spanish Golden Age (XVIII century)[60] - the reduction of emotional susceptibility is in itself the ultimate goal of tragic performances (Halliwell 1986, 351-2). A notable advocate of this view was Hegel, who referring back explicitly to

---

[58] Jacob Bernays (2004, first published in 1857), who many commentators consider the most prominent exponent of this position in modern times, defines this as "the *pathological* point of view", which he sees as a distinct interpretative perspective in its own right, which does not have to be necessarily linked to the moralistic dimension. He argues: "And why should one look on theatrical catharsis from a moral or hedonistic point of view before one tries to do it from *that* point of view from which Aristotle has approached catharsis in general in the *Politics*? But that is not the moralistic, nor as little the purely hedonistic; it is a *pathological* point of view" (p. 325).
[59] Halliwell has borrowed the expression from Veselin Kostic (1960) who first used it in the context of his discussion of interpretations of catharsis developed by Renaissance critics.
[60] For an interesting discussion of the interpretation of tragic catharsis amongst critics in XVIII century Spain, see Darst (1971)

Aristotle's *Poetics*, argued that the representation of human passions, emotions and troubles, moves us to reflect on them, and so reduces the grip that those emotions have on us (Hammermeister 202, 94).

Moderation

The third interpretation of catharsis, which Halliwell calls 'of *moderation*', relies on two central notions in Aristotle's thinking on ethics, namely the concept of the *mean* and *habitus*. The difference with the earlier position rests on the fact that rather than a simple reduction of the audience's susceptibility to the emotions of pity and fear, in this version of catharsis, the audience goes through a process of "psychological attunement or balance" (Halliwell 1986, 352). This might entail a heightened or reduced receptiveness to emotions, depending on what is required by each audience member to reach the desirable 'mean' (or, in other words, balance). As Dorsch (1965, 19) maintains, by catharsis, Aristotle "means their restoration to the right proportions, to the desirable 'mean', which is the basis of his discussion of human qualities in the *Ethics*". It is through repeated experience of the cathartic process, that audiences can develop a *habitus*, and thus learn to feel the emotions in question in the right way and to the right degree. The English poet Milton, in the preface to his *Samson Agonistas* (1671) offers the only example of this interpretation of the tragic catharsis in early English criticism (Kostic 1960, 72):

> Tragedy, as it was antiently compos'd, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems: therefore said by *Aristotle*, to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is, to temper and *reduce them to just measure* with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion: for so in Physic things of melancholic hue and quality are us'd against melancholy, sowr against sowr, salt to remove salt humours (cited in Herrick 1926, 159)[61].

More recently, Ernst Cassirer has taken it upon himself to re-formulate this view for a XX century readership. In his *An Essay on Man* (1944, 148-9), he argues that the cathartic process as intended by Aristotle does not refer to a process of purgation or

---

[61] This passage also clearly shows that Milton subscribed to the 'homeopathic' understanding of the processes by which catharsis takes place that was discussed above.

any similar transformation in the passions represented on the stage. For Cassirer, the locus of transformation is the human soul, which achieves, through the aesthetic experience, "a state of rest and peace":

> The highest intensification of our emotional life is thought of as at the same time giving us a sense of repose. We live through all our passions feeling their full range and highest tension. But what we leave behind when passing the threshold of art is the hard pressure, the compulsion of our emotions. The tragic poet is not the slave but the master of his emotions; and he is able to transfer this mastery to the spectators. In his work we are not swayed and carried away by our emotions. Aesthetic freedom is not the absence of passion, not Stoic apathy, but just the contrary. It means that our emotional life acquires its greatest strength, and that in this very strength it changes its form. For here we no longer live in the immediate reality of things but in a world of pure sensuous forms. *In this world all our feelings undergo a sort of transubstantiaton with respect to their essence and their character* (*Ibid.*, 148; emphasis added).

Emotional Release

The fourth interpretation identified by Halliwell is the one that has proven predominant in modern times, and it is the one that sees catharsis as a process of 'emotional release or *outlet*', whereby the theatrical performance effectively provides a means of expending any pent-up or extreme emotions. According to this view, the question of tragic pleasure (or in other words, the question of why spectators enjoy witnessing painful and upsetting events on stage) is resolved by the recourse to the idea of 'psychic discharge'; though audiences are not aware that this process is taking place, its beneficial effects can be noted nonetheless (Nuttall 1996, 39). This view is heavily indebted to the already mentioned therapeutic approach to the purging role of tragedy championed by Jacob Bernays in the late XIX century. In the view here under examination, however, the medical analogy becomes paramount, so that emphasis is placed entirely on the idea of therapeutic *relief* from passions through the theatrical experience at the expense of any ethical dimension of the process (which, as we have seen earlier, was an important element of the 'pathological' view elaborated by the Italian Renaissance critics, Milton and Dacier). The most significant modern re-interpretation of this therapeutic view is represented by the notion that a person's recognition of personal experiences being reflected in the action on stage can result in those experiences and emotions (usually troubling to the individual in question) being 'resolved'. In other words, in this view, theatrical performances afford audiences the

possibility of confronting ambiguous and troubling issues in their own lives (Meisiek 2004, 802).

The most influential example of such an understanding of catharsis (here extended to the entire sphere of artistic expression, or just expression *tout court*) is without doubts the elaboration by Freud and his colleague Breuer of what they referred to as the 'cathartic method' for the treatment of hysteria (Breuer and Freud 1955 [1893-5]). Freud and Breuer's central idea was that repressed negative emotions can build up within an individual and ultimately cause psychological symptoms. The cathartic method they devised, thus, was centred on the importance of the release of the emotional state that was originally associated with the traumatic experience. Freud called the procedure by which the analyst helps the patient relive and discharge past, traumatic emotions, 'abreaction'. The key aspects of the cathartic method appear in their clearest form in the discussion that Freud and Breuer (*Ibid.*, 21-47) offer of the case of Anna O., one of Breuer's patients. Breuer observed that the only way to relieve Anna of her symptoms was to allow her to describe her emotions during the hypnotic sessions and indulge in her favourite poetical ways of expressing them (she referred to her hypnosis sessions as 'the clouds'[62]):

> If during this [the 'clouds'] she was able to narrate the hallucinations she had had in the course of the day, she would wake up clear in mind, calm and cheerful. She would sit down to work and write or draw far into the night quite rationally. […] If for any reason she was unable to tell me the story during her evening hypnosis she failed to calm down afterwards, and on the following day she had to tell me *two* stories in order for this to happen" (*Ibid.*, 27 and 29).

Having followed the cathartic method for some time, however, Freud became frustrated with its limitations, and begun work on the development of psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, the influence of Freud's (and Breuer's) early work on catharsis and abreaction has undoubtedly been most influential in shaping understanding of the cathartic effects of the arts in the XX century. Although the extent of such influence cannot satisfactorily be discussed here, we would suggest that a good example of

---

[62] Breuer (*Ibid.*, 21) himself describes Anna as having "great poetic and imaginative gifts", and it would appear that we owe her the term 'talking-cure' to describe the psychoanalytical process (*Ibid.*, 30).

contemporary theories ultimately rooted in Aristotle's notion of catharsis as mediated by Freud are represented by the work of Thomas J. Scheff. He has argued that catharsis through the theatrical experience is made possible by a physical reaction to emotional experiences (such as laughing or crying at what happens on the stage). These outwards signs confirm that, whilst watching the performance, the members of the audience project their emotions onto the characters of the play, and so are released themselves from the grip of those emotions. The therapeutic value of this experience is obvious, especially when negative emotions are thus projected and neutralised. Whilst this is largely an unconscious process and the spectator is likely to assume that the emotions felt are a product of the performance, in reality, the performance allows him or her to let go of pre-existing feelings relating to troubling past experiences (Meisiek 2004, 803).

Furthermore, the development of psychotherapeutic theatre by the likes of Jacob L. Moreno (1889-1974) is also indebted to Aristotle's theory of catharsis. Moreno developed the concept and practice of 'psychodrama', a method of group therapy (but also, in Moreno's view, a mode of living) based on the use of a dramatic format and theatrical terms (Holmes 1991, 7). Moreno argued that in the practice of psychodrama[63], a cathartic process occurs that "produces a healing effect – not in the spectator (secondary catharsis) but in the producer-actors who produce the drama and, at the same time, liberate themselves from it" (Moreno 1974 [1940])

Though not strictly concerned with the therapeutic aspects of catharsis, Constantin Stanislavsky's psychodynamic acting method is also inscribed in the Aristotelian tradition mediated by psychoanalytical considerations. In his book *An Actor Prepares* (1937), Stanislavsky tries to bring together the work of the playwright and the actors with the empathic response of audiences in the concept of *emotion memory*, which he (*Ibid.*, 168) explains thus:

> Just as your visual memory can reconstruct a inner image of some forgotten thing, place or person, your emotion memory can bring back feelings you have already experienced. They may seem to be beyond recall, when suddenly a suggestion, a thought, a familiar object will bring them back in full force.

---

[63] Psychodrama was first created in Vienna in the 1920s and gave rise to much interest, especially in the US, only to come back to Europe for a period of growth in the 1950s. Though psychodrama was not initially developed as the form of therapeutic theatre the label indicates today, its therapeutic potential soon became obvious, and Moreno was a key figure in this shift (Røine 1997, chapter 1).

> Sometimes the emotions are as strong as ever, sometimes weaker, sometimes
> the same strong feelings will come back but in a somewhat different guise.

For Stanislavski, then, the process starts with the actor attempting to get a sense of his or her role. Guided by the work of the playwright, actors must try to establish a link between the emotions expressed in the script and their own past experiences: "Those feelings, drawn from your past experience, and transferred to our part, are what give life to the play. […] All external production is formal, cold, and pointless if it is not motivated from within" (*Ibid.*, 164). The actor must subsequently project his/her own feelings onto his/her role, thereby allowing the audience to empathically share in them, so that, ultimately, the emotional burden lies with the actor, rather than the audience (as in most cathartic theories of drama)[64]. For Stanislavski, the essence of catharsis lies precisely in this remembering of past experiences and emotions, which – if negative – lose their harmful character in the process of being brought back to consciousness and harnessed in order to get into the spirit of the part[65].

Intellectual Catharsis

Another important version of theatrical catharsis identified by Halliwell (1986) is that of *intellectual* catharsis, whereby the emotional aspects of the theatrical experience become secondary compared with its alleged cognitive value. One of the most prominent proponents of this view is Leon Golden (1962), who arrives at his conclusion by connecting the references to *katharsin* in the clause of the definition of tragedy with what Aristotle said about the way men learn in chapter 4 of the *Poetics*. Here Aristotle maintains that imitation is the most natural way for men to learn.

---

[64] In Stanislavsky's own words (*Ibid.*, 177): "You can understand a part, sympathize with the person portrayed, and put yourself in his place, so that you will act as he would. That will arouse feelings in the actor that are *analogous* to those required for the part. But those feelings will belong, not to the person created by the authors of the play, but to the actor himself" (emphasis in the original).

[65] The theory of catharsis in theatre as a way to develop motivation for action, which is at the heart of Augusto Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed* (2000) can also be seen as a contemporary derivation of the therapeutic interpretation of Aristotelian catharsis. Boal however, begins with a critique of what he refers to as "Aristotle's coercive system of tragedy function" (*Ibid.*, 36), on the basis that any limitation of actions on the basis of a fixed set of patterns of action is a form of coercion and oppression (Boal refers here to the prescriptions for plot and character development to be found in Aristotle's *Poetics*). Boal argues that the theatre can produce an emotional dissonance in the audience which might in turn spur them into action in their real lives. The ultimate aim of the theatrical experience is indeed the dissolution of all forms of both physical and psychological oppression, and the cathartic moment has a central role in the theatrical mission (see also Meisiek 2004, 809-813).

Aristotle fundamentally agrees with Plato on the mimetic nature of art and poetry, and indeed states this quite explicitly in the opening chapter of the *Poetics*. However, whereas the imitative nature of poetry, as we have seen, was the basis for Plato's denial of any cognitive function for poetry, Aristotle, though starting from the same assumption, comes to a much different conclusion. Aristotle argues that it is precisely because of its mimetic nature that poetry can carry out its educational role. Learning, indeed, is, according to Aristotle, one of the goals of all poetry. The learning process as described in book 4 of the *Poetics* is thus summarised by Golden (*Ibid.*, 53-4):

> The act of learning which Aristotle refers to can be most clearly understood to mean the act of inferring, from the particular act witnessed in the artistic presentation, the universal class to which this act belongs. The artist so organizes his work that the spectator is able to infer, from the individual circumstances pictured before him, the universal law which subsumes them. This movement from the particular to the universal involves a learning process in that it renders clearer and more distinct the significance of the events presented in the work of art.

This is precisely why, Aristotle argues in chapter 4 of the *Poetics*, we take pleasure in witnessing unpleasant events (such as in tragedy), as the pleasure is, in fact, a result of the learning process that those unpleasant events witnessed on stage bring about. On the grounds of the observation that *katharos* - the adjectival form that share the same root *as katharsin* - in classical Greek also meant 'clear' in an intellectual sense, Golden (*Ibid.*, 56-7) argues that Aristotle had this particular metaphorical meaning in mind when he chose to conclude his definition of tragedy in chapter 6 with the words '*katharsin*': "Thus it becomes possible to translate *katharsis*, on the basis of this evidence, as the act of 'making clear' or the process of 'clarification' by means of which something that is intellectually obscure is made clear to an observer".

As Martha Nussbaum (1986, 389), another advocate of this position points out, this usage of *katharos* to mean intellectual clarification was current at the time when Aristotle was writing his *Poetics*, having already been brought into common use by none other than Plato in his *Republic*. Here, and in the *Phaedrus*, Plato asserts that *katharos* cognition is indeed what we have whenever the soul is not hampered by bodily obstacles and constrictions. Hence, Nussbaum (*Ibid.*) concludes, "*Katharsis* is the clearing up of the vision of the soul by the removal of these obstacles; thus the

katharon becomes associated with the true or truly knowable, the being who has achieved *katharsis* with the truly or correctly knowing". It is precisely on the basis of this influential precedent that Nussbaum feels entitled to assert that Aristotle's epistemological use of the term and notion of catharsis to indicate the removal of a pre-existing obstacle (and, hence, a process of intellectual clarification) as "easy and natural"[66].

Dramatic or Structural Catharsis

The final interpretation of catharsis that Halliwell identifies is the one he refers to as *dramatic* or *structural catharsis*, which posits that catharsis is not a phenomenon concerning the audience of a tragic performance, but rather an internal feature of the dramatic text. One of its modern proponents is Gerald Else (1963, 439), who defines catharsis as "a transitive or operational factor within the tragic structure itself", and explains: "Thus the catharsis is not a change or end-product in the spectator's soul, or in the fear and pity (i.e., the dispositions to them) in his soul, but a process carried forward in the emotional material of the play by its structural elements, above all by the recognition". By recognition, here, Else means the part of the play where it becomes clear that the misfortune that has befallen upon the tragic hero is not deserved, and that he is, in fact, not guilty, and his motives were not μ?a???, that is, morally repellent.

The structural view of catharsis has had, over time, illustrious proponents, such as for instance, Goethe, who in his *Gleanings from Aristotle's Poetics* (1826) made a case for it, and proposed to translate the controversial passage in chapter 6 of the *Poetics* as "tragedy is the imitation of a significant and completed action, which after a pitiful and fearful course completes its business with the stabilizing of such passions" (cited in Bernays 2004, 321). Bernays (*Ibid.*) has gone to great extent to prove that Goethe's translation is incompatible with the usage and grammar of the classical Greek language. Questions of philological propriety aside, this last interpretation of catharsis

---

[66] For a refutation of Golden's and Nussbaum's epistemological interpretation if catharsis, see Nuttall (1996, 11-15).

has been the least fruitful in terms of originating a distinct intellectual tradition, and it is also the least relevant to the present discussion.

What are we to make of this necessarily abbreviated discussion of the notion of catharsis and its numerous interpretations? Whilst it is probably unlikely that an agreement will ever be reached amongst classical scholars, philosophers and literary critics over what Aristotle really meant by ???a?s??, it is beyond doubt that - by presenting a radically different and contrasting view of the function of theatre and poetry than that offered by Plato's *Republic* - Aristotle has made a very significant contribution to the development of a positive intellectual tradition that attributes to the arts a formative and moral function. As we will see, this strand of aesthetic thought has developed in original and creative ways over the two and a half millennia that separate us from Aristotle's times, forming a major component of the European intellectual tradition and becoming one of the cornerstones for systems of public subsidy of the arts throughout the West.

Chapter 4: Personal well-being

The claims grouped under this category can be seen, in many respects, as a derivation of Aristotle's theory of catharsis discussed above. In these cases, the medical metaphor which, as we have seen, has been at the centre of an interpretative debate over Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*, has been developed into full-blown new theoretical developments focusing on the effects of the arts on individuals' well-being and, more recently, quality of life. Two main derivations of the original Aristotelian ideas can be identified under the heading of 'theories claiming that the arts can be beneficial to personal health and well-being", one more theoretical, the other more pragmatic in its nature and aims.

Pleasure and Enjoyment

On a more theoretical and philosophical level, the point that the enjoyment of art can result in a pleasurable experience that enhances personal well-being was made, amongst others, by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). For Kant, the arts have primarily a cognitive function, and the aesthetic pleasure lies precisely in the constant attempt – never successful - to move from imagination to understanding through the aesthetic experience (Hammermeister 2002, 30). However, in his *Critique of Judgement*, he argues that even when the artistic experience is just too removed from conceptual cognition to bring anything more than simple enjoyment, such enjoyment, whilst it should not be confused with enjoyment of the sublime, is in itself beneficial for man's well-being, both physical and mental. In Kant's (1987, 134) own words:

> The agreeable lassitude we feel after being stirred up by the play of affects is our enjoyment of the well-being that results from the establishment of the equilibrium of our various vital forces. This enjoyment comes to no more in the end than what Oriental voluptuaries find so appealing when they have their bodies thoroughly kneaded, as it were, and have all their muscles and joints gently squeezed and bent – except that in the first case the moving principle is for the most part within us, whereas in the second it is wholly outside us. Thus many people believe they are edified by a sermon that in fact builds no edifice (no system of good maxims), or are improved by the performance of a tragedy when in fact they are merely glad at having succeeded in routing boredom.

As we will see in the second part of this section of the paper, a similar understanding of the role that the enjoyment of the arts can have in determining well-being is at the heart of modern concepts of 'art therapy'.

Relief from 'Will'

Schopenhauer's understanding of the aesthetic pleasure is not dissimilar from Kant's (Janaway 1994, 59). In his *The World as Will and Representation*, however, Schopenhauer brings his own distinctive nuance to the concept, whereby art is seen as one of the few means of protection from the anguish brought about by the unbearable human condition. As Hammermeister (2002, 111) observes, Schopenhauer's writings "signal the beginning of the dismantling of the idealist tradition". The main – and, according to Hammermeister, the most problematic - symptom of such departure is the 'individualist turn' of Schopenhauer's thinking, as a result of which art is no longer considered as tied to a community (be it a universal community of mankind, as for Kant, or Hegel's notion of a community based in the nation-state). For him, art becomes important only from the point of view of the isolated individual that finds in the artistic experience a way to escape, at least temporarily, from an unbearable human existence and the responsibilities and pressures brought about by communal life. In other words, the engagement with the aesthetic brings about not a higher form of engagement with the world, but rather an attempt to withdraw from it (*Ibid.*, 112-3).

For Schopenhauer, the arts afford man a much needed form of 'consolation': as Janaway (1996, 47) explains, "the tranquil contemplation of art gives us a pleasant and valuable aesthetic *experience*. Dwelling on the perception of some particular thing's beauty is therapeutic because it frees the mind from the pains and strivings associated with the body albeit temporarily". The function of the arts as temporary remedy to the anguish of life is closely related to the notion of 'will', since the crucial problems of aesthetics is - according to Schopenhauer – precisely "how satisfaction with and pleasure in an objects are possible without any reference thereto to our willing" (quoted in Janaway 1994, 59). What Schopenhauer precisely meant by 'will' is a much debated and complicated question, which lies beyond the scope of the

present study. However, in the already mentioned *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer, in a distinction reminiscent of Plato, describes the two faces of reality: 'representation', that is, the way the world presents itself to us in everyday experience, and 'will', that is, the world as it is in itself, and beyond the mere appearances of which human knowledge is constituted (Janaway 1994, 6). Janaway (*Ibid.*) suggests that the best way to understand the concept of 'will' is to conceive it as a form of unrelenting yet blind 'striving forward' for something. Art, thus, offers man some respite from the usual domination of the will and this never-fulfilled quest and the resulting suffering[67]. In Schopenhauer's words:

> … so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are given up to the throng of desires with its constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the subject of willing, we never attain lasting happiness or peace … Thus the subject of willing is constantly lying on the revolving wheel of Ixion, is always drawing water in the sieve of the Danaids, and is the eternally thirsting Tantalus.
> When, however, an external cause or inward disposition suddenly raises us out of the endless stream of willing, and snatches knowledge from the thraldom of the will, the attention is now no longer directed to the motives of willing, but comprehends things free from the relation to the will. Thus it considers things without interest, without subjectivity, purely objectively… Then all at once the peace, always sought but always escaping us on that first path of willing, comes to us of its own accord, and all is well with us … [F]or that moment we are delivered from the miserable pressure of the will. We celebrate the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing, the wheel of Ixion stands still (quoted in Janaway 1994, 58-9).

In Work and in Leisure

Other thinkers have similarly asserted that pleasure, well-being, or a sense of fulfilment can result from aesthetic experiences, and the following brief survey will therefore not aspire to be exhaustive but merely suggestive of the arguments elaborated in this area. In his 1886 essay entitled "The Aims of Art", for instance, William Morris (1834-1896) discusses the purpose of art in man's life, and investigates the psychological motivations behind the making and the enjoyment of art, which he claims to be ultimately rooted in pleasure[68]. Morris distinguished two

---

[67] For Schopenhauer, however, just as for romantic aesthetics, art is ultimately a higher form of cognition, in that art alone can penetrate Maya, or the veil of appearances. This view will be further discussed in later sections of the paper.

[68] The present discussion of William Morris's conceptions of the function of art has to be necessarily a very brief one. However, a detailed and perceptive discussion of Morris' "The Aims of Art" and its relation to Morris's socialist thinking can be found in Upchurch 2005.

main 'moods' that dominate man's life, the mood of 'energy', which moves us towards activity, and the mood of 'idleness', which invites us to seek rest. The making of art therefore satisfies the mood of energy, whilst enjoyment of the arts during leisure time provides a contemplative pleasure that suits the mood of idleness. In both cases, it is clear that the preponderant aim of art is to provide man with pleasure. In Morris's (1966 [1886]), 82) own words:

> I suppose, indeed, that nobody will be inclined to deny that the end proposed by a work of art is always to please the person whose senses are to be made conscious of it. It was done *for* some one who was to be made happier by it; his idle or restful mood was to be amused by it … The restraining of restlessness, therefore, is clearly one of the essential aims of art, and few things could add to the pleasure of life more than this.

Hence, Morris's (*Ibid.*, 84) conclusions on the fundamental function of art:

> Therefore the Aim of Art is to increase the happiness of men, by giving them beauty and interest of incident to amuse their leisure, and prevent them wearying even of rest, and by giving them hope and bodily pleasure in their work; or, shortly, to make man's work happy and his rest fruitful. Consequently, genuine art is an unmixed blessing to the race of man.

Fulfilled Time

An alternative way of articulating the pleasure derived from the arts is represented by the view according to which the value of the arts resides in our complete commitment and absorption when creating or enjoying a work of art; in this perspective, the arts provide us with a way to 'fulfil' our time (Koopman 2005). One of the main proponents of this notion of 'art as fulfilment' is Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), who, in his essay *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1986), distinguishes between two "fundamental ways of experiencing time":

> In the context of our normal, pragmatic experience of time, we say that we "have time for something." This time is at our disposal; it is divisible; it is the time that we have or do not have, or at least think we do not have. In its temporal structure, such time is empty and needs to be filled. Boredom is an extreme example of this empty time. When bored, we experience the featureless and repetitive flow of time as an agonizing presence. In contrast to the emptiness of boredom, there is the different emptiness of frantic bustle when we never have enough time for anything and yet constantly have things to do… These two extremes of bustle and boredom both represent time in the same way: we fill our time with something or we have nothing to do. Either way time is not experienced in its own right, but as something that has to be

"spent". There is in addition, however, a totally different experience of time which I think is profoundly related to the kind of time characteristic of both the festival and the work of art. In contrast with the empty time that needs to be filled, I propose to call this "fulfilled" or "autonomous" time (Gadamer 1986, 41-2).

Gadamer (*Ibid.*, 42), then, clarifies his thought by using the festival, and its temporal dimension, as a paradigm for the arts, arguing that enjoyment of the arts, as well as the festival, represent a case of 'fulfilled time':

> We all know that the festival fulfils every moment of its duration. This fulfilment does not come about because someone has empty time to fill. On the contrary, the time only becomes festive with the arrival of the festival… We do not calculate here, nor do we simply add up a gradual sequence of empty moments to arrive at a totality of time… It is of the nature of the festival that it should proffer time, arresting it and allowing it to tarry. That is what festive celebration means. The calculating way in which we normally manage and dispose of our time is, as it were, brought to a standstill.
> It is easy to make a transition from such temporal experiences of life to the work of art.

Gadamer goes on to argue that it is the organic unity of the work (whereby every detail of the work of art is an integral part of the whole) that produces the effects of fulfilment.

Art as 'Experience'

Fulfilment is also a central notion in John Dewey's understanding of art. In his *Art as Experience*, Dewey (1980 [1934]) defines fulfilment as a completed *experience* and identifies the arts as a domain that allows for completed experiences to happen. Dewey begins his argument with the observation that the interaction of every living creature with its environment necessarily results in experiences. Most of the experiences we encounter in everyday life, however, are "inchoate". As Dewey (*Ibid.*, 35) himself explains:

> Things are experienced but not in such a way that they are composed into *an* experience. There is distraction and dispersion; what we observe and what we think, what we desire and what we get are at odds with each other (emphasis in the original).

In contrast, we have *'an* experience', whenever, "the material experienced runs its course to fulfilment" (*Ibid.*). In this case, the experience becomes integrated in the general 'stream of experiences' that is our life, without, however, losing its distinctiveness: "such an experience is a whole and carries with it its own individualising quality and self-sufficiency". In Dewey's (*Ibid.*, 46) view, then, the arts provide us with exemplary instances of *an* experience:

> … the esthetic is no intruder in experience from without, whether by way of idle luxury or transcendent ideality, but that it is *the clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience* (emphasis added).

Importantly, when referring to the aesthetic experience, Dewey in fact refers to both the case of artistic creation - art as "a process of doing or making" - and the aesthetic experience as "appreciative, perceiving and enjoying" (*Ibid.*, 47). Both types of activity can indeed result in a fulfilling aesthetic experience[69]. Jackson (1998, 4-5) clearly summarises Dewey's ideas thus:

> In either case, the experience, when successful – when it truly is *an* experience – is characterized at its close (and often periodically during its course) by feelings of satiety and fulfilment. What is fulfilling from either perspective is not simply the object or the performance, although we often speak as though it were… Actually, it is the audience's encounter with the object or performance, or the artist's wrestling with the stuff of its making that proves to be the source of their enjoyment or suffering. The true work of art is not the object that sits in a museum nor the performance captured on film or disc. Rather, it is the experience occasioned by the production or the experience of appreciating objects and performances. For the artist, those two forms of experiencing are one.

Art as Play

Other thinkers, such as Johan Huizinga (1970, 21) in *Homo Ludens*, have compared the artistic experience to *play*, highlighting in particular the element of the *fun* of playing: "it is precisely this fun-element that characterizes the essence of play. Here

---

[69] Indeed, as Dewey (*Ibid.*, 46) laments, "we have no word in the English language that unambiguously includes what is signified by the two words "artistic" and "aesthetic". Since "artistic" refers primarily to the act of production and "esthetic" to that of perception and enjoyment, the absence of a term designating the two processes taken together is unfortunate".

we have to do with an absolutely primary category of life, familiar to everybody at a glance right down to the animal level". An important strand of Huizinga's examination of "culture *sub specie ludi*" is the close relation he identifies between play and the arts. This is what he has to say about the close relationship between play and poetry:

> Let us enumerate once more the characteristics we deemed proper to play. It is an activity which proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility. The play-mood is one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive in accordance with the occasion. A feeling of exaltation and tension accompanies the action, mirth and relaxation follow.
> Now it can hardly be denied that these qualities are also proper to poetic creation. In fact, the definition we have just given of play might serve as a definition of poetry (*Ibid.*, 154-5)[70].

As for the other thinkers discussed earlier, pleasure is a crucial aspect of the aesthetic experience. Speaking of music in particular, Huizinga (*Ibid.*, 184) declares:

> But whereas all other creatures know now the distinction between order and disorder which is called rhythm and harmony, to us men … [the gods] have granted the perception of rhythm and harmony which is invariably accompanied by pleasure. Here, as clearly as possible, a direct connexion is established between music and play.

Evolutionary Significance

More recently, this notion that the enjoyment of the arts has a role to play in terms of our health and well-being has been expanded upon by the American playwright David Mamet, who, in the essay *Three Uses of the Knife*, puts forward his view of the arts – and drama in particular – as the ultimate survival mechanism at man's disposal:

> Children jump around at the end of the day, to expend the last of that day's energy. The adult equivalent, when the sun goes down, is to create or witness drama – which is to say, to order the universe into a comprehensible form. Our sundown play/film/gossip is the day's last exercise of that survival mechanism. In it we attempt to discharge any residual perceptive energies in order to sleep. We will have drama in that spot, and if it's not forthcoming we will cobble it together out of nothing (Mamet 1998, 8).

---

[70] Huizinga (*Ibid.*, chapter 10) makes similar points for the other arts: music, dance and the plastic arts.

Mamet (*Ibid.*, 11) reinforces this point time and time again in the essay, as he does, for instance, when attempting to explain why men have always been captivated by drama:

> It is enjoyable, like music, like politics, and like theatre, because it exercises, it flatters, and it informs our capacity for rational synthesis – our ability to learn a lesson, which is our survival mechanism.

This view of artistic endeavours as being at the centre of what has allowed man to survive and preserve his species has indeed been seized upon by scientists, who have put forward the suggestion that intellectual and artistic creativity and genius might all be explained in evolutionary terms (Simonton 1999). Nettle (2001, 173), for instance, argues that "[h]uman creative performance could well be, at root, a form of sexual display". At the basis of Nettle's argument lies the empirical observation that intelligence and creativity are indeed key determinants of human mate choice. In other words, in the same way in which a peacock displays his feathers in an attempt to make himself more attractive to a potential mate, members of the human race have used the products of artistic creativity and 'cultural performance' to make themselves stand out from the crowd:

> Pursuing cultural capital, then, is one way of increasing mating success, and the main way to do this, across cultures, is through the appropriate kind of creative performance (*Ibid.*, 175).

The evolutionary importance of creativity - and hence the arts and culture - has also been underlined by the already mentioned Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996, 318) in his influential study of creativity:

> Survival no longer depends on biological equipment alone but on the social and cultural tools we choose to use. The inventions of the great civilizations – the arts, religions, political systems, sciences and technologies – signal the main stages along the path of cultural evolution. To be humans means to be creative.

The arguments in favour of this theory of the evolutionary significance of cultural performance and creativity could be seen as a derivation of the belief that the arts have a role to play in enhancing man's sense of well-being and his health, as well as his happiness[71]. The most common derivation of this claim, however, is represented by the growing discipline of 'art therapy', which represents the more pragmatic strand of this category of function.

Art Therapy

Art therapy can be defined as "the use of art in the service of change on the part of the person who created the artwork" (in Madden and Bloom 2004, 137). It has been argued (*Ibid.*) that the arts therapy literature generally shares a concern with art *processes* rather than art *products*, and that such emphasis necessarily entails a particular attention to the activities involving the *production* of culture, as opposed to the enjoyment of art, through listening or viewing art[72]. Yet, if any well-being or health benefit can accrue from contact with the arts, the type of involvement (creation *or* enjoyment) can be expected to be an important determinant in the process[73].

As was hinted at in the context of our discussion of Aristotle and the notion of tragic catharsis, the belief in the therapeutic function of art has a very long history, and one that is not limited to the West alone – incantation and poetry were major healing practices in Native American cultures for millennia. Rafael Campo (2003, 31 ff.) –

---

[71] In the literature of the emerging discipline of 'happiness studies', a number of references appear to the role of leisure time spent enjoying the arts and popular culture as a source of happiness. See, for instance, Nettle 2005 (page 155) and Argyle 2001 (chapter 8) on the effects of watching TV and listening to music on happiness and other aspects of well-being. For a contrary view, see Layard 2005 (pp. 88-90), who argues that watching TV can make us less happy by fostering comparisons between our lives and lifestyle and those of wealthy celebrities.

[72] As Tessa Dalley (1984, xii) explains, the difference between "'art' in the traditional sense and art as it is used for therapeutic purposes" is that in the former the final artistic product is the very end of the creative exercises, and the process of creating, which is usually a solitary one, becomes secondary. Things are different in the case of art therapy: "In contrast, art activity undertaken in a therapy setting, with clear corrective or treatment aims, in the presence of a therapist, has a different purpose and objective. In therapy, the person and process become most important, as art is used as a means of non-verbal communication. Put more elaborately, art activity provides a concrete rather than verbal medium through which a person can achieve both conscious and unconscious expression, and can be used as a valuable agent for therapeutic change".

[73] The failure to capture the different impacts that are logically to be expected of different arts activities – and particularly from participatory vs. non-participatory ones – is one of the most crucial points of criticism moved against current methodologies for the evaluation of the social impacts of the arts (Belfiore 2006b, 31).

himself a medical doctor arguing in favour of the healing powers of poetry - shows that similar beliefs were also held in the East. In the Egyptian culture of the pharaonic age, for instance, the connection between poetry and healing was made clear by the 'book of the dead', a book containing charms, spells, and hymns to the gods that was used in burying rituals as a guidebook of sorts, meant to guide the soul of the deceased in its journey through the afterlife. The ancient Greeks also believed poetry and healing to be inextricably linked, and this close relationship found its embodiment in the god Apollo. Apollo, one of the most powerful deities in the Greek pantheon, was at the same time the god of poetry and healing. His symbols were the lyre, usually played in accompaniment to poetry, and the staff, which still today is identified with medicine. Stephen Rojcewicz (2004, 209 ff.) goes so far as to suggest that the epic poems of Homer, one of the oldest example of poetry in Western civilization to have survived, can be seen as "definite precursors to supportive psychotherapy and to poetry therapy", on the grounds that herein Homer often refers to verbal methods of soothing and comforting as an integral part of the therapeutic regime for the treatment of war wounds. For instance, Rojcewicz (*Ibid.*, 210) singles out a passage in the *Iliad*, Book XV, in which Patroclus succours and attempts to treat his wounded friend Eurypylus, that displays a significant "association of soothing words and stories with soothing drugs". Homer writes:

> Patroclus sat…
> In his friend Eurypylus's shelter…
> Trying to lift the soldier's heart with stories,
> Applying soothing drugs to his dreadful wound
> As he sought to calm the black waves of pain [74].

This passage in fact represents, according to Rojcewicz (*Ibid.*) an early instance "of the beneficial integration of psychotherapy with drug treatment". Similarly, in Rome, Aesculapius was the god associated with physicians, on the grounds of being credited with the invention of medicine; he was, however, also the father of the seven Muses, the goddesses representing the various arts and generally reputed to provide artistic inspiration to poets and artists. Moreover, the belief in the healing effects of poetry can also be traced within the Judeo-Christian tradition, as illustrated by the Biblical poetry than can be found in the Psalms and the Song of Solomon, containing both

---

[74] Translation by Robert Feagles, quoted in Rojcewicz 2004.

prayers and poetical references that deal with the healing of a number of different conditions ranging from depression to infertility (*Ibid.*, 34).

This faith in the role of literature and the arts in general as an aide to healing undoubtedly persists in the modern world, where the study of the therapeutic function of the arts has generated a vast body of literature which cannot, for reasons of space, be extensively discussed here. However, within the category of *art as psychotherapy*, Madden and Bloom (2004) - echoing a distinction reflected in the literature - distinguish a 'shamanic' and a 'mechanistic' approach to arts therapies. This classification ultimately boils down to the distinction between the "art *as* therapy" approach versus the "art *in* therapy" approach:

> The art *as* therapy considers the act of artistic creation as itself healing and cathartic. The art *in* therapy approach sees artistic creation as an instrument for the clinician – as a tool for diagnosis, prognosis and treatment (*Ibid.*, 139).

The *shamanic* approach is of most interest to the present discussion. It is typified by the belief in the *inherently* cathartic and thus healing property of the artistic process. On the basis of such an approach - and the concomitant belief in the close relationship between emotional states and image formation - claims have been made for the possibility of improving the well-being of patients affected by mild depression just by getting them to draw happy scenes (*Ibid.*)[75]. This approach is also quite common in the vast range of self-help or practice-oriented literature, where the natural dimension of the healing properties of creative processes seems to be a recurring theme. In one such manual, aimed at harnessing the healing and transformative powers of the reader through a series of exercises, and suitably titled *The Soul's Palette: Drawing on art's transformative powers for health and well-being*, C. A. Malchiodi (2002, 11) argues that:

> Art therapy, the use of the creative process for emotional restoration and healing, grew out of the idea that images are symbolic communications and that art making helps us to express and transform difficult life experiences. It has expanded our understanding of how image making and imagination help

---

[75] As Brown (1997, xvii) explains, however, the creation of images does not in itself resolve traumas or psychological problems. Rather, in art therapies, "a healing process can occur using symbols, provided there is a positive transformation of the symbol".

during the dark night of the soul, carrying forward the ancient knowledge of art's healing powers as well as the work of Freud and Jung. Artistic expression is one of our elemental tools for achieving psychological integration, a universal creative urge that helps us strive for emotional well-being.

Equally, language-based artistic expression has been claimed to affect health positively, and the literature purporting the beneficial effects of both writing creatively and reading (the latter being usually referred to as 'bibliotherapy') in both helping patients to deal with their condition as well as improving their well-being has been steadily growing in the last few decades[76]. Bibliotherapy, in particular, has been usefully employed, for instance, in the therapy for mild to moderate depression[77] (Scrogin, Jamison and Gichneaur 1989) and in dealing with aggressive children (Shechtman 1999). This technique can be defined as using literature to bring about a therapeutic interaction between participant (in other words, the patient) and facilitator (the therapist) (McCarty Hynes and Hynes-Berry 1994, 9-10).

Bibliotherapy is based on a long-lived belief in the healing powers of works of literature. As Riordan and Wilson (1989, 506) remind us, a plaque on the entrance to an ancient Greek library read "the healing place of the soul". Indeed, the logic behind bibliotherapy lies in the conviction that the discussion of the questions raised by a piece of literature can lead members of the group (for this is a group therapy) to reflect upon their own circumstances, and arrive at a fresh view of life. If the insight so gained is successfully internalised by the participants, it might lead to a change of behaviour and to a reduction the symptoms of the psychological pathology. The idea that poetry-writing is a powerful means of healing was behind the involvement of the poet Ben Okri, in 2005, in the setting up, in Britain, of a new organisation called

---

[76] Two representative examples of the literature on the beneficial impacts of writing creatively are Frank 1991, who movingly writes about how writing about illness can help to work out ways to accept and deal with ill health, and DeSalvo 1999, who clarifies that "[w]riting that describes traumatic or distressing events in detail *and* how we felt about these events then and feel about them now is the only kind of writing about trauma that clinically has been associated with improved health" (p.25). Androutsopoulou (2001) discusses the idea that talking about a favourite piece of fiction might represent a 'safe' vehicle for the discussion of personal issues and traumas. For a detailed discussion of the bibliotherapy methods, and the differences between 'reading bibliotherapy', 'interactive bibliothearpy' and 'poetry therapy', see McCarty Hynes and Hynes-Berry (1994; especially chapter 1). See also Staricoff 2005 for an extensive review of the relevant medical literature.

[77] As Riordan and Wilson (1989) show, however, the medical community is not unanimous with regards to bibliotherapy's effectiveness as a therapeutic intervention.

Mental Fight Club which aims to encourage people suffering from mental health problems to join in groups and discuss and perform poetry and fiction (Quarmby 2005). Other arts forms have also been found to have a therapeutic and healing potential, as in the case of 'cinematherapy' (Sharp, Smith and Cole 2002) and music therapy (Alridge 1996 and Biley 2000).

Indeed, following developments towards the full acceptance of the broad definition of health provided, in 1948, by the World Health Organization as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease", the arts have been found to have a significant role to play in achieving this delicate equilibrium between the domains of the good physical and mental functioning, and the social environment (Staricoff 2005, 24). Mental health, in particular, has been an area where the application of art therapies has proved more fruitful[78]. This is because enjoyment of the arts or artistic creation encourages self-expression, which is positively correlated with emotional health; furthermore, enhanced expressiveness can ease the resolution of inner conflicts, thus also promoting emotional well-being (Madden and Bloom 2005, 139).

In conclusion, this chapter has offered a review of theories focusing around the belief that the arts can improve health and well-being. Writings in these area can be divided into two broad groups One focuses on the notion of *pleasure-giving* as a central function of the aesthetic experience; the other highlights the therapeutic role of both artistic production and consumption in our everyday life as well as in a medical setting. Claims for the powers of the arts to heal and promote well-being can be partly attributed to the progressive importance gained, in the last thirty years, by the notion of 'quality of life' in public policy debates. However, as the present discussion has attempted to show, the origin of such arguments goes back far in time, and is ultimately related to the Aristotelian notion of tragic catharsis discussed earlier. The next chapter of the paper will discuss the arguments made for the formative and

---

[78] Art programmes have been also claimed to have a range of beneficial psychological effects on patients affected by other, non-mental conditions. Ferszt et al. (2000), for instance, have conducted a study of the impacts of an art programme on an inpatient oncology unit. They found that benefits deriving from the programme included improving patients' ability to cope with pain, improved communication between nurses and patients, and improved attitudes towards hospitalization.

educational powers of the arts. As we will see, this is also a theme that can be seen as originating from Artistotelian arguments.

Chapter 5: Education and Self-Development

As was discussed earlier, Plato's suspicion of the arts – poetry and theatre in particular – derived from his belief in the strong hold they have on the human psyche. By affecting the irrational part of the psyche, the arts can affect both the ethical sphere and human behaviour. However, precisely because of that hold the arts have on us, if their content and form is carefully directed and censored by the state (so as to ensure that the feelings and emotions instilled through the artistic experience are desirable ones) the powers of the arts can be harnessed for the good of the polity (Belfiore 2006a). As Plato (1993, 73; 378d) himself explains in the *Republic*:

> The point is that a young person can't tell when something is allegorical and when it isn't, and any idea admitted by a person of that [young] age tends to become almost ineradicable and permanent. All things considered, then, that is why a great deal of importance should be placed upon ensuring that the first stories they hear are best adapted for their moral improvement.

This notion of the positive potential of the arts was seized upon by Aristotle, who tried to give it a stronger articulation. Aristotle, as we have seen, maintained that it is not desirable to kill or to starve the emotional part of the psyche, since a balanced experience of passions and feelings (as afforded by the tragic performance) is actually important to maintaining the equilibrium of the human psyche (Butcher 1951, 246). On these grounds, then, Aristotle argued that dramatic poetry, when properly structured (according to the indications provided in his *Poetics*), could both educate the unruly emotions, and transmit universal truths (Lamarque 2001, 455). The ultimate aim of Aristotle's response to Plato, however, was to free poetry from enslavement to the ethical sphere. As Butcher (1951, 238) explains:

> Aristotle … was the first who attempted to separate the theory of aesthetics from that of morals. He maintains consistently that the end of poetry is a refined pleasure. In doing so he severs himself decisively from the older and more purely didactic tendency of Greece. … he never allows the moral purpose of the poet or the moral effects of his art to take the place of the artistic end. If the poet fails to produce the proper pleasure, he fails in the specific function of his art. He may be good as a teacher, but as a poet or artist he is bad[79].

---

[79] This aspect of Aristotelian thought was also picked up by Bertolt Brecht (1964, 181), who writes: "Thus, what the ancients, following Aristotle, demanded of tragedy is nothing higher or lower than it

As was shown in the discussion of the category of catharsis, however, this has not prevented later thinkers from interpreting Aristotelian thinking on poetry in epistemological terms, as an argument for the formative and educational function of tragedy and poetry in general. This development rested on a crucial passage in chapter IX of the *Poetics*, which has been interpreted as offering "an explicit statement that the nature of the learning process involved in poetry is that of seeing the relationship between the individual act and the universal law it illustrates. It is clearly indicated that the aim of poetry is to express what is universal in the form of particular or 'historical' events" (Golden 1962, 54). In Aristotle's own words:

> … the function of the poet [is not] to relate what has happened, but what may happen, what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. […] Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity… (Butcher's translation, in Butcher 1951, 35).

It was particularly the Italian writers of the Renaissance that combined elements of Aristotelian thought with snippets of Horace's theory of poetry and moulded them into a whole new claim for the effects of the arts on people: that of the formative function of the artistic experience. As M. H. Abrams (1953, 15) argues in his influential *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic theory and the critical tradition*: "A history of criticism could be written solely on the basis of successive interpretations of salient passages of Aristotle's *Poetics*". In particular, commenting on Sir Philip Sidney's (1554-1586) appeal, in his *A Defence of Poetry*, to Aristotle's authority as a source for the claim of the educative role of poetry, Abrams (*Ibid.*) remarks: "In this instance, with no sense of strain, Sidney follows his Italian guides (who in turn had read Aristotle through the spectacles of Horace, Cicero and the Church fathers) in

---

should entertain people. Theatre may be said to be derived from ritual, but that is only to say that it becomes theatre once the two have separated; what it brought over from the mysteries was not its formal ritual function, but purely and simply the pleasure which accompanied this. And the catharsis of which Aristotle writes – cleansing by fear and pity, or from fear and pity – is a purification which is performed not only in a pleasurable way, but precisely for the purpose of pleasure. To ask or to accept more of the theatre is to set one's own mark too low".

bending one after another of the key statements of the *Poetics* to fit his own theoretical frame".

The Influence of Horace

Before we look in more details at such arguments and their genesis, we must look at the long-lasting influence of the Latin poet Horace (65-8 BC) and his *Ars Poetica* on the development of ideas of the educational potential of poetry. At the time when Horace wrote his epistle on poetry, the debate over whether the true function of poetry was mere pleasure or moral instruction was already a lively one. Two generations before him, Cicero (104-43 BC) had already taken position in the defence speech delivered at the trial of the poet Archia, where he had not only openly admitted to indulging in poetry, but also argued that this provided him with inspiration for his work as orator:[80]

> How do you imagine I could find material for my daily speeches on so many
> different subjects if I did not train my mind with literary study, and how could
> my mind cope with so much strain if I did not use such study to help it
> unwind? Yes, I for one am not ashamed to admit that I am devoted to the
> study of literature (Cicero 2000, 114).

Not only, Cicero (*Ibid.*, 115) argues, is poetry nothing to be ashamed about, it is, as a matter of fact, a highly formative endeavour:

> … I also firmly maintain this, that when a natural disposition which is noble
> and elevated is given in addition a systematic training in cultural knowledge,
> then something remarkable and unique comes about.

Cicero (*Ibid.*, 115-6) also demonstrates awareness of arguments postulating that pleasure is the ultimate aim of poetry. Nevertheless, he posits, the pleasure that poetry gives is of a particular kind, able to widen the reader's mental horizon:

---

[80] The strength of the Roman prejudice against poetry is evident from Cicero's *Pro Archia*, because here Cicero clearly declares that he is not ashamed of his love of poetry, and is also confirmed by the vehemence of Horace's defence of poetry and the emphasis (implicitly polemical) placed on the much higher status of the poet in Greece than in Rome (Innes 1989, 266).

But suppose one could not point to this great benefit [attaining and practising excellence], suppose that the study of literature conferred only enjoyment: even then, I believe, you would agree that this form of mental relaxation broadens and enlightens the mind like no other. For other forms of mental relaxation are in no way suited to every time, age and place. But the study of literature sharpens youth and delights old age; it enhances prosperity and provides a refuge and comfort in adversity; it gives enjoyment at home without being a hindrance in the wider world; at night, and when travelling, and on country visits, it is an unfailing companion.

Similarly, Strabo (63-4 c. BC - 24 AD), a contemporary of Horace, argued, in his treatise *Geography*, that poetry is "a kind of elemental philosophy, which introduces us early to life, and gives us pleasurable instruction in reference to character, emotion, action" (in Spingarn 1908, 24). Horace's distinctive contribution to this debate marks a refusal to choose between pleasure and instruction as the prime functions of poetry by claiming them both, and together, as the ultimate aim of poetry. Horace explores these issues in one of his epistles, the *Epistula ad Pisones*, commonly referred to as *Ars Poetica*, composed sometime between the 12 and 8 BC. In the second half of the epistle, Horace makes his famous statement:

Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae
aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae (333-4)

Blakeney (1928, 54) translates the verses thus: "The poet's aim is either to profit or to please, or to blend in one the delightful and the useful"[81]. Horace adds, shortly afterwards:

Omne tulit punctum qui miscit utile dulci,
lectorem delectando pariterque monendo.

---

[81] In these short verses Horace effectively sets the agenda for much of the later debate over the aims of poetry. As Abrams (1953, 16) puts it: "…*prodesse* and *delectare*, to teach and to please, together with another term introduced from rhetoric, *movere*, to move, served for centuries to collect under three heads the sum of aesthetic effects on the reader. The balance between these terms altered in the course of time. To the overwhelming majority of Renaissance critics, as to Sir Philip Sydney, the moral effect was the terminal aim, to which delight and emotion were auxiliary. From the time of the critical essays of Dryden through the eighteenth century, pleasure tended to become the ultimate end, although poetry without profit was often held to be trivial, and the optimistic moralist believed with James Beattie that if poetry instructs, it only pleases the more effectually". This debate between pleasure vs. instruction as the true aim of art has remained very lively in modern times. One of the most influential representatives of the 'hedonistic' view is the American philosopher George Santayana, who, in his *The Sense of Beauty* argues: "science is the response to the demand of information, and in it we ask for the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Art is the response to the demand for entertainment, and truth enters into it only as it subserves these ends" (quoted in Cassirer 1979, 202).

<div style="text-align: center;">
hic meret aera liber Sosiis; hic et mare transit
et longum noto scriptori progat aevum.
</div>

"The man who mingles the useful with the sweet carries the day by charming his reader and at the same time instructing him. That's the book to enrich the publisher, to be posted overseas, and to prolong the author's fame" (*Ibid.*)[82].

Towards the end of the epistle, Horace redresses the balance following an emphasis on the pleasure-giving properties of poetry, and makes another argument that will be endlessly echoed and developed by Renaissance humanists concerning the civilising powers of poetry:

> This was the poets' wisdom of old – to draw a line between the Man and the State, the sacred and the common; to build cities, to check promiscuous lust, to assign rights to the married, to engrave laws on wood. Thus did praise and honour come to divine poets and their laws[83] (*Ibid.*, 56).

Horace here prefigures the view that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world' put forward by Shelley in his *The Defence of Poetry* (1821), which is at the heart of the next category of impacts we will consider, that of the civilising powers of the arts. For the moment, however, we will turn to the consideration of how Renaissance critics, especially in Italy, blended together Aristotelian and Horatian elements and created their own version of the argument that the arts, and poetry in particular, can instruct and edify.

Renaissance Elaborations

One of the main aims of the Italian writers of the Renaissance was to salvage the arts (poetry and the theatre in particular) from the hostility that, as we have seen, was to

---

[82] So, for the Italian poet Tasso the end of poetry ('*fine*') is to be useful by delighting ('*giovare dilettando*'). Similarly, for Milton, the poet has the power to "inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu and public civility", and to teach "the whole book of sanctity and vertu through all the instances of example" (in Steadman 1962, 117).

[83] As shown by Sperduti (1950) in his thorough review, the idea of the divine nature of poets was a commonly accepted notion throughout antiquity, and the influence of this notion also was to become a significant inspiration for the Renaissance critics, many of whom referred to the divine origin of poetry in their quest for a convincing defence of poetry from the Christian censure.

be found in the writings and the orations of the fathers of the Church and in Plato's *Republic*[84]. The need was evident, then, to address the psychological and cognitive shortcomings of poetry first identified by Plato and subsequently developed by the Christian writers. In particular, because of its pagan nature, the case of the poetry produced in pre-Christian times posed particular problems to the religiously sensitive Renaissance writers[85]. The medieval Church had indeed always looked at pagan culture with extreme suspicion, and as we have seen, overt condemnations of poetry, theatre and other cultural forms abound in the writings of early and medieval Christian writers (Spingarn 1908, 3-4).

The main task ahead of the Renaissance critics thus was to answer these objections against classical poetry. The answer to the problem was found in the allegorical method of interpreting literature, whereby the content of pre-Christian literature was interpreted as an allegory of Christian values and beliefs. This interpretative method was first introduced by Fulgentius (465-527), who, in his *Virgiliana Continentia* gives us a typical example of a re-interpretation of Virgil's *Aeneid* as a journey towards the progressive achievement of happiness that makes it compatible with the Christian faith. During the Renaissance, this seemed the only way to circumvent the moral criticism of poetry, by arguing that moral teachings can be found in all poetry (pagan poetry included) by seeking the hidden meanings that lie beneath the literal expression. Hence, for Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca and their contemporaries, the function of the poet is to hide his moral instruction behind a veil of beautiful inventions, or, to borrow, Petrarca's phrasing, "veritatem rerum pulchris velaminus adornare" (to adorn the true nature of things with beautiful veils).

This strategy, nevertheless, was not without drawbacks, for – as Spingarn (1908, 8) – notes:

---

[84] As Spingarn (1908, 21) explains, the authority of Plato during the Renaissance was such that it made it impossible to just disregard his arguments against poetry. As a result many of the writers in XVI century Italy felt the need to refute, or at least to try and explain, the reasons for Plato's indictment of poetry, and to come up with convincing counter-arguments.

[85] As if the pagan content of classical literature were not enough to solicit suspicious reactions from Christians leaders and philosophers, the very idea of indulging in the pleasures of literature seemed, to Christian philosophers, extremely dubious. As Saintsbury (1902, 381) puts it, "To Augustine, as to monk and homilist long afterwards, not merely was the theology of literature false, and its morals detestable, but it was – merely as occupation – frivolous and puerile, a thing unworthy not only of a Christian but even of a reasonable being".

> This method [allegorical interpretation], while perhaps justifying poetry from
> the standpoint of ethics and divinity, gives it no place as an independent art;
> thus considered, poetry becomes merely a popularized form of theology.

The allegorical mode of understanding poetry and its power to educate and provide moral instruction proved nevertheless popular with Renaissance critics. So, Leonardo Bruni (1374-1444) in his *De Studiis et Litteris* (c. 1405), after discussing the allegorical interpretation of the pagan myths, concludes:

> Hence I hold my conviction to be securely based; namely, that Poetry has, by
> our very constitution, a stronger attraction for us than any other form of
> expression, and that anyone ignorant of, and indifferent to, so valuable an aid to
> knowledge and so ennobling a source of pleasure can by no means be entitled to
> be called educated (Woodward 1963 [1897], 131).

Another interesting suggestion on how to reconcile a belief in the educational role of poetry with a love for the authors of classical antiquity is proffered by Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405-1464), who, in his treatise *De Liberorum Educationes* (1450) rephrases the old dilemma of whether pagan literature ought to be condemned:

> The crucial question is: how do you use your authors? … we leave on one side
> their beliefs and superstitions, their false ideas of happiness, their defective
> standard of morals; we welcome all that they can render in praise of integrity
> and in condemnation of vice. … Thus morals and learning are alike forwarded
> by the judicious use of Literature in education (Woodward 1963 [1897], 150).

A Horatian inspiration is evident in the work of Antonio Minturno, who – in his *De Poeta* (1559) - builds his defence of poetry on the basis of ammunition provided by the Latin poet. Minturno argues that poetry, whose nature is such that it can embrace all topics, can be said to comprehend all possible forms of human knowledge. Indeed, no other form of learning can be found before the first poets, and no nation – no matter how primitive - has ever been completely deprived of or opposed to poetry. According to Minturno, verse, whilst not essential to poetry, makes it more delightful, and thus more successful a tool of instruction (Spingarn 1908, 21). In his *Poetica* (1536), Bernardino Daniello (c.1500-1565) puts forwards a number of arguments that also appear in Sir Philip Sidney's (1554-1586) *A Defence of Poetry*. Closely

following Horace, Daniello maintains that the poets were the inventors of the arts of life, and better teachers than the philosophers. Because of their power to delight, poets teach more pleasantly (and thus effectively) than any philosopher ever could (*Ibid.*, 20). A generation later, Sidney (1966, 19) echoes Daniello's as well as Horace's claims:

> This did so notably show itself, that the philosophers of Greece durst not a long time appear to the world but under the masks of poets. So Thales, Empedocles, and Parmenides sang their natural philosophy in verses; so did Pythagoras and Phocylides their moral counsels,; so did Tyrtaeus in war matters, and Solon in matters of policy: or rather they, being poets, did exercise their delightful vein in those points of highest knowledge, which before them lay hid to the world.

The writings of the humanists of the XV and XVI centuries are indeed an inexhaustible source of similar arguments in favour of the instructive function of poetry and, therefore, the central role it should have in the educational process. It is precisely to them that we owe the very notion of *studia humanitatis* after all, and this is but a small token of their long-lasting influence over the later understanding of the formative and educational powers of the arts and literature. The idea that the arts and literature are a means to educate and instruct through pleasure and enjoyment outlived the XVI century, to become a main notion in thinking and writing about the arts, and literature in particular. In later centuries, the novel especially came to be seen as the primary repository for the Horatian idea of delightful instruction through the aesthetic experience. For instance, writing about the rise of the novel in America, and quoting Royall Tyler, an American novelist active in the second half of the XVIII century, Cathy N. Davidson (2004, 142) observes:

> … increasingly by the end of the eighteenth century, the dichotomy between amusement and instruction was being erased – largely through the instrument of the novel – so that the public craved books designed to "amuse while [they] instruct", in Royall Tyler's phrase[86].

---

[86] Admittedly, Davidson (2004) does not connect Tyler's words to a Horatian influence. However, other scholars of American literature of the XVIII century have highlighted the influence of Horace's poetry on the development of certain strands of American literature (and social satire particularly), showing how selected famous lines by the Latin author were routinely imitated (Shields 1983; Ward & Trent, et al. 1907–21, vol. XVI). It is therefore possible to assume that Horace and his work were largely known to American intellectuals of that time and likely to have exerted a certain influence on views of the nature and functions of poetry and literature.

Bildung

Another important strand of thinking that focuses on the educational role of the arts and humanistic culture is represented by theories of *Bildung*. These, first developed in the German context, have also proved to be extremely influential over thinking about the relationship between the arts and the educational sphere. Scholars agree on the difficulty of doing justice, in an English translation, to the semantic complexity of the word *bildung*. Swales (1978, 14) suggests that:

> The word *Bildung* implies the generality of a culture, the clustering of values by which a man lives, rather than a specifically *educational* attainment. [..] *Bildung* becomes, then, a total growth process, a diffused *Werden*, or becoming, involving something more intangible than the acquirement of a finite number of lessons (emphasis in the original).

In order to better understand this 'total growth process', and the thinking behind this notion of "the self-realization of the individual in his wholeness" (*Ibid.*) we need to look at the evolution of the concept over time. According to Susanne Hermeling's (2003) historical reconstruction of the notion of *Bildung*, its theoretical elaboration took place in Germany between 1790 and 1830. In these crucial years, the theorisers of *Bildung* – Herder, Humboldt – and the poets of the *Bildungsidee* – Goethe and Schiller – worked to put together one of the most influential understandings of education ever. Hermeling (*Ibid.*) traces the pre-history of the concept back to the religious writers of the Middle Ages, and particularly to the writings of the XIII century mystics. She traces the progressive elaboration of the idea of the process of self-improvement by which the faithful attempts to mould him/her soul in the shape of God. Mystic thought was eventually judged to be heretical and thus banned and repressed throughout the XVI century. However, by then, a lot of the themes developed by the mystic writers had seeped through the general consciousness, and kept feeding thinking on self-improvement and moral self-development[87]. The Pietists writers were especially influential in promoting an idea of *Bildung* as God's active transformation of the passive Christian faithful.

Hermeling (*Ibid.*, 169) singles out, amongst others, Johann Arndt (1555-1621), whose teachings were centred upon a precept he found in the letter to Ephesians, that read

---

[87] Notions of self-cultivation are indeed central to ideas of *Bildung* (Bruford 1975, 1).

"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind". In Arndt's view, the idea of transformation is indissoluble from the notion of self-improvement. As Hermeling (*Ibid.*) explains, "Arndt's idea of shaping the powers of the mind and the heart to God's likeness leads up to the eighteenth-century mode of expression". It is indeed around the XVIII century, that the word *bilden* ('to mould' and hence, in its broader sense 'to educate') became associated to both a religious and an aesthetic context (*Ibid.*, 171). Progressively however, and in parallel with the gradual trend towards secularization, the religious meaning of *Bildung*, whilst not abandoned altogether, came to be interpreted as an inward process. As Kontjie (1993, 2) explains:

> This concept of *Bildung* changes significantly in the course of the eighteenth century. Instead of being passive recipients of a pre-existent form individuals now gradually develop their own innate potential through interaction with their environment. Organic imagery of natural growth replaces a model of divine intervention. Transformation into the perfect unity of God turns into the development of one's unique self.

This shift in the understanding of *Bildung* was due to the central influence of the Enlightenment sensibility over the European middle classes that, in the XVIII century attempted to replace traditional notions of an aristocracy of blood and birth right with an aristocracy of the spirit. A central element in this shift from a 'nobility of birth' to a 'nobility of merits' is the role of education, which assumed, particularly in Germany, a crucial importance:

> In comparison with France and England the middle class in eighteenth-century Germany was underdeveloped and its political influence insignificant. It is one reason why the German thinkers emphasised the value of education for the individual, of *Bildung* as a cause in itself, instead of the social and political ends of education: this being the most conspicuous and most criticised characteristic of the *Bildungsidee* (Heermeling 2003, 175).

Equally central was the influence of the speculative theory of Leibniz (1646-1716) and of German Idealism (in particular Hegel's elaboration of a dialectical progressive movement towards 'absolute knowledge') on the main thinkers of *Bildung*, Herder (1744-1803) and Humboldt (1767-1834).

The spirit of *Bildung* is clearly expressed by Humboldt in this passage from his *The Limits of State Action*:

> The true end of man, not that which his transient wishes suggest to him, but that which eternal immutable reason prescribes, is the highest possible development of his powers into a well-proportioned whole. For culture of this kind of freedom is the first and indispensable condition (in Bruford 1975, 16).

For Humboldt, it should not be the aim of the state to provide happiness, but freedom for the individual. The highest aim for man is to strive for *Bildung*, and freedom is a prerequisite for the quest for self-education and amelioration. The state should therefore take it upon itself to guarantee individual freedom, thus aiding the individual's *Bildung*, rather than setting up a national educational system (Gonon 1995).

The notion that an important component of *Bildung* is self-development, or *Selbstbildung*, is central in Humboldt's writing. Humboldt is quite clear that a genuine process of *Bildung* has nothing to do with the kind of education that aims at preparing one for a profession, or for civic life, or even for a life devoted to God. In fact, self-development is the one true aim of the educative process. Needless to say, the ideal of *Selbstbildung*, whilst in theory open to all human beings, is – in fact – an intrinsically elitist notion, based as it is on the assumption of the possibility of devoting time to self-development and self-perfection (this, in practice, presupposes as a prerequisite, the luxury of leisure so as to devote oneself to learned *otium* and self-development) (Hermeling 2003).

The idea of *Bildung* as process, central in the German debates over the *Bildungsidee*, is clearly exemplified in the *Bildungsroman*, which unsurprisingly predominates in novelistic production in Germany in the time-span here considered. This is a type of novel that centres around a central character, and charts his/her development and learning process up to a stage where a certain degree of *Selbstbildung* is achieved. The most influential examples of *Bildungsroman* have been written by Goethe (1749-1832), who also wrote the already mentioned *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and *William Meisters Lehrjahre* ("William Meisters' Apprenticeship"), two classic titles

in the genre. As the XIX century academic Karl Mongenstern (who is credited with using the term *Bildungsroman* for the first time in 1803) explains, these novels not only charted the personal journey of self-education and formation of the protagonist, but also helped the readers in their own process of self-perfection:

> We say that we may call it the *Bildungsroman*, first and primarily, on account of its content, because it represents the *Bildung* of the hero in its beginning and progress to a certain stage of completion; but also second, because just this depiction promotes the *Bildung* of the reader more than any other sort of novel (quoted in Kontjie 1993, 16).

Furthermore, as this passage from Goethe's autobiography *Dicthung und Warheit* ('Truth and Poetry') shows, the writer's work is also part of this process of self-perfection and education. Speaking of his early youth, Goethe explains:

> And thus began that bend of mind from which I could not deviate my whole life through: namely, that of turning into an image, into a poem, everything that delighted or troubled me, or otherwise occupied my attention, and of coming to some certain understanding of myself thereupon, as well to rectify my conceptions of external things, as to set my mind at rest about them. The faculty of doing this was necessary to no one more than to me, for my natural disposition whirled me constantly from one extreme to the other. All the works therefore that have been published by me are only fragments of one great confession (cited and translated by Cassirer 1979, 210).

It would be misleading, however, to see the process of *Bildung* and its component of *Selbstbildung*, as a completely inward-looking mechanism; on the contrary, the process of self-education is seen as an integral part of the individual's contribution to the enrichment and maintenance of his or her civilization. As Herder explains, *Bildung* is an "interactive social process in which men influence each other within a specific social setting and in which they both receive from and add to their distinctive historical and communal heritage" (quoted in Barnard 1969, 12[88]). Indeed, the relationship between culture and language, the individual and the nation is an important theme recurring in the theorists of *Bildung* (Hermeling 2003, 174).

---

[88] We are grateful to Egil Bjornsen for pointing us in the direction of Barnard's essay, and for sharing his work on the notion of *Bildung* in relation to Norwegian cultural policy.

The role that the arts have in the process of *Bildung* was explored by Schiller (1759-1805) in his collection of letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). Here, by the term 'education', Schiller refers precisely to the process of self-education of the individual discussed so far. He argues that, in the work of art, the two normally opposed powers of reason and sensuality (which Schiller refers to as the 'sensuous' and 'formal' drives) are reconciled and harmonised within the individual. Whereas the imperfect individual is dominated by either reason or nature, the aesthetic state – or 'play' drive – makes possible the achievement of a more desirable equilibrium. So, although Schiller does not envisage for art a specific didactic function, he nevertheless argues that artistic experiences widen the individual's intellectual horizon, so that it is ultimately a perfect vehicle for *Bildung* (Hermeling 2003, 175). His main contribution to the *Bildungidee*, then, consists in helping to establish the concept of beauty and its appreciation as a fundamental step in the *Bildung* process of both individuals and community (Hohr 2002, 61).

Modern Elaborations

In modern times the question of the educational and formative value of art and culture was developed by a number of thinkers. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), in his *Prison Notebooks*, writes that culture "is organization, discipline of one's inner self, a coming to terms with one's own personality; it is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one's own historical value, one's own function in life, one's own rights and obligations" (in Forgacs 1988, 57). Ernst Cassirer (1979, 211-2) later took up this question in one of his Yale lectures, delivered probably in 1942. Here Cassirer reviews the classic philosophical denials of the cognitive and educational function of art, and puts forward his own interesting argument in favour of the educational powers of the arts, which is worth quoting at length:

> Imitation of nature and expression of feelings are the two basic elements of art. They are, as it were, the stuff of which the garment of art is woven. But they do not express art's fundamental character, they do not exhaust its meaning and value. If art were nothing else than a mere copy of nature or a mere reproduction of human life, its intrinsic worth and its function in human culture would be rather doubtful and questionable. But it is much more. It adds, so to speak, a new dimension to human life; it gives it a depth that we do

not reach in our common apprehension of things. Art is not a mere repetition of nature and life; it is a sort of transformation and transubstantiation. This transubstantiaton is brought about by the power of aesthetic form. Aesthetic form is not simply given; it is not a datum of our immediate empirical world. In order to become aware of it, we have to produce it; and this production depends on a specific autonomous act of the human mind. We cannot speak of aesthetic form as part or element of nature; it is a product of a free activity. It is for this reason that in the realm of art even all our common feelings, our passions and emotions, undergo a fundamental change. Passivity itself is turned into activity; mere receptivity is changed into spontaneity. What we feel here is not a single or simple emotional state. It is rather the whole gamut of human life, the continuous oscillation between all its extremes – between joy and grief, hope and fear, exultation and despair.

The themes of the process of transformation and transubstantiation of the feelings through art, and the view of art as the dynamic process of life itself are central to Cassirer's understanding of how art can have an educational role in man's life. As he concludes at the end of the lecture:

> It is this character of aesthetic experience which to my mind gives to art its special place in human culture and makes it an essential and indispensable element in the system of liberal education. Art is a way to freedom, the process of the liberation of the human mind which is the real and ultimate aim of all education; it has to fulfil a task of its own, a task that cannot be replaced by any other function (*Ibid.*, 215)

Closely related to this view of the educational function of art, are the cognitivist theories of art, which were indirectly observed earlier. The central tenets of a cognitivist view of art have been succinctly summarised by Cynthia Freeland:

> (1) Artworks stimulate cognitive activity that might teach us about the world. … (2) The cognitive activity they simulate is part and parcel of their functioning as artworks. (3) as a result of this stimulation, we learn from artworks: we acquire fresh knowledge, our beliefs are refined, and our understanding is deepened. (4) What we learn in this manner constitutes one of the main reasons we enjoy and value artworks in the first place" (quoted in John 2001, 331).

The influence of notions of *Bildung* as well as the tension between *prodesse* and *delectare* as functions of art can be found in the thinking of Herbert Read (1893-1968). In his *To Hell with Culture* (2002a [1963], 31), he argues:

> … cultivation is the distinctive power of man, the power that has enabled him to progress from the animal and the savage state. In his progress man has cultivated, not only animals and plants, but also his own kind. Education is nothing other than self-cultivation, and cultivation, when man directs it to his own species, naturally includes the cultivation of those senses and faculties by means of which man gives form and shape to the things he makes.

Art, for Read (2002b [1963], 171), has a central role to play in this process of self-cultivation, and hence is called for a higher mission than simple entertainment:

> Art is not necessarily a moral activity, and its tonic effect is made through the senses. Nevertheless, even in its purest, or most abstract – in Oscar Wilde's sense, its most *useless* forms: in one of Shakespeare's songs, or a minuet by Mozart, or a drawing by Boucher – even then art is radically different from amusement. It does not leave us without affecting us, and affecting us, according to some scale of value, for the better. … works of art speak more directly to us: for by their form and style they give us a measure of the refinement of a civilization.

Stephen Spender (1961, 223) echoes similar arguments when he points out that "art is a central medium for the realization of man's search for significance in life". Indeed, as much of the present discussion has shown, in many of the philosophers and scholars whose work we have looked at, the formative and educational value of arts has not just a cognitive dimension, but an ethical one too.

In conclusion, this chapter has focused on writings that ascribe an intrinsic educative function to the arts. The origin of such a position has been identified in Aristotle's attempt to salvage poetry from the Platonic attack and in his notion of dramatic catharsis. The later evolution of the original Aristotelian position was also examined, and two particularly significant moments in the evolution of this claim were identified in the writings of the Latin poet Horace, and his suggestion that the true aim of poetry is to instruct while it delights, and the subsequent elaborations of this idea by the Italian Humanists of the Renaissance. The last section of the chapter looked at how such ideas coalesced, in the XVIII century, around the notion of *bildung*, and later elaborations of the claim for the educational and formative powers of the arts. The moral dimension of the *bildung* function of art, which, as we have seen was hinted at by the writers considered in this section becomes more explicit in the claims made for the civilising power of art. These will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Moral improvement and civilization

In the present category we have grouped together the claims made for the civilising and moralising effects of the arts. The notion of the 'civilising mission' of the arts is here intended in its broader sense, so that within this category we will consider the moral implications of the already discussed defence of poetry and art from the Platonic and Christian prejudices, as well as specific claims that the arts are an instrument of moral improvement and civilisation.

Aristotle and Horace

We have seen how Aristotle attempted, in his writings on dramatic poetry, to counteract the Platonic censure of poetry by providing an alternative understanding of the nature of the pleasure derived from the enjoyment of poetry and theatre. However, as confirmed by the popularity of the moral interpretation of his notion of catharsis, his endeavour to defend poetry from Plato's criticism had clear moral undertones. It was observed above how, for Aristotle, poetry does not have a patently moral or didactic aim. Nevertheless, as Spingarn (1908, 18-9) points out, in Aristotle's *Poetics*:

> poetry is justified on the grounds of morality, for while not having a distinctly moral aim, it is essentially moral, because it is [an] ideal representation of life, and an idealised version of human life must necessarily present it in its moral aspects. Aristotle distinctly combats the traditional Greek conception of the didactic function of poetry, but it is evident that he insists fundamentally that literature must be moral, for he sternly rebukes Euripides several times on grounds that are moral, rather than purely aesthetic.

Horace too, should be mentioned again here, for we have seen how, by regarding early poets as sages and prophets, and the inventors of arts and sciences, Horace is effectively pointing out the civilizing function of poets and poetry.

Renaissance Humanists

Equally, we have noted before how the arguments in defence of poetry elaborated during the Middle Ages and subsequently elaborated by the Italian Renaissance writers, and based on the allegorical interpretation of poetry, had clear ethical undertones too. Whilst the effort to rebuke Platonic and Christian denigration of poetry and theatre centred on a fusion of Aristotelian and Horatian themes aimed at demonstrating the educational power of poetry, the type of instruction thus gained was of a strong moral nature (as to be expected from writers living in a period suffused with a far-reaching and deep-rooted religiosity). Central to the allegorical interpretation of poetry was the notion that moral teachings ought to be sought in the hidden meanings that could be discovered beyond the literal expression of poetic texts, both ancient and modern. Hence, Leonardo Bruni's already mentioned definition of poetry as "so valuable an aid to knowledge and so *ennobling* a source of pleasure", a recurring theme in Italian Renaissance literary criticism.

Indeed, the influence of the Renaissance Humanists' ideal of self-cultivation – and the centrality of the artistic experience within it – resulted in such works as Baldesar Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano* ("The Book of the Courtier"), a treatise dealing with issues of etiquette, social problems, and the intellectual accomplishments of the perfect courtesan. The *Cortegiano*, turned out to be one of the great books of its time, widely translated throughout Europe, and the first step towards the elaboration, through a literary work, of the 'ennobling ideal' of the court and the courtesan (Petronio 1991, 213). The enjoyment of refined activities, such as poetry reading, was always an important element of what Giuseppe Petronio (*Ibid.*, 215) defined as the 'aristocratic ethics' of courtesan life that Baldesar Castiglione contributed to moulding. Juan del Boscán (1490c-1542) and Garcilaso de la Vega (1503-1536), who were instrumental in the diffusion of the *Cortegiano* in Spain, used it as the foundation for their own humanistic programme (in which poetry played a central role): "a holistic way to individual perfection via submission to a complexly articulated code of conduct" (McCaw 2001, 264).

The moral undertones of the civilising function thus attributed to artistic endeavours and pastimes become even more explicit in the writing of Michel de l'Hospital (1506-1573) - the French jurist, humanist, and influential protector of many a poet – who

was a strenuous advocate of the civilizing powers of letters and culture. As Petris (2003, 691) explains, for de l'Hospital, the spirit of the Renaissance was embodied in the hope "that the *humaniores litterae* can help man fulfil the best part of his nature, his *humanitas*, which is not a given, but a potentiality to be developed. For Michel de L'Hospital only the self-knowledge bred by letters can prevent man from becoming the slave of his passions".

If we move from the defence of poetry to the defence of theatre, we notice that, in England, moral arguments for the defence of theatre were put forward by a number of writers in the attempt to counteract what – as was seen earlier – was a ferocious attack on the stage by the Puritan pamphleteers. So, in his already mentioned *A Defence of Poetry*, Sir Philip Sidney endeavours to respond to the rhetorical question posed by Stephen Gosson (one of the main personalities involved in the attack against the stage) in his 1582 polemical essay *Plays Confuted in Five Actions*: "The best play you can picke out, is but a mixture of good and evil, how can it be then the schoolemistres of life?" (Barish 1981, 90). Sidney, who was instrumental in introducing the authors of the Renaissance to an English readership, and was profoundly influenced by them, follows their teachings in defending the theatre as moral, true, and useful (Bruch 2004, 17). The original element in his thinking was to transfer the criticism usually made against the theatre onto history, lamenting its too confused, contradictory and inconsistent nature. Rather than in history, then, moral instruction ought to be looked for in literature and the theatre. Indeed, imaginative literature is able to create a 'perfect pattern' of good and bad, vice and virtue (much neater, in fact, than that we can witness in everyday life and the historical past) therefore presenting a more consistent tool for our moral education (Barish 1981, 90).

Similarly, Thomas Lodge (c.1558-1621) also follows in the wake of the Renaissance writers in his *A Defense of Poetry, Music and Stage Plays*, where – referring back to Boccaccio's version of the allegorical interpretation of literature - he outlines the civilising role of theatre in antiquity and its role as a moral guide for humanity ever since (Bruch 2004). On the one hand, these authors demonstrate the profound influence of arguments on the moral education to be gained from poetry elaborated in XVI century Italy. On the other hand, however, their writings are symptomatic of the rather unoriginal nature and the lame and ineffectual tone of contemporary attempts

to defend the theatre - especially if compared with the vehemence of the opposite side in what came to be known as the 'stage controversy' (Barish 1981, 117 ff.).

French Enlightenment

The arguments for the moral and civilising function of arts developed during the French Enlightenment, on the other hand, are original and significant, for they introduce, for the fist time, an explicitly civic slant to the case made for the civilising powers of the arts. In his perceptive essay, Saisselin (1970) argues that until the XVIII century, the fine arts were the privilege of the aristocracy and the wealthy, and the emphasis was on artistic consumption as a way to combat the inevitable *ennui* of everyday life. Providing pleasure was thus expected to be the principle aim of art. However, this view of art as frivolous and decadent *divertissement* was openly questioned by the Enlightenment *philosophes*. The group of writers usually referred to by this label – Diderot, Marmontel, Alembert, Condillac, and Voltaire – coherently put forward a radically different view and advocated an art which could forge citizens imbued with moral and civic values and virtues. In other words, they postulated that art should be used for the education and moral improvement of mankind (*Ibid.*, 200). A crucial step in this process was the *philosophes*' attribution of moral value to public utility, and the establishment of a link between such public utility and the call of the artist. This represents a point of departure from previous elaborations of the moral functions of poetry, which tended to focus primarily on processes of self-improvement and self-fashioning.

The intellectual work of the *philosophes*, then, resulted in a new hierarchy of cultural production, whereby art and literature that promoted moral and public utility were perceived as inherently superior to artistic expressions merely aiming at *divertissement*. As Saisselin (*Ibid.*, 202) explains:

> What they [the *philosophes*] wanted was great art, to be founded upon permanent values such as the true, the good, and the beautiful. *Divertissement* and *agreement* were a secondary consideration. The justification for art was to be founded upon the *beau ideal* and artists were exhorted to devote themselves to an art of moral, civic, and therefore public utility; the artist was no longer merely to please a patron, divert a leisure class, or glorify the great,

nor, for that matter, to emulate the gentleman; he was to be first and foremost a citizen.

Saisselin (*Ibid.*) is careful to explain that such developments did not come out of the blue, but are, rather, correlated to important developments taking place in society at large around the same time. In particular, he singles out the importance of the progressive institutionalisation and professionalization of art, which, indeed, begun in the XVIII century, and of the rise of the bourgeoisie. By the 1770s, the *philosophes* had been successful in characterising the forms of art enjoyed by the nobility as corrupted and decadent, and in forging an alternative ideal of the cultivated man of distinction, equally distant from the old aristocracy as from the vulgar populace.

The particular view of the moral and civic function of art introduced by the writers of the French Enlightenment would become very influential. That it soon acquired wide acceptance is proved by Antoine Quatremère de Quincy (1755-1849), who, writing a couple of generations after the *philosophes*, and from a very different political standpoint, nonetheless displays a similar understanding of the civic function of art[89]. The conviction that art should have a social purpose is at the heart of Quatremère's thinking. For him, as for the *philosophes* before him, art is an object of social and cultural utility that can provide us with a precious understanding of the origins, the rise and the decline of past civilizations. Greek art, in particular, fascinated him, and in his *Considérations sur les Arts de Dessein en France* (1791), an essay presenting an ideal programme of art education, he discusses the way in which, in classical Greece, art became a crucial means for the articulation of the ethical preoccupations of the polis. Greek art then, contained and transmitted a whole complex of historical, religious, political, civic and moral values that, altogether, constituted and preserved the Greek social order (Adams 2004). The centrality of the public and moral utility of art in Quatremère's thinking is explicitly emphasised in this passage from his *Considérations morales sur la destination des ouvrages de l'art* (1815):

> My purpose is to show that the moral utility of works of Art, or their application to a noble, fixed use, is the most important condition necessary for

---

[89] Quatremère was a fierce opponent of the republican left, and because of his political faith was imprisoned during the Terror of 1793. In 1795, he was involved in the failed royalist insurrection of 13 Vendémaire (Adams 2004, 2).

the artist and the art lover to produce and to judge; for the public to sense and to taste the beauties of imitation (in Wilcox 1953, 366).

Kant

If we move from France to Germany, we notice that there too the XVIII century represents a moment of theoretical elaborations that highlight the links between art and morality. Kant, in his *Critique of Judgement*, made it clear that, when exposed to a work of art, simply taking pleasure from it is not an adequate response on our part. The pleasure that derives from being exposed to beauty, for Kant, needs to be ultimately directed towards morality, since only moral ideas can be contemplated as ends:

> Unless we connect the fine arts, closely or remotely, to moral ideas, which alone carry with them an independent liking, the second of the two alternatives just mentioned [a displeasure with the object] is their ultimate fate. They serve in that case only for our diversion, which we need all the more in proportion as we use it to dispel the mind's dissatisfaction with itself, with the result hat we increase still further our uselessness and dissatisfaction with ourselves (Kant 1987 [1790], 196).
> .

Despite the fact that the moral and aesthetic judgements belong to different categories – on the grounds that the former is based on abstract concepts and has universal validity, and the latter is non-conceptual and can thus only aspire to subjective universality – the connection between the aesthetic and the moral is reiterated throughout the *Critique* (Hammermeister 2002, 37). As Scruton (1982, 91) puts it, for Kant "[a]esthetic experience and practical reason are two aspects of the moral". In particular, the ethical dimension of the aesthetic sphere and its powers of moral instruction appear most clear in the famous Section 59 of the *Critique of Judgement*, aptly entitled "Beauty as the Symbol of Morality". Here Kant says:

> Now I maintain that the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good; and only because *we refer the beautiful to the morally good* (we all do so naturally and require all others to do so, as a duty) does our liking for it include a claim to everyone else's assent, while the mind is also conscious of being *ennobled* by this [reference], above a mere receptivity for pleasure derived from sense impressions, and it assesses the value of other people too on the basis of [their having] a similar maxim in their power of judgement (Kant 1987 [1790], 228; emphasis added).

.**Romanticism**

It is however in the XIX century, with the Romantic writers, that the articulation and theorisation of the moral and civilising powers of art – as well as their civic value – reaches its climax. An exhaustive discussion of Romantic theories of art is not only, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the present paper, but an endeavour inevitably beset with difficulty. Partly, the reason for this is that Romanticism was a Europe-wide phenomenon, and although certain of its most characteristic features recur in most European nations, nevertheless each of them saw the development of a different version of its aesthetic, linked to the social, political and cultural conditions prevailing there (Bennett 2006). Furthermore, as Wiedmann (1986, 1) explains, even within individual nations, "Romanticism was not, nor at any time aspired to be, a coherent and self-consistent movement based on a programme of thought or system of ideas. Neither in terms of literature nor art was Romanticism ever a unified style although it did bring about dramatic and far-reaching formal innovations".

The analysis that follows, then, offers but a few representative examples of Romantic theories that are most relevant to the present discussion. In particular, our examination aims to highlight how Romantic aesthetic theories, especially as developed in early XIX century England, could ultimately be seen as the most powerful theoretical re-elaboration of the Horatian double functions of poetry and art - *prodesse et delectare* – in modern times. The pleasure that contact with the arts gives men is indeed an important feature of Romantic thinking, as this passage from William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (1800) shows:

> The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely the necessity of giving
> immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information that might
> be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer,
> or a natural philosopher, but as a Man (Wordsworth 1936, 737).

In other words, the aim of the poet is to provide pleasure to an educated public. Wordsworth's writing is indeed peppered with references to pleasure, which he considered as essential to poetry and poets, often expressing doubts over his own capability of giving pleasure to others through his work (Kermode 2004, 22).

Wordsworth, however, was also very careful in specifying the extraordinary nature of the pleasure deriving from poetry, in order to ensure that it should not be confused with the baser and less noble pleasures and occupations that Wordsworth saw as gaining popularity in his times. In a view that will become almost canonical in Romantic theories of art, then, poetry becomes an antidote to the malaise and corruption of present time's society:

> For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day. For a multitude of cause, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies (Wordsworth 1936, 735).

This brief passage from the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* effectively summarises many of the concerns of the English poets and writers of this period. As industrialization and increasingly specialized modes of production were slowly but steadily changing the world in dramatic ways - cities were growing fast, and the market provided a never-ending supply of 'extraordinary incidents' and 'gross and violent stimulants' - mental degeneration seemed almost inevitable. The antidote to such developments was poetry, which, in this view, assumes a crucial role in the regeneration of society (the *prodesse* element in Horace's dyad). In the *Preface*, indeed, Wordsworth explicitly presents his own poems as his modest attempt to counteract "this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" (*Ibid.*).

A by-product of this view of the regenerative and civilising function of poetry, is the central and heroic notion of the poet that accompanies it: Wordsworth defines the poet as

> the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and

climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the cast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time (*Ibid.*, 737 and 738).

If we look at another great Romantic poet and theorist, Percy Bysse Shelley (1792-1822), we can see similar points being articulated, on both the nature of the poet and his role in society. In particular, the guiding role of the poet finds in Shelley an explicit definition. In his *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley (1954, 297) writes:

Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world [90].

Furthermore, the identification of the main functions of poetry with the provision of pleasure as well as a civilising force in a time of moral decadence is also a theme that we find developed in Shelley's *Defence*, where the ethical nature of the effects of poetry on readers is explicitly stated:

A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. […] Poetry strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.

And further:

Poetry ever communicates all the pleasures which men are capable of receiving: is it ever still the light of life; the source of whatever beautiful or

---

[90] In his notes to Shelley's essay, David Lee Clark (*Ibid.*) comments that "[j]ust as the plowman prepares the soil for the seed, so does the poet prepare mind and heart for the reception of new ideas, and thus for change". This is however a view of the social function of poets and intellectuals that was already being developed in the previous century. Zygmunt Bauman (1987, 68) summarises the attitudes of the early modern European cultural elites and their self-appointed role as guides of humanity thus: "The tremendous potential of humanity cannot be realised without the help of the mediators, who interpret the precepts of Reason and act on them, setting conditions which will make the individuals willing, or obliged to follow their human vocation". What is original in the writers considered here, then, is the re-elaborations of older arguments in tones that are suffused with a romantic sensibility.

generous or true can have place in an evil time. It will readily be confessed that those among the luxurious citizens of Syracuse and Alexandria, who were delighted with the poems of Theocritus, were less cold, cruel, and sensual than the remnant of their tribe (Shelley 1954, 286).

Indeed, what Wordsworth and Shelley put forward in these passages, has been defined by August Wiedmann (1986, 66 ff.) as the 'hierophantic conception of art', whereby the artist and poet appears, indeed, as a hierophant, that is, a mediator and interpreter of transcendental and divine truths which he also helps in communicating to his fellow men. The significance of such a view of poetry and art to the present examination is clarified in Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1990 [1958], 42). Here Williams explains that, around the time when Wordsworth and Shelley were writing, artists "came to see themselves as agents of the 'revolution for life', in their capacity as bearers for the creative imagination. […] it was on this basis that the association of the idea of general perfection of humanity with the practice and study of the arts was to be made". As Williams further explains, it was precisely through the work produced by artists and poets that it was possible to have access to "that ideal of human perfection which was to be the centre of defence against the disintegrating tendencies of the age"[91] (*Ibid.*).

This brief review, therefore, makes it possible to conclude that, for both Wordsworth and Shelley, poetry has a clear ethical and humanising function. As Bennett (2006, 129) puts it, "poetry, by virtue of its imaginative power, has the capacity to awaken the imaginative potential of others. Because imagination is at the root of empathy, and because empathy promotes moral conduct, poetry thus fulfils a vital moral function". Furthermore, this view of the poet as interpreter and of poetry as "the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth" (Shelley 1954, 281), and a civilising force in society - "Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man" (*Ibid.*, 293) – will prove extremely influential in England, whilst through similar notions

---

[91] With regards to the social criticism implied in Romantic notions of poetry and the poet, Eagleton (2000, 16-17) observes: "Art could now model the good life not by representing it but simply by being itself, by what it showed rather than by what it said, offering the scandal of its own pointlessly self-delighting existence as silent critique of exchange-value and instrumental rationality. But this elevation of art in the service of humanity was inevitably self-undoing, as it lent the Romantic artist a transcendent status at odd with his or her political significance, and as, in the perilous trap of all utopia, the image of the good life came gradually to stand in for its actual unavailability".

elaborated by Weimar theorists (Goethe, Schiller, etc.) these ideas became, in fact, current throughout Europe.

As a matter of fact, the influence of such ideas was soon felt beyond the European borders. In the second half of the century, a view of the civilising powers of literature that is fundamentally consistent with the one discussed above can be found in the writings of the American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892). In his *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman proposes a new, powerful version of the medical metaphor first introduced by Aristotle, and writes about the therapeutic and civilising powers of works of literature. The problem of the civilised world was, in his view, "social and religious, and is to be finally met and treated with literature" (quoted in Jensen 2002, 34). Whitman's claims for the power of literature, however, go much further than this, for, very few people actually are fully aware of the portentous ways in which "great literature penetrates all, gives hue to all, shapes aggregates and individuals, and after subtle ways, with irresistible power, constructs, sustains, demolishes at will" (*Ibid.*):

> A single new thought, imagination, abstract principle, even literary style, fit for the time, put in shape by some great literatus, and projected among mankind, may duly cause changes, growth, removals greater than the longest and bloodiest war, or the most stupendous merely political, dynastic, or commercial overturn (*Ibid.*, 34-5).

If we come back to Europe, we see that the Romantic writers effectively set out a way of thinking about the arts and their role within society that was to be followed up by numerous later intellectuals, thus indirectly affecting cultural policy debates of today. Bennett (2006, 131) suggests that "[i]n many respects, post-war cultural policy in Britain was itself a Romantic project"[92].

As Bennett (2006) observes, progressively (and, at least in part, at the hands of the Romantic writers themselves), theories and ideas that were initially formulated for poetry alone, came to be extended to the arts in general, thus developing into a general theory of the relationship between the arts and society. Such ideas developed

---

[92] Bennett (2006, 130), in particular, singles out the particular, institutionally privileged position of the arts (as distinguished from a broader notion of culture) in the British funding system as an indication of the long-lasting and deep influence of Romantic theories over contemporary thinking on the arts: "The construction of a state cultural policy based on the arts […] can in many respects be seen as an institutional reflection of the status accorded to poetry by Wordsworth and Shelley".

further in a number of different directions as the XIX century progressed. For reasons of space, we will focus on the particular articulation and development of some fundamental ideas about the nature and function of art by Matthew Arnold. As was discussed earlier, Arnoldian theories of culture have to some degree reflected the intellectual and ideological basis of a liberal-humanist understanding of art and culture. In turn, such liberal-humanist notions of culture (which, very briefly, identify and limit Culture with the aesthetic forms that, considered together, make up the traditional canon of European high culture) have represented the theoretical and ideological basis for much of post-war cultural policy in Europe (Jordan and Weedon 1995).

Matthew Arnold

As we have seen, in XIX century England, the world was changing very fast, and by the second half of the century, both urbanization and industrialization had gained further momentum, bringing with them social inequalities, overcrowding and disease. Consequently, anxieties about the urban 'mob' and the possibility of social unrest were palpable amongst the English middle and upper classes, especially following the Second Reform Act of 1867, which almost doubled the size of the English electorate. Whilst in principle not adverse to democracy, Matthew Arnold was however worried by what he saw as the 'anarchic' tendencies of present society. This is how Bennett (2005, 463-4) explains and summarises the central concerns expressed by Arnold in his most influential piece of cultural and social criticism, *Culture and Anarchy* (1869),

> [H]e presents us with an England that, for from being in a state of "unrivalled happiness", is in fact not only brutalised and culturally impoverished but also on the verge of social and spiritual anarchy. In the face of such conditions, Arnold […] turns to his notion of culture, which he offers as an answer to "anarchy" and suggests will be "the great help out of our present difficulties." He links culture to the idea of the state and proposes that a kind of intellectual aristocracy, distinguished by its attachment to culture, will provide the source of authority that is so needed in times of anarchy.

Matthew Arnold (1993 [1869], 190), in the Preface to *Culture and Anarchy*, famously defined his notion of culture, and thus, the solution to society's present malaise as "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically…". The social dimension of such a quest for knowledge and understanding is made explicit when Arnold (*Ibid.*, 62) argues that "[p]erfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated". The idea of perfection and its link with culture are a central theme in Arnold's essay. So, "the idea of beauty and of a human nature perfect on all sides, which is the dominant idea of poetry, is a true and invaluable idea" (*Ibid.*, 67). It is, furthermore, an idea with obvious ethical undertones:

> … the idea which culture sets before us of perfection, - an increased spiritual activity, having for its characters increased sweetness, increased light, increased life, increased sympathy, - is an idea which the new democracy needs far more than the idea of the blessedness of the franchise, or the wonderfulness of its own industrial performances.

On this basis, Arnold (*Ibid.*, 151) reaches conclusions not too dissimilar from those articulated, on the opposite shores of the Atlantic, by Walt Whitman:

> If we look at the world outside us we find disquieting absence of sure authority. We discover that only in right reason can we get a source of sure authority; and culture brings us towards right reason. […] What we want is a fuller harmonious development of our humanity, a free play of thought upon our routine notions, spontaneity of consciousness, sweetness and light; and these are just what culture generates and fosters.

Arguments based on the civilising powers of the arts, and the belief that they could counteract the 'anarchic' tendencies of society and thus contribute to the maintenance of social order, indeed became central to parliamentary debates surrounding the first instances of state involvement in cultural matters in England, for instance, on the

occasion of the opening of the first art galleries in London[93]. In many ways, however, Arnold was only expressing and articulating in an intellectually sophisticated manner views of the transformative and civilising potential of the arts that were, at that time, already widespread and deeply felt among the English educated classes. This passage from the minutes of the annual meeting, in 1841, of the Art Union of London, reveals the opinion of its secretary, George Godwin, whose position is very close to that of Arnold:

> The influence of the fine arts in humanising and refining, in purifying the thoughts and raising the sources of gratification in man, is so universally felt and admitted that it is hardly necessary now to urge it. By abstracting him from the gratification of the senses, teaching him to appreciate physical beauty and to find delight in the contemplation of the admirable accordance of nature, the mind is carried forward to higher aims, and becomes insensibly opened to a conviction of the force of moral worth and the harmony of virtue (quoted in King 1964, 107).

Similarly, the social reformist William Stanley Jevons, in his *Methods of Social Reform* (1883, 7) expresses the same sentiments when he declares, with typical Victorian assertiveness, that "[a]mong the means towards a higher civilisation, I unhesitatingly assert that the deliberate cultivation of public amusement is a principal one". Indeed, "popular amusement are no trivial matter, but rather one that has great influence on national manners and character" (*Ibid.*). On the basis of this confident premise, Jevons' essay goes on to discuss the ways in which music, public libraries and museums (which, to the Victorian mind, were all forms of public recreation) could impart their civilising effects on the English populace. As we have shown in earlier articles, the idea of a civilising mission for the arts that was developed around this time is still far from extinct in contemporary policy documents (Bennett 1995, 210; Belfiore 2004).

F.R. Leavis

Arnoldian theories of culture provided a powerful and influential inspiration to the work of the critic and academic F. R Leavis (1895-1978). In one of his most

---

[93] For an extensive discussion of parliamentary debates and views discussed in the XIX century, see Minihan 1977; Pearson 1982; Bennett 1998, chapter 5.

important essays, *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*, Leavis explicitly establishes himself as the heir, in post-war times, of the Arnoldian campaign for a search for a cultural authority that could counteract the intellectual, social and cultural degeneration of present times. However, In Leavis' view, his own task was even tougher that it had been for Arnold a century before. Indeed, a new dramatic development had produced a stark contrast between the present situation and that witnessed by Arnold: the 'mass' was now beginning to actively challenge the status of the intellectual minority, and this had resulted in the creation of a new and oppositional language which aimed at subverting traditional forms of cultural authority (Baldick 1987, 163). In response to such developments, Leavis puts forward an elitist theory based on the assumption that true culture is only attainable through a literary education, and that the minority of people who, in his opinion, were genuinely in possession of such culture represented the consciousness and moral guide of humanity as a whole:

> The minority capable not only of appreciating Dante, Shakespeare, Donne, Baudelaire, Hardy (to take major instances) but of recognising their latest successors constitutes the consciousness of the race (or of a branch of it) at a given time. […] Upon this minority depends our power of profiting by the finest human experience of the past; they keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of tradition. Upon them depend the implicit standards that order the finer living of an age, the sense that this is worth more than that, this rather than that is the direction in which to go, that the centre is here rather than there (Leavis quoted in Baldick 1987, 164-5).

A logical corollary of such a position was the centrality of English departments within academia, which Leavis envisaged as the nucleus of such 'consciousness of the race', and therefore as a central agent in the regeneration of both society and culture:

> To revive or replace a decayed tradition is a desperate undertaking; the attempt may seem futile. … The more immediate conclusions would seem to bear upon education. … Something in the nature of luck is needed; the luck, let us say, that provides a centre of stimulus and a focus of energy at some university. All that falls under the head of 'English' there becomes, then, in spite of Mr H. G. Wells, of supreme importance (quoted in Johnson 1979, 103).

What gets lost in Leavis's own re-interpretation of the civilising powers of the arts and their potential to counteract negative developments in society is the democratic impetus that moved Arnold to say that culture "is not satisfied until we *all* come to a perfect man; it knows that the sweetness and light of the few must be imperfect until the raw and unkindled masses of humanity are touched with sweetness and light". Indeed, as Watson (2000, 75) points out:

> … by a supreme paradox, he [Leavis] seems to have seen no place for literature outside school and colleges, showed no interest in visiting theatres and cinemas or encouraging others to do so, and always conceived of literary understanding as uniquely an outcome of master-pupil relations. 'Everything must start from, and be associated with the training of sensibility'. The exploring scholar seeking the unknown or the unfamiliar meant nothing to him; neither did the lonely reader in love with a book. Leavis was an Eliotian, and Eliot's theory of tradition – of a sensibility handed down by an elite from generation to generation – lay enduringly at the heart of his faith.

Because of his influence over English academia, Leavis has exerted a profound authority over post-war literary and cultural criticism, and, in many respects, the discipline of cultural studies developed as an attempt to counteract Leavis's influential understanding of the literary canon and of cultural value[94]. Arguments purporting the transformative and civilising powers of the arts are, indeed, still alive and well, both in the intellectual arena and in the public discourse surrounding arts funding. A representative example of contemporary versions of this argument is provided by Roger Scruton, who has been making the case for the civilising role of art and their moral function repeatedly over the past three decades. So, in his *Art and Imagination* (1974, 248-9) he writes:

> The relation between moral and aesthetic judgement suggests that standards for the validity of the one will provide standards for the validity of the other. To show what is bad in a sentimental work of art must involve showing what is bad in sentimentality. To be certain in matters of taste is, therefore, to be certain in matters of morality: ethics and aesthetics are one.

---

[94] According to Milner and Browitt (2002, 7), "[t]here can be little doubt that cultural studies did indeed emerge by way of quasi-populist reaction against the elitism of older forms of literary study".

More recently, writing for the *Guardian* newspaper in distinctly Leavisite tones, he has suggested that taste is intimately connected with moral development:

> Through melody, harmony and rhythm, we enter a world in which others exist beside the self, a world that is full of feeling but also ordered, disciplined and free. That is why music is a character-forming force, and the decline of musical taste a decline in morals. The anomie of Nirvana and REM is the anomie of its listeners. To withhold all judgement, as if taste in music were on a par with taste in ice-cream, is precisely not to understand the power of music (Scruton 1997).

The Arts and Colonialism

Before we move on to the next category of claims for the arts, we need to consider one further aspect of the notion of 'civilization', that is, the idea prevalent in XIX century Britain and Europe that the arts could provide an ethical justification for the imperial and colonial enterprise. A typical example of the discourses around the civilising mission of Europe in the colonies is represented by the writings of J. A. Symonds (1840-1893), who, in his *The Renaissance in Italy* (an encyclopaedic *opus* written between 1875 and 1886), wrote:

> Such is the Lampadephoria, or torch-race, of the nations. Greece stretches forth her hand to Italy; Italy consigns the fire to Northern Europe; the people of the North pass on the flame to America, to India, and the Australian isles (quoted in Davies 1997, 24)

This motif of the torch-bearing European continent bringing the light of civilization to as yet uncivilised countries overseas, and the related notion of what Rudyard Kipling famously dubbed 'the white man's burden' (to spread said civilisation) indeed recurs time and time again in the literature of this period[95]. The opening lines of Kipling's famous 1898 poem "The white man's burden", are worth quoting here:

> Take up the White Man's burden-
> Send forth the best ye breed-
> Go bind yours sons to exile

---

[95] Whilst this aspect of the rhetoric around the moral justification of the imperial enterprise falls beyond the scope of the present study, it is worth mentioning that there was also a powerful religious component in the pro-colonisation arguments (Brooks and Faulkner 1996, 15-6; Lindsay 1981).

<div align="center">
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild -
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child [96].
</div>

The justificatory nature of such arguments in favour of the civilising role of European, and particularly British, colonisers has been extensively investigated by contemporary post-colonial studies. In particular, Louis Lindsay (1981, 10-1), in his essay *The Myth of a Civilising Mission*, writes:

> The myth that England was carrying the 'white man's burden' served to enoble imperialist designs giving to them a kind of missionary zeal, frequently characterised by deeply fanatical and unswerving commitments. It was primarily the conception which they had of themselves as *cultural missionaries* which allowed Englishmen to speak with such fervour and pride on the things which they had allegedly done for their colonies and the multiple and uncountable blessings which imperial rule supposedly bestowed on the non-white races of the world. [...] The alleged civilising mission of British colonialism became established over time as something of an independent ideology with its own kind of autonomous dynamic. It became, so to speak, the 'moral fig leaf' which covered, justified and rationalised virtually all aspects of British imperialism (emphasis added).

In her perceptive study of the development of English literature as a subject of academic study, Gauri Viswanathan[97] (1989, 2-3) points out that the discipline entered the curriculum in the colonies long before it was institutionalised in the British islands. Her conclusion is indeed that the age of colonialism was a crucial moment for the establishment of the discipline of English, so that "no serious account of its growth and development can afford to ignore the imperial mission of educating and civilizing colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a mission that in the long run served to strengthen Western cultural hegemony in complex ways" (*Ibid.*, 2). Viswanathan's (*Ibid.*, 10) broader point is that the British colonisers used English literary studies as a tool to pursue a 'strategy of containment' in the colonies, and particularly in India, in a bid to quell all potential rebellions through cultural authority rather than relying on military power alone. In Viswanathan's own words,

---

[96] From the poem 'The White Man's Burden", reprinted in Brooks and Faulkner 1996, 307.
[97] We are grateful to Anna Upchurch for pointing us in the direction of Viswanathan's interesting essay.

"[t]here is little doubt that a great deal of strategic maneuvering went into the creation of a blueprint for social control in the guise of a humanistic program of enlightenment". This view indeed confirms what Antonio Gramci famously pointed out when he wrote that "the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'…It seems clear … that there can and indeed must, be hegemonic activity even before the rise to power, and that one should not count only on the material force which power gives in order to exercise effective leadership" (in Forgacs 1988, 249 and 250).

It is therefore unsurprising that the rhetoric of the civilising mission of imperial nations was quite often subscribed to not just by the colonisers, but by the colonised too, who implicitly acknowledged the alleged cultural superiority of the colonising nation (Mann 2004 2-3). This, in turn, had significant consequences, for it slowed down the processes by which oppressed colonies begun to press for de-colonisation and the recognition of their own cultural values. From the point of view of the imperial powers, however, this shows the degree to which the civilising mission myth proved a most effective tool in support of the imperial enterprise. As Parita Mukta (1999, 27) puts it, "[t]he 'civilizing mission' was heavily implicated in the process of imperial subjugation, and the assertion of a cultural/political superiority"[98].

In her discussion of the mechanisms by which colonial subjects end up internalising the images, ideas, traditions and cultural values of the colonising country, whilst at the same time devaluing and disregarding their own original culture, Tatiana Aleksic (2002, 350) shows how the phenomenon discussed above is far from having disappeared following de-colonisations processes in the XX century:

> Western images, experience, knowledge and especially literature and the arts, are shown as universal, of global interest and thus universally acceptable, even desired. Everything else is 'local', 'limited', or, in a word, 'exotic' - interesting, but not globally appealing. Works of art written or made by western authors are à priori considered valuable and 'universal', appealing to the public across the globe.

---

[98] Van Krieken (1999, 297) points us towards a gap in the academic literature investigating "the extent to which 'civilizing offensives', the self-conscious attempts to bring about 'civilization', have revolved around essentially violent policies and practices".

Furthermore, Aleksic (*Ibid.*, 351) raises a number of points with regard to what has been termed 'benevolent racism' that are of great relevance to the contemporary cultural debates in the UK. Here, issues of under-representation of artistic expressions produced by cultural minorities within the publicly subsidised arts have become politically embarrassing, so that cultural diversity has become a top priority for bodies such as the Arts Council[99]:

> The West has different strategies through which it can always 'prove' its benevolence to those unwilling to delve deeper into the heart of the colonial matter. Statistically, there has been an increase in the number of artists of African or Asian origin who have been rewarded and acknowledged in the artistic world of the West. They are usually praised for 'bringing something new' to the world of artistic expression, or 'contributing' to the 'multicultural' world of the West, etc. Often what lies behind this seemingly positive trend is just another ploy by the West in its struggle to preserve its 'whiteness'. Writers and artists who are 'lucky' enough to be allowed to enter the Western arts world get support and recognition if, and only if, they remain within the limits of their 'national/ethnic tradition'. It can be argued that they are not accepted into the artistic world as *individuals*, as *free creating subjects*, rather they are seen as *symbols* of the Other, and the recognition and praise they receive is a mere token gesture. They are desired for the exoticism of the *otherness* their native traditions supposedly bring with them.

In other words, could it be that the existence of specific policy measures to foster cultural diversity and promote, specifically, Black or Asian cultural and artistic forms might actually be a way to unwittingly yet endlessly reproduce and reinforce the marginalisation of those very artistic expressions that the state aims to encourage? Answering such a complex question is beyond the scope of the present paper. However, it is worth recording the concerns raised by the cultural sector over the possibility that cultural diversity policies might have, in fact, increased polarisation between mainstream and minority artistic expressions. Tony Greaves (2003) has recently commented that:

> If cultural diversity policy is a call to come out of our arts comfort (or 'discomfort') zones, both as black and white artists and practitioners, and

---

[99] The question of cultural diversity has become increasingly central to British cultural policy debates since the introduction of equal opportunities legislation in the 1970s, and gained further momentum after the Race Relations Amendment Act of 2000 (Graves 2003). As a result of such developments, cultural diversity policies and related issues of access have become increasingly central themes in the rhetoric of both the government and the arts funding bodies (see Jermyn and Desai 2000). ACE's most recent manifesto document *Ambitions for the Arts* (2003), for instance, repeatedly reiterates the centrality of the principle of cultural diversity to the organisation's work. As the document states on page 6: "We want cultural diversity to be a central value in our work, running through all our programmes and relationships".

engage in different art forms and ideas on an equal footing – then that is fine. However, the fundamental value system that operates within the arts sector has yet to be seriously challenged by cultural diversity policy. Arts Council policy is still dictated by short-hand terms, which has led to the frustration of many artists who are caught in an arts identity trap not of their own making.

In conclusion, this chapter has reviewed theories that posit that the arts have a humanising and civilising function is society. There are two main strands to this category of claims. The first is characterised by strong moral undertones, whereby the arts are seen an essential tool in a process of ethical self-improvement and refinement. Hence, the recurring theme of the 'ennobling' powers of the aesthetic experience that we have encountered in the writings analysed here. The second thread in this group of writings is represented by the theme of the arts as a force that can promote civilization and contribute to the formation of the perfect citizen. Here the emphasis is chiefly upon the civic dimension and socio-political significance of the transformation attributed to the aesthetic experience. In the next chapter, we will see how the arts have been explicitly seen as a political instrument and a tool of social engineering.

Chapter 7: Political instrument

Much of what we have discussed so far conforms to what M. H. Abrams (1953, 15) defines as 'pragmatic' theories of art, for they all look "at the work of art as a means to an end, an instrument to get something done, and tends to judge its value according to its success in achieving that aim". With the present category, we witness what is arguably the most pragmatic of the categories analysed so far, in that the instrumental element is here most prominent. For reasons of space, we can only discuss a few examples of the claims that the arts may be effectively used as a political instrument and as a tool for social engineering: the function of the arts within the Fascist and Nazi regimes; the theory of the 'governmentalization of culture' put forward by Tony Bennett (1995 and 1998) on the basis of the thinking of the French theorist Michel Foucault; and the notion of the theatre and the novel as agents of social and political change.

Whilst we might not all agree with George Orwell that "all art is to some extent propaganda"[100], one has to acknowledge that the tight links between art and politics have been apparent throughout history. For the subordination of the arts to politics, and more specifically, the use of art for propaganda purposes is not a modern phenomenon. On the contrary, it can be traced at least as far back as to classical antiquity. The reasons for such a long-standing connection are set out by Ellenius (1998, 2):

> The Latin word *repraesentatio* means visualising, or illustrating, for instance by using examples. In French and English usage, the word 'representation' carried the meaning of a visual or conceptual image, often equivalent to a symbol or a metaphor. Ever since classical antiquity, political power had been disguised in metaphors.

One of the reasons why the arts seemed a fruitful conduit for politics is the fact that, as we have seen, the arts are believed to affect people in many subtle ways. Even Plato's concerns for the corrupting powers of poetry and the theatre and their ban from the ideal polity can be connected to the idea that art could provide a powerful

---

[100] Quoted in De Rose Evans (1992, 7).

social weapon, and could therefore be politically dangerous (Leith 1965, 16-7) Unsurprisingly, then, the arts - and visual imagery in particular - have often been used in both crude and sophisticated ways to achieve political ends. For instance, in her study of the use of art as propaganda in ancient Rome, De Rose Evans (1992) shows how it was not only the art forms most obviously suited to the expression of political ideas that were used for propaganda, such as triumphal paintings. These were certainly a central element of propaganda, since they could effectively educate the illiterate populace on the successful military campaigns of the Roman army and its leaders.

Yet such magniloquent expressions of political values through art were also accompanied by subtler ones. A good example is the propagandistic nature of Roman coins, often used by young members of the aristocracy to get the public to familiarise themselves with their appearance, emblazoned in the coins, as this was believed to give them a certain advantage when they embarked on a high-profile political career. The Church also provides numerous examples of how art was used to promote the main tenets of the Chrsitian faith, to the extent that medieval cathedrals have been described as a "plastic presentation of the dogmas and traditions of the Church" (Leith 1965, 17).

Further examples of the link between art and politics can be found during the French Revolution, whose leaders consciously and systematically employed a number of different art forms to promote the values of the Revolution. Dowd (1951) goes so far as to argue that many propaganda techniques (such as the pageant and the festival) that have become central to modern political activism were in fact first created and perfected in XVIII century France. Dowd (*Ibid.*, 535) suggests that, "[f]rom the practical point of view it was probably the leaders of the Revolution who did more to promote the arts as a means of stimulating national sentiment than any other single political group until the twentieth century". A further interesting point made by Dowd is that many artists during the French Revolution were quite happy to put their talent to the service of politics. Indeed, many of the people who held important legislative and administrative positions throughout the Revolution were artists, and during the Reign of the Terror, the Mayor of Paris was a sculptor. This declaration by the painter Louis David (himself a member, and at one time president, of the *Comité de sûreté*

générale of the Revolutionary movement) is representative of the feelings of many French artists at that time:

> Each of us is accountable to the fatherland [*la patrie*] for the talents which he has received from nature. … The true patriot ought to seize avidly upon every means of enlightening his fellow citizens and of constantly presenting to their eyes the sublime traits of heroism and virtue.
>
> The artist [he said on another occasion] ought to contribute powerfully to public instruction … by penetrating the soul … by making a profound impression on the mind. … Thus … the traits of heroism and civic virtue presented to the regard of the people will electrify its soul and will cause to germinate in it all the passions of glory and devotion to the welfare of the fatherland (quoted in Dowd 1951, 537).

Louis David, thus, highlights the explicit link between this idea of the arts as a crucial element in political struggles and the idea that the arts can profoundly affect values, beliefs and consciousness that we have seen recurring time and time again in the thinkers discussed so far. It is however in the XX century that the idea of art as propaganda finds its most powerful and shameful embodiment, in the Fascist and Nazi ideology and in the two regimes' cultural policies[101].

Fascism and Nazism

As early as 1923, Mussolini, speaking at the opening of a contemporary art exhibition in Milan, declared that it would be impossible to run a country ignoring its arts and artists, and a government that decided to do so, especially in a country like Italy, would simply be stupid[102] (Margozzi 2001, 27). Unsurprisingly, then, art and artists were at the very heart of Mussolini's cultural and political strategy.

It has been argued that Italian Fascism equates to a political project that had as its ultimate goal the formation of a new national culture and identity for the Italian

---

[101] The use of culture for explicitly political and propagandistic purposes, however, is far from being an exclusive feature of the Fascist and Nazi regimes, for – as the preceding discussion has shown – this is a recurring occurrence in political life, especially within non-democratic regimes. The arts, therefore, were also central to other European totalitarian political regimes, the Soviet Union being an obvious example. Unsurprisingly, then, Stalin dubbed writers "engineers of the soul" (in Debreczeny 1997).

[102] Mussolini's exact words were: "Non si può governare ignorando l'arte e gli artisti […]. In un paese come l'Italia sarebbe deficiente un governo che si disinteressasse dell'arte e degli artisti". The translation above is the author's.

people. This aim was to be achieved through the re-creation of the self, that is, in the moulding of the Italian people with a view to creating 'new identities as citizens of Fascist Italy' (Berezin 1997, 5). As Doumanis (2001, 146) further explains, the arts and culture had a central role to play:

> Mussolini sought to develop a national culture that engaged directly with the masses, that appealed to their sensibilities and which they might find emotionally uplifting. The new national culture was to be celebrated through new rituals and commemorative practices, through the creation and adoration of new or reinvented symbols and sacred objects. […] In most ways, Mussolini's government was demonstrably incompetent, but where it showed considerable ingenuity was in recognizing the importance of culture in politics. Its attempts to solve the problem of mass politics by allowing for cultural instead of political participation was probably Italian Fascism's most distinctive contribution to modern politics.

Unsurprisingly then, ritual forms of mass cultural participation and mobilization perfected by the Fascist regime and public spectacle were the preferred vehicle for the expression of the Fascist identity project. In spite of the extensive restructuring of the educational system, Italy during the Fascist *Ventennio* was a country with large areas inhabited by an illiterate population that did not use the national language in everyday life, and where access to culture was strongly limited. As a matter of fact, only a small elite had the privilege of enjoying Italian high culture and the great Italian artistic heritage (Berezin 1997, 47). Therefore, from the regime's perspective, 'public spectacle' - that is, grand public ritualistic events - were the perfect tool to reach a culturally unsophisticated populace. It is beyond question that from 1922 onwards, "spectacle replaced aesthetics as a defining force within popular Fascist cultural practice" (*Ibid.*, 41). Great events, exhibitions, expositions, fairs and processions with a distinct ritualistic flavour ensured that spectacle became the regime's privileged form of political communication.

It is with the ideology and the social engineering practices of the Nazi regime, however, that the idea that the arts can and should have a political purpose assumes its most powerful and disturbing articulation. The task the Third Reich had given itself was no less than imposing the National Socialist philosophy of life on the German people and the conquered countries, so as to shape their minds, attitudes and behaviour. As in Fascism, art and culture seemed to provide a useful tool in this endeavour. As Adams (1992, 10) explains, "[t]he National Socialists discovered that

art not only could carry a political message but was also a perfect medium for creating and directing desires and dreams. It was able to program people's emotions and direct their behaviour". Nor was Hitler himself in any way reluctant to make clear the link he saw between art, politics and propaganda. Speaking at the Nuremberg Party Day of 11 September 1935, Hitler declared:

> Art has at all times been the expression of an ideological and religious experience and at the same time the expression of a political will (Quoted in Adams 1992, 9).

It is no surprise, then, that Hitler had an equally clear view of how the arts were to help him achieve his political objectives. In a speech given at the Reichstag in Berlin in 1933, shortly after taking over power, he announced:

> Simu ltaneously with the purification of our public life, the government of the Reich will undertake a thorough moral purging. The entire educational system, the theater, the cinema, literature, press, and broadcasting will be used as a means to that end (*Ibid.*, 10).

Säuberung – cleansing or purification – thus became the central theme of the Nazi political and cultural project, leading to a systematic attempt to 'Aryanise' both the civil service and artistic institutions (Spotts 2002, 30).

Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, where much of his thinking on art is to be found, explicitly links the aesthetic sphere to the Nazi regime's infamous 'problem of the Jews'. In the book, published over ten years before his seizeure of power, Hitler discussed in great detail his view of contemporary art as degenerate. He believed this degeneration of art to be a product of a degenerate society where the cultural and genetic Aryan element had become increasingly diluted (by the parasite and uncreative Jew). Therefore, he envisaged a special educational mission for the German people based on the notion that the genetically pure Aryan race was the true custodian of culture, whose task was to spread this true culture as wide as possible. As Hitler explained in *Mein Kampf*, he was dominated by what he felt as a higher calling:

> … the obligation in accordance with the Eternal Will that dominates this universe to promote the victory of the better and stronger, and to demand the submission of the worse and the weaker…. In this world human culture and civilization are inseparably bound up with the existence of Aryan. His

dying off or his decline would again lower upon this earth the dark veils of
a time without culture (in Adams 1992, 11).

As was the case in Fascist Italy, then, in Nazi Germany, art too was identified as having the important task of forging the nation, by overcoming social and economic barriers and moulding an organic community that shared the same values and beliefs (as well as hatred towards the same targets). To a significant extent, the evolution of the Nazi project did prove that the arts could be successfully harnessed as powerful social and political weapons. Indeed, as Carey (2005) and others have suggested, the comfortable co-existence of Nazism and European high culture has irredeemably undermined that culture's claim to possess essentially ennobling properties.

'Governmentalization of Culture'
Another articulation of the capacity of the arts to be used for political ends is represented by Tony Bennett's discussion of the 'governmentalization of culture'. This thesis represents a particular articulation of the broader notion of the 'governmentalization of social relations', which Bennett (1992, 397) defines as "the management of populations by means of specific knowledges, programmes and technologies – which, according to Foucault, most clearly distinguishes modern forms of social regulation from their predecessors". Bennett refers here to the French thinker's influential critique of traditional Western political thought based on a 'juridico-discoursive' understanding of power, historically rooted in the revitalization of Roman Law in the Middle Ages and the centrality of the monarchical institution in Western legal and political thinking.

As Foucault (1980) explains, traditional Western notions of political power identify it as emanating from a single source (typically the monarch) and thus trickling downwards in the social hierarchy until it reaches and affects the populace. Against this traditional conception, Foucault proposes his own alternative view. He suggests that, in order to understand power and its workings in contemporary society, we ought to look at the strategic apparatuses and the subtle mechanisms of domination

and subjection that shape society, rather than at traditional forms of sovereignty developed:

> I would say that we should direct our researches on the nature of power not towards the juridical edifice of sovereignty, the State apparatuses and the ideologies which accompany them, but towards domination and the material operators of power, towards forms of subjection and the inflections and utilisations of their localised systems, and towards strategic apparatuses. We must eschew the model of Leviathan in the study of power. We must escape from the limited field of juridical sovereignty and State institution, and instead base our analysis of power on the study of the techniques and tactics of domination (*Ibid.*, 102).

The consequences, for the historical researcher are clearly spelt out by Foucault (*Ibid.*, 96) who explains that historical analysis should not

> concern itself with the regulated and legitimate forms of power in their central locations, with the general mechanisms through which they operate, and the continual effects of these. On the contrary, it should be concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions.

Foucault here refers to 'governmental power', which, as Bennett (1995, 22) explains, "is characterised by the multiplicity of objects which it pursues, objectives which have their own authorization and rationality rather than being derived from the interests of some unifying central principle of power such as the sovereign or, in later formulations, the state".

In Bennett's own adaptation of the Foucauldian concept of governmental power to the field of cultural history, the XIX century is identified as a crucial moment in the process of 'govennmentalization'. In this view, culture – and, in particular, high culture – becomes progressively instrumentalized in order to become useful as a means of social management, and, furthermore, social engineering (Bennett 1992, 1995, 1998 chapter 5). In particular, Bennett (1995, 23) argues that, at this point in time, culture becomes embroiled in a number of tactics being developed in order to change the behaviour and personal conduct of the populace, with a view to

establishing a system for the 'government of the self' to replace the older top-down version of sovereignty and power. In Bennett's (*Ibid.*) own words:

> The critical developments affecting the sphere of culture in these regards concerned the shift – which, of course, was a relative rather than a total one – from a conception in which culture served power by embodying, staging or representing it, making it spectacularly visible. In place of this, culture was increasingly thought of as a resource to be used in programmes which aimed at bringing about changes in acceptable norms and forms of behaviour and consolidating those norms as self-acting imperatives by inscribing them within broadly disseminated regimes of self-management.

What Bennett is arguing in this somewhat laboured passage is that, in the course of the XIX century, certain types of 'rational recreations' and cultural activities (such as visiting public museums and arts galleries, which are 'invented' precisely around this time) were shaped in such a way that they could be used for political ends due to their power to shape public morals and behaviour[103]. These ends would be usually presented in the guise of the now familiar theme of the 'civilising powers' of the arts. Moreover, the civilising effects of culture were expected to bear all sorts of social benefits, as a result of the changed forms of behaviour that exposure to the arts would ensure (Bennett 1998, 122).

Bennett makes use of extensive quotations from English writers of the XIX century and Parliamentary debates of the times, which would appear to confirm that precisely at this time a conscious effort was being made to instrumentalise culture (and especially 'high' culture) for political ends that related to social control and the modification of the behaviour of the urban poor. If we come back to the already mentioned essay by Jevons (1883, 32), we find an explicit reference to the political benefits and social engineering potential – in terms of crime reduction – of the investment made by the state on libraries, museums and concert halls:

---

[103] Indeed, another important aspect of this harnessing of culture for governmental purposes is, according to Bennett (1992, 400), the fact that the environment where exposure to culture takes place is viewed as a more powerful influence than the art itself. Hence, the creation of the museum as a space thought out so as to ensure not just the maximum visibility of the artworks, but the visibility of each visitor to his fellow museum-goers. This, in turn, would endow individuals with enhanced capacity for self-monitoring and self-regulation (which are ultimately the mechanisms through which governmental power operates).

> Now, this small cost is not only repaid many times over by the multiplication
> of utility of the books, newspapers and magazines on which it is expended,
> but it is likely, after the lapse of years, to come back fully in the reduction of
> poor-rates and Government expenditure on crime. We are fully warranted in
> looking upon Free Libraries as an engine for operating upon the poorer
> portions of the population.

Similarly, this passage from Thomas Greenwood's 1888 essay *Museums and Art Galleries* confirms that the civilising effect of the arts were expected to result in changed habits and manners, and as an antidote to antisocial behaviour:

> After a holiday spent in a Museum the working man goes home and cons
> over what he has seen at his leisure, and very probably, on the next summer
> holiday, or a Sunday afternoon walk with his wife and little ones, he
> discovers that he has acquired a new interest in the common things he sees
> around him. […] He has gained a new sense, a craving for natural
> knowledge, and such a craving may, possibly, in course of time, quench
> other and lower craving which may at one time have held him bondage –
> that for intoxicant or vicious excitement of one description or another
> (quoted in Bennett 1992, 400).

At the time when Greenwood wrote his essay on the civilising powers of museums and arts galleries, indeed, it was common belief that popular improvement in taste and appreciation of the arts would directly result in moral progress (Minihan 1977, 52). In the late 1830s, already, William Ewart Gladstone, alluding to the British Museum and the National Gallery - which had been opened thanks to public funding – proclaimed that: "the State offers to its individual members those humanising influences which are derived from the contemplation of Beauty embodied in the works of great masters of painting". He goes on to conclude that: "the higher instruments of human cultivation are also ultimate guarantees of public order" (quoted in Minihan 1977, 32).

The Victorians were adamant about the civilizing potential of the fine arts. They even believed that once the fine arts had been given the chance to operate their magic on the British working classes, they would forsake the ale-house for artistic pursuits. Such an achievement would reduce alcohol abuse and the chances of public disorders while promoting social cohesion. To borrow Allan Cunningham's words, the beneficiaries of the elevating effects of the arts were: 'Men who are usually called

"mob"; but they cease to become mob when they get a taste' (Minihan 1977, 89). Sir Martin Archer Shee, when asked to testify in front of a Parliamentary Select Committee on Fine Arts in 1841, spelt it out further:

> … that the object of the Committee is, not so much, to forward the arts themselves, as through their influence to advance their great end, towards which the promotion of the fine arts can be considered but as means, the civilization of our people; to give to their minds a direction which may tend to withdraw them from habits of gross and sensual indulgence; to secure and sustain the intellectual supremacy of our country, not only with respect to the present age, but with reference to posterity… (quoted in Minihan 1977, 68).

It is clear from these quotations that arts promotion was not seen as an end in itself, but rather as an alternative to forms of social activity and recreation that were seen as undesirable and dangerous. Arguments similar to those put forward by Jevons for museums and libraries also figured prominently, in the second half of the XIX century, in debates over the opportunity for the government to establish a National Theatre, as shown by the poet Richard Henry Horne's words:

> A regular, systematic stage influence upon national character of the kind we advocate, must eventually exercise its due, its inevitable power of softening, purifying, and elevating, and thus render the aid of a National Theatre well worthy the consideration of a wise and economic Government, were it only from the saving it would effect in the cost of the various departments of our penal legislature and reformatory institutions… (Minihan 1977, 143)

Such considerations seem to confirm – on the one hand - Bennett's notion of the attachment of the arts to a governmental agenda in the XIX century; and, on the other, that the use of the arts as a tool to promote social cohesion is no means a novel element of contemporary cultural policy.

Whilst the discussion has, so far, focussed mainly on the use – or rather – the abuse of the arts within political regimes that did not shy away from instrumentalizing the cultural sphere in the pursuit of their political programmes, there is another dimension of the idea that the arts can contribute to the political agenda of the day that we need to consider. We refer here to a more positive and, indeed, redemptive view of the ways in which the arts operate in society, and the connected belief that the arts can be

a progressive force that can bring about change and improvements in the lot of disenfranchised and oppressed groups. For reason of space, our discussion of this aspect of the present category of impact will focus on a necessarily brief analysis of the 'committed' novel and political theatre.

The 'Committed' Novel

The idea that novels can change history, fight slavery and oppression, bring about legal change and generally have a major role to play in political struggles is very old and deep-seated in the collective consciousness of the West. Such faith is expressed, for example, by the controversial French writer Roger Garaudy, who is credited with the declaration that "[a] good book… is a force, a tool or weapon, to make the dreams of today become the reality of tomorrow" (quoted in Caute 1971,72-3) . This is by no means a view universally shared by all novelists[104], not even those whose work can be defined as broadly 'political'. Günter Grass, for example, has repeatedly argued, throughout his career, against the limitations entailed by an explicitly 'committed' stance on the part of novelists. As he himself polemically puts it:

> From the start, even before inserting his paper into the typewriter, the committed writer writes, not novels, poems or comedies, but committed literature… Everything else, which takes in a good deal, is disparaged as art for art's sake (in Caute 1971, 34).

Whether the explicit concern of the artist for ideas and values that are extrinsic to immediately aesthetic or artistic considerations is detrimental to the aesthetic value of the novel itself is a debate beyond the scope of the present analysis[105]. Nevertheless, it remains unquestionable that the history of literature and literary criticism is littered with examples of novels that are said to have exercised direct political influence over their times. Michael Hanne (1996, 37) suggests that one of the earliest and best known examples is Goethe's *The Sorrow of Young Werther*, the alleged impacts of

---

[104] Nor by cultural critics for that matter, as the earlier discussion of Adorno's views on literary commitment have already shown.

[105] This view can be summarised by the words of the American critic Gerald Rabkin: "The *problem* of commitment arises when the artist is committed to values or actions extrinsic to the immediate concerns of his art, when the moral urgency of outside imperatives forces him as an artist into nonaesthetic areas of consideration" (in Caute 1971, 34).

which have been discussed in an earlier chapter of this paper. Other illustrious examples might be the novels of Charles Dickens and Charles Kingsley, which, by exposing the social ills of XIX century Britain, are said to have been partly responsible for the wave of social and legal reforms that gained momentum towards the end of the century. On the other side of the Atlantic, the publication, in 1906, of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, with its stark depiction of the hard lives of the workers in the meat-packing industry in Chicago, is commonly believed to have been the main stimulus for the passage of the 'Pure Food and Drug Act' in the U. S. congress a mere few months afterwards (*Ibid.*).

Similarly, in his study of XVIII century literature, John Bender (1987) argues that the attitudes to prison that were formulated in narrative fictions published between 1719 and 1779 enabled and, in fact, shaped a new view of the penitentiary that eventually found its embodiment in the construction of new prisons towards the end of the century. According to Bender's account, "Defoe, Gay, Hogarth, and Fielding all predicate the new prisons in the very act of depicting the old" (*Ibid.*, 3). Such a conclusion is necessarily based upon a view of the novel (and art in general) not as a mere reflection of historical reality, but rather as an agent with the discrete power to shape history and enact direct social, political, cultural and legal change. In Bender's (*Ibid.*, 7) own words:

> … we can see more in works of art than mere reflections. They clarify structures of feeling characteristic of a given moment and thereby predicate those available in the future. This is the specific sense in which they may serve as a medium of cultural emergence through which new images of society, new cultural systems, move into focus and become tangible.

Hanne (1996, 34) suggests that the alleged power of the novel to shape reality and 'make' history can be explained by the fact that not only do most novels deal with real and recognizable places and times and refer to widely known historical events; but also, and more importantly, the reader's fascination with novels ultimately lies in his or her belief that they provide accurate representations and observations of actual human and social processes. This, Hanne argues has obvious repercussions in the political sphere, for most peoples' sense of their own history and the history of other peoples is more likely to be derived from fiction and film than from a thorough study

of the work of historians. Nor is this is by any means limited to poorly educated individuals, for it is likely that most well read people will have gained their understanding of, say, 1840s Russia from their encounters with the works of Gogol and Turgeniev, in the same way that many peoples' understanding of contemporary multicultural Britain might have been mediated by the works of writers such as Hanif Kureishi, Monica Ali and Zadie Smith. In other words, Hanne (*Ibid.*, 35) maintains, we tend to treat fictional narratives as a fully legitimate source of historical information which is at least complementary to, if not substitutive for, historiography proper:

> We derive general impression of living conditions of different classes, forms of social interaction, political processes, all of which we take to be typical of the period and place, from the fictional narratives we read, despite our awareness that most of the characters and events included in the story did not exist outside it.

If we accept Hanne's argument as accurate, we can begin to better understand the ways in which novels may become – through their publications, distribution, consumption and interpretation – a vehicle for change in social and political history. One of the most common ways in which narrative fictions can achieve this, is by telling a story that has never previously been told, with all the political implications which this might encompass, since "storytelling… is always associated with the exercise, in one sense or another, of power, of control" (*Ibid.*, 8). Indeed, two opposed views of the relation of storytelling to power have been playing each other out in the academic arena. On the one hand, some have suggested that all forms of storytelling (novel-writing included) necessarily contribute to the reproduction of the dominant ideology. Hence, for instance, Robert Scholes' (1980, 212) call for an 'anti-narrative', on the grounds that "traditional narrative structures [can be] perceived as part of a system of psychosocial dependences that inhibit both individual human growth and significant social change. To challenge and lay bare these structures is thus a necessary prelude to any improvement in the human situation". A large number of literary critics and political philosophers within the Marxist tradition have indeed explored extensively the ways in which cultural production and consumption are embroiled in the political and economic context of the times, so that ultimately a

society's power structure not only finds itself reflected in the cultural sphere, but also strengthened through it.

On the other hand, however, other commentators have maintained that there are ways in which storytelling can be disruptive of the existing social order, and thus, liberating and progressive. The crucial way in which storytelling can achieve this, is by telling previously untold stories, thus offering a perspective on the world that had been, until then not voiced and thus not legitimised[106]. For instance, Ross Chambers (1984) suggests that the key to understanding the impacts of the novel lies in its 'power of seduction': since the power of a novel to seduce its readers is a non-coercive form of power, it can be harnessed against other forms of coercion. In Chambers' own words:

> If such power [the novel's] can be called the power of seduction, it is because seduction is, by definition, a phenomenon of persuasion: it cannot rely on force or institutional authority ("power") for it is, precisely, a means of achieving mastery in the absence of such means of control. It is the instrument available to the situationally weak against the situationally strong (*Ibid.*, 212).

Hence, the obvious conclusion:

> … such seduction, producing authority where there is no power, is a means of converting (historical) weakness into (discursive) strength. As such, it appears as a major weapon against alienation, an instrument of self-assertion, and an "oppositional practice" of considerable significance (*Ibid.*).

The possibilities thus opened up for the novel to be a force for ethical and political reflection and a potential spur to action are articulated by Derek Attridge (2004, x) in the preface to his study of the South African writer J. M. Coetzee:

> The importance of Coetzee's books, I believe, lies not only in their extraordinary ability to grip the reader in proceeding from sentence to sentence and from page to page, to move intensely with their depiction of cruelty, suffering, longing and love, to give pleasure even when they dispirit and disturb, but also in the way they raise and illuminate questions of immense practical importance to all of us. These include the relation between

---

[106] As Michael Hanne (1996, 15) explains: "… the telling of a different kind of story (often a previously untold story) will trigger the telling of other stories of the same kind and a new, highly charged consciousness and solidarity will be created on the basis of the aggregation of similar stories, which results in a degree of empowerment of people who previously saw themselves as isolated and powerless".

ethical demands and political decisions, the human cost of artistic creation, the exactingness and uncertainty of confessional autobiography, and the difficulty of doing justice to others in a violent society.

It would be misleading, however, to assume that the novel can impact on history and society in a direct and straightforward manner. Attridge himself goes on to discuss the ways in which Coetzee has engaged with the difficult social and political issues of his native country (namely colonialism and its multifaceted legacy of oppression) in a way that highlights the complexity, ethical and political, of contemporary South Africa - so as to discourage any easy expectations of a simple and clear moral or political conclusion to be drawn from his novels. The complexity of the position of the 'committed' novelist was highlighted by Coetzee himself, who during a controversial speech in Cape Town in 1987, declared:

> … in times of intense ideological pressure like the present, when the space in which the novel and history normally coexist like two cows on the same pasture, each minding its own business, is squeezed to almost nothing, the novel, it seems to me, has only two options, supplementary or rivalry (in Attridge 2004, 14).

Coetzee himself, rather unsurprisingly, then went on to advocate the latter option.

A slightly different attitude is expressed by the concept of *litérature de témoignage*, that is "literature which seeks to bear witness to its time", which Margaret Atack (1989, 16 ff.) suggests as a useful paradigm for understanding the literary production of the French Resistance that flourished in the years of the Nazi occupation. The concept derives from a book by the French academic Jean Norton Cru entitled *Du Témoignage* (1940). This is a discussion of First World War literature, which also explores in great detail the broader question of the nature and importance of documentary literature. In Cru's view, the true novel is the one that faithfully records what its author has witnessed, any embellishment and ornament being superfluous to the real meaning and objective of the writing. In his usage, *témoignage* indicates an active (rather than reactive) stance, whereby the aim of the wrirher is to transmit the moral lesson to be learned from the events witnessed and registered by the writer. Needless to say, Cru's unquestioned belief in literature as the reflection of an event, and the issue of the extent to which a subjective account of an event can be accepted

as authentic are all highly problematic (Atack 1989). Yet, Cru's stance and motivation as a writer, despite the internal contradictions of his theorizing, are representative, we would argue, of the inspiration of much politically engaged fiction writing.

A further complication lies in the fact that if we accept that novels might be written and used as political weapons, then we might have to accept that, like all weapons, they might be used to fight for the opposite side; or they might be used to fight battles different from those first envisaged by their authors; or, even, they might be employed in the context of several different political battles at the same time (Hanne 1996, 3). As Hanne (*Ibid.*, 4) puts it:

> At a certain point, … authors' political intentions – which, like authorial intentions in general, are in any case ultimately unknowable – in a sense become irrelevant, as groups of readers wittingly or unwittingly appropriate the text for their own purposes. Writers have no means of limiting, let alone absolutely determining, the readings to which their works will be subjected.

Many of the considerations discussed here with regards to the engaged novel are also relevant to the theatre, often referred to as the "most political of all art forms" (Patterson 2003, 1). This is true particularly of 'political theatre', which Michael Patterson (*Ibid.*, 3) defines as "a kind of theatre that not only depicts social interaction and political events but implies the possibility of radical change on socialist lines: the removal of injustice and autocracy and their replacement by the farer distribution of wealth and more democratic systems".

Political Theatre

Patterson is indeed referring here to that strand of playwriting of the twentieth century that had an explicit intention to convert audiences to new ways of thinking, by becoming "more overtly political, questioning not so much social morality as the fundamental organization of society, with the emphasis on economics rather than on ethics" (*Ibid.*, 1). Central figures in this development, which was often indebted to and expressive of a Marxist analysis of the state of society, were Erwin Piscator and

Bertolt Brecht. They were amongst the first playwrights to suggest, through the stage, a socialist alternative to the *status quo* of their times. It is, in fact, to Piscator's essay of 1929, entitled precisely 'political theatre', that we owe this commonly used label.

In Britain, 'political theatre' became particularly lively in the post-war years, and – according to some commentators had lost much of its impetus by the mid-1980s (*Ibid.*, 1; Peacock 1999). As we have seen, since the time of Classical Greece, the theatre has been considered a privileged forum for the debate of delicate and complex political and ethical issues. The very nature of the performing arts, by bringing people together in a communal aesthetic experience, lends itself to this role as a site of communication and questioning. It is the intrinsically public and communal nature of theatre that is seen as preserving its potential for political influence in the era of the mass media. This is how David Hare (1988, 38), an English playwright working within the arena of what we have defined as 'political theatre', explains the limitations of television as a tool for social and political critique:

> The inherent problem with television as an agent of radical ideas is that its massive audience is not confronted en masse. It is confronted in the atomised arena of the family living room, the place where people are at their least critical, their most conservative and reactionary… The television audience, approached in the midst of their private and personal existence, are much more likely than collectively addressed audiences to take an individual, personalised (and therefore psychological rather than social) view of the behaviour demonstrated to them.

It would thus appear that whilst works of art can be seen, in certain circumstances, as agents of social and political change, certain art forms are more prone to achieving these ends than others, the theatre having an obvious advantage over other, more private, aesthetic experiences.

Whether the theatre can actually succeed in producing this shift in peoples' political beliefs and therefore aid actual political change remains to be seen. It is interesting to note that the attempt of British playwrights to counteract the advent and instauration of Thatcherism and its values was commonly seen as unsuccessful. This is how the dramatist Howard Brenton (1995, 75) recalls his own and his fellow writers' attempt to overturn the political climate of the 1980s through their writing:

> Thatcherism, like all authoritarian dogmas, was brightly coloured. Writers were trying to get all the darkness, the social cruelty and suffering behind the numbingly neon-bright phrases – 'the right to choose', 'freedom under the law', 'rolling back the state'. It was as if a hyperactive demon was flitting about amongst us, seeking with its touch to turn everything into a banal conformity, a single-value culture with one creed – 'by their sale returns ye shall know them'.

Yet, writing in 1988 about British theatre in the late '70s and early '80s, John Peter, the *Sunday Times*'s theatre critic wrote: "British drama hasn't found a language to deal with the 1980s, when the issues are starker, politics tougher, and the moral choices more extreme". Nevertheless, as late as 1996, John McGrath, in the introduction to his collection of plays entitled *Six Pack*, argued for the necessity of articulating a language and a discourse that could 'undo' the damage caused by Thatcherism, and highlighted the central role of writing for the theatre in this process:

> In an age in which the growth of the 'visual' languages of film, television, advertising, and computer iconography is the excuse for vapid imprecision: in which political and financial and industrial powers have one very exact internal language of expansion and profit, but when called upon to speak to the world hire Public Relations advisers to teach them to speak a rather different language designed to deceive, or even to appear to speak while in fact saying nothing; in which, in short, public language is in danger of losing its ability to tell the truth of the world in all its complexity, then perhaps at least some writers should refuse complicity with this failure by declining to indulge in smart post-modern games-playing, and rather struggle to create recognisable images of a world in transition, and even to dare to ask: transition to what? To answer we must have words that mean.

In this passage, McGrath is providing much more than a statement of his aesthetic position, for this is also a firm declaration of the political function of language and literary and theatrical writing, and a genuine belief in the power, or even the ethical necessity, of a theatre that can change society for the better.

In conclusion, this chapter has presented a diverse range of claims made for the capacity of the arts to realize a number of different political ends. We have looked at examples of the abuse of the arts by totalitarian regimes for the purposes of propaganda and to further their political aims. On the other hand, we have also looked at the ways in which both the novel and the theatre have been said to counteract the

coercive nature of political power, by giving voice to marginalised or silenced perspectives, thus playing an emancipative social role and contributing to progressive political change.

Chapter 8: Social stratification and identity construction

In contemporary times, the most influential theories that have focused on the ways in which taste-formation and cultural consumption are linked to social differentiation and stratification have been produced within the sociological field by Max Weber, George Simmel, and, more recently, Pierre Bourdieu, to name but the most prominent writers.

However, the notion that one of the main functions of art in society is to operate a distinction between people is much older than standard sociological theories of 'taste as refinement'. For example, we looked earlier at theories suggesting that human creative performance can be interpreted as a form of sexual display, and therefore, as a crucial element in the battle for survival of the human species. In other words, artists and other creative people are set apart by their own creativity in a way that puts them at an advantage from an evolutionary point of view. Ellen Dissanayake (1998, 61-2) reinforces this point when she argues:

> … the fact that people everywhere value the arts and take the trouble to express themselves aesthetically suggests to an evolutionary biologist that there is a reason: doing this, (rather than not doing this) contributes to human evolutionary fitness. Faced with the overwhelming evidence that people everywhere make and respond to the arts, the ethologist would have to presuppose that the arts must have survival value.

Lewis-Williams (2002), in his fascinating study of European cave art of the Upper Palaeolithic, which mixes anthropological and neurological insights in the attempt to understand for what reasons human beings living at that time began to create art, comes to a similar conclusion. He suggests that 'cave artists' were not driven by aesthetics or by a desire for self-expression. He maintains that "the making of art is a social, not a purely personal, activity. Art serves social purposes, though it is manipulated by individual people in social contexts to achieve certain ends. Art cannot be understood outside its social context" (*Ibid.*, 44).

So, if at a basic evolutionary level, the arts are involved in distinguishing between humans that are 'evolutionary fit' and those who are not, in the course of time the

ways by which the aesthetic sphere has become connected to exercises in social differentiation and distinction have become increasingly complex and sophisticated. Saisselin (1970, 214-5), for instance, argues that the *philosophes* working and writing in XVIII century France were key to contributing to the establishment of an understanding of culture that contained a means of social differentiation. It was during the Enlightenment that culture and artistic refinement came to be seen as a way for the growing (both in size and influence) middle classes to distance themselves both from the loathed nobility and the vulgar lower classes. In Saisselin's (*Ibid.*, 214) own words, around this time, a crucial shift occurs: "if an aesthetic built on beauty may be associated with the nobility, then the aesthetic of the bourgeoisie is precisely that of distinction. […] The gentleman, the hero, the courtier are replaced by the man of distinction".

Certainly, the Romantic theories of genius, and the grand claims made for the poets, now seen as being nothing less significant than "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" points towards a similar development. As will be remembered, the idea of cultural refinement as theorised in the work of the English Romantics discussed earlier, was in close association with claims of social superiority. As Bennett (2006, 128) notes, for Shelley, "poets were engaged in an essentially moral enterprise. Inevitably, they thus inhabited a morally superior world to those who went about the more mundane business of making money". Similarly, Wordsworth notes that "one being is elevated above another" in direct proportion to his or her level of aesthetic refinement. It is the business of poets to raise this level of refinement amongst their people (*Ibid.*).

The long-lasting influence of both Enlightenment and Romantic views of the social superiority that can be conferred by the cultivation and refinement of cultural tastes is evident in the observations made by later intellectuals. D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930), for instance, did not believe that the work of intellectuals bore any relevance whatsoever to the life of the populace. He did envisage the role of mentor and moral guide for intellectuals, and novelists in particular, but the object of such mentoring ought to be, in his view, just a small, refined section of the community. For the rest - that is, the working classes, or the 'non-mental' section of the population - too much culture might actually be counter-productive; hence Lawrence's opposition to mass

education (Johnson 1979, 120). Similarly, T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, puts forward his own proposal for a class-based elite with a strong cultural component. His view was based on the assumption that what he referred to as an "identity of belief and aspiration" could only occur whenever a shared social and family background could be called upon to bring the members of such elite together. In his critique of a meritocratic society, Eliot (1962 [1948], 42) argues:

> In an élite composed of individuals who find their way into it solely for their individual pre-eminence, the differences of background will be so great, that they will be united only by their common interests, and separated by everything else. An elite must be therefore be attached to *some* class, whether higher or lower: but so long as there are classes at all it is likely to be the dominant class that attracts this elite to itself.

Eliot's argument would appear to confirm, thus, the point famously made by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1830) that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" (in Laing 1978, 7). Indeed, for Marx (1818-1883), all individual expressions are subordinate to their economic and class relations in society. Therefore, culture (the 'super-structure'), reflects class forces and their interplay in society. Class forces, in turn, derive from the economic system of material production (the 'base'). Inevitably, then, history, as well as culture, are driven by the struggle between classes and cannot but reflect it (Swingewood 1998, 3).

Towards the beginning of the XX century, however, the Marxian view that assimilated culture to a reductive model based on the base-superstructure relation, came under scrutiny. The challenge of coming up with theoretical frameworks that could deal with the complexity of modern culture (and society) was taken up by the emerging discipline of sociology, and by those such as Durkheim, Weber and Simmel. As Simmel eloquently puts it, he saw his work as an attempt to complement Marx's historical social theory, by constructing

> a new storey beneath historical materialism such that the explanatory value of the incorporation of economic life into the causes of intellectual culture is preserved, while these economic forms themselves are recognised as the

result of more profound valuations and currents of psychological, even metaphysical preconditions (quoted in Swingewood 1998, 31)[107].

Max Weber (1864-1920), in particular, attempted to retrieve the notion of stratification from the pre-eminently economic understanding that was promoted by the theories of Karl Marx. For Marx, the concept of social class was defined predominantly in relation to those who possessed control over the means of economic reproduction. Weber, instead, suggested a distinction between the Marxian view of social stratification, and what he called 'status honour', which he saw as grounded in relation to the means of cultural reproduction (Peterson 1997, 71). An important distinction put forward by Weber, thus, is the one between 'class' and 'status group'. In Weber's own words (1948, 193):

> With some over-simplification one might thus say that 'classes' are stratified according to their relations to the production and acquisition of goods; whereas 'status groups' are stratified according to the principles of their *consumption* of goods as represented by special 'styles of life' (emphasis in the original).

Although the categories of classes and status groups can often overlap, an important feature of what Weber calls 'status honor' is represented by the fact that "above all else a specific *style of life* can be expected from all those who wish to belong to the circle" (*Ibid.*, 187; emphasis in the original). Another important point Weber raises is the fact that social stratification according to status becomes particularly significant when the economic conditions of a society are relatively stable. It is in these circumstances that the 'style of life' assumes a central role among social elites:

> The decisive role of a 'style of life' in status 'honor' means that status groups are the specific bearers of all 'conventions'. In whatever way it may be manifest, all 'stylization' of life either originates in status groups or is at least conserved by them.

---

[107] As Alan Swingewood (1998, 31 explains, "although critical of the holistic tendency of Marxism, Simmel clearly regarded his own contribution as a supplement, not an alternative, to Marx's historical social theory".

Weber is voicing here a classical understanding of the mechanisms of social distinction and taste formation as elaborated within standard sociological theories of 'taste as refinement'. These see the formation of taste as the dominion of the privileged and well educated elites, and its diffusion to the rest of society as a 'top-down' process: a standard is elaborated at the top of the social hierarchy and then trickles downwards to the rest of the population. In this view, the lower classes are eager to subscribe to the aesthetic values and the criteria of good taste elaborated at the top of the social scale, as this would appear to offer them a way to climb up the social ladder (Meyer 2000).

George Simmel (1858-1918) also placed at the centre of his sociological explorations the role of cultural values and norms in socialising and civilising individuals by attributing them to distinct social groups associated with specific social statuses and styles of behaviour (Harrington 2004, 150). The idea of culture as 'refinement' is what interested him:

> The material products of culture – furniture and cultivated plants, works of art and machinery, tools and books – in which natural material is developed into forms which could never have been realised by their own energies, are products of our own desires and emotions, the result of ideas that utilize the available possibilities of objects. […] By cultivating objects, that is by increasing their value beyond the performance of their natural constitution, we cultivate ourselves; it is the same value-increasing process developing out of us and returning back to us that moves external nature or our own nature (Simmel 1997, 37).

Simmel was also interested in the mechanisms by which aesthetic consumption, together with manners, style, fashion, and behaviour all contribute to processes of social differentiation. In particular, writing about fashion, he argued that following fashion allows the individual a sense of social distinction, yet, at the same time, also a sense of belonging to a certain social group, since "the individual is freed from choosing and appears simply as a creature of the group, as a vessel of social content" (Simmel 1997, 188). As Simmel (*Ibid.*, 189) further explains:

> Fashion is the imitation of a given pattern and thus satisfies the need for social adaptation; it leads the individual onto the path that everyone travels, it furnishes a general condition that resolves the conduct of every individual into a mere example. At the same time, and to no less a degree, it satisfies

the need for distinction, the tendency towards differentiation, change and individual contrast.

Simmel's conclusion, then, is inevitably that "fashions are always class fashions", with the corollary that "the fashions of the higher strata of society distinguish themselves from those of the lower strata, and are abandoned by the former at the moment when the latter begin to appropriate them" (*Ibid.*). In essence, this represents the very influential kernel of classical sociology's accounts of taste, whereby the process of taste formation is envisioned in terms of the sequence 'refinement-diffusion-devaluation-further refinement'. Part of this process is the continuous effort, on the part of the taste-forming social elites, to maintain their distance from the lower classes through means of 'aesthetic outdistancing' (Meyer 2000, 34)[108].

Around the same time, Antonio Gramsci, writing from his prison, was expressing similar views with regards to the power of certain forms of culture and educational attainment to operate distinctions across a population along class lines. He particularly attacks the mechanism by which holding a university degree can become a marker of social status yet not be a guarantee of a cultured sensibility (but rather an incentive for an empty intellectualism):

> We need to free ourselves form the habit of seeing culture as encyclopaedic knowledge, and men as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts, which have to be filed in the brain as in the columns of a dictionary, enabling their owner to respond to the various stimuli from the outside world. This form of culture really is harmful, particularly for the proletariat. It serves only to create maladjusted people, people who believe they are superior to the rest of humanity because they have memorised a certain number of facts and dates and who rattle them off at every opportunity, so turning them almost in a barrier between themselves and others…. The young student who knows a little Latin and history, the young lawyer who has been successful in wringing a scrap of paper called a degree out of the laziness and lackadaisical attitude of his professors – they end up seeing themselves as different from and superior to even the best skilled workman, who fulfils a precise and indispensable task in life and is a hundred times more valuable in his activity than they are in theirs (in Forgacs 1988, 56-7).

---

[108] A classical example of this type of study is the Norbert Elias' (1994) influential book entitled *The Civilizing Process*, which focuses, as Elias himself explains, on "modes of behaviour considered typical of Western civilised man" (p.xi).

Elements of Weber and Simmel's thought can be traced in the important work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), whose investigation of a number of aspects of French life made him one of the most highly regarded and influential contemporary sociologists (Jenkins 2002, ix). The present discussion cannot do full justice to the complexities of Bourdieu's study of cultural consumption and production in contemporary France and its complex sociological and philosophical implications. For practical reasons, then, we will focus primarily on Bourdieu's *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*, first published in France in 1979, and the most relevant of Bourdieu's essays to the present discussion.

As for Weber, and especially Simmel before him, *Distinction* focuses on Bourdieu's study of the mechanisms by which the individual's aesthetic disposition and taste are correlated to both social class and educational achievement. As Bourdieu (1984, 6) himself explains in the introduction to *Distinction*:

> Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classification is expressed or betrayed.

In other words, taste and cultural consumption (through the creation of a superior sphere of higher cultural experiences as in Kant's high aesthetics) represent a way for the educated middle classes to distance themselves from the lower classes, and to bestow legitimacy on such differentiations. Bourdieu refers to this process as a 'cultural consecration', a mechanism that requires the denigration of those tastes and aesthetic manifestations that do not belong to the afore-mentioned 'high aesthetics':

> The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word, natural - enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasure for ever closed to the profane. That is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences (*Ibid.*, 7).

The aesthetic sense is, thus, "a distinctive expression of a privileged position in social space" (*Ibid.*, 56). Like Simmel, Bourdieu too finds that whilst separating people in different groups, matters of aesthetic taste also group people together, according to criteria of similar social status and educational levels:

> Like every sort of taste, it [the aesthetic sense] unites and separates. Being the product of the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence, it unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from others. And it distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is the basis of all that one has – people and things – and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others (*Ibid.*).

This aesthetic disposition finds expression in the middle classes' propensity for the appreciation of the fine arts, for the attendance at museums and theatres, and for other forms of artistic engagement with high arts facilities, and is a reflection of the stock 'cultural capital' that the dominant class can harness for the reproduction and preservation of its status (Lane 2000, 52)[109].

Interestingly, the interim findings of a project currently underway at the Open University together with Manchester University on "Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion" would appear to show a similarity between the conclusions reached by Bourdieu on the basis of his fieldwork in France in the 1960s and 1970s, and those reached by British scholars in the XXI century. As Tony Bennett (2005) - one of the principal researchers on this project - explains, a major component of the project was an extensive survey of peoples' cultural activities and preferences, tastes and their relation to class background, educational attainments, ethnicity, gender, and a number of further social indicators. Bourdieu himself would not have been surprised to hear that a positive correlation was found between high rates of participation in cultural activities and professional (rather than manual) occupations. Especially when participation in the 'high' arts is concerned (visits to museums and galleries, theatres and concert halls), data showed that having a university degree or not is the clearest indicator of cultural preferences and attendance behaviour. This leads Bennett (*Ibid.*,

---

[109] Whilst only a limited proportion of the middle classes regularly experiences the arts, recent data on arts participation and attendance collected, in England, by the Arts Council confirms that professionals (indeed, the middle classes) are consistently more involved in all the cultural activities included in the survey than working class or unemployed individuals (ACE 2004).

3-4) to conclude that "well-educated middle-class professionals and managers are the most likely to be heavily involved in those parts of the cultural sector that are dependent on public funding whereas less well educated unskilled and semi-skilled workers are more exclusively involved in the commercial cultural sector". Hence, it would appear that not only is cultural consumption still a force for social distinction in today's society, but that, to a certain extent, the 'high'/'low' culture divide is also part of the mechanism of taste formation and refinement that reflects social and educational divisions.

It is important to observe that cultural participation does not simply operate a distinction between individuals that either have or have not certain levels of cultural capital. Social stratification through culture, in fact, operates in much subtler ways, and allows all manner of distinctions to be made even amongst the 'cultured'. As the American scholar William Ian Miller (2003) writes, in a book entitled *Faking It*, aesthetic experiences often represent occasions for painful self-awareness, and force us to face up to our own deep-seated social insecurities. Comparing the contemplation of a painting to the contemplation of the beautiful in nature, Miller (*Ibid.*, 158) maintains:

> With art we have the added anxiety as to whether we are enjoying it properly and whether we can convince others we enjoyed it properly without seeming either too simple or sillily pretentious.

At the root of what Miller (*Ibid.*, 160) defines as "the obligatoriness of being properly appreciative of those things we are supposed to appreciate" is ultimately one's fear of showing oneself up in front of one's peers with whom the aesthetic experience is often shared, especially in a museums setting:

> You cannot help but be aware of their reaction, not just to the object of appreciation but also to your watching of it. They will be judging, you feel, whether you are being a proper appreciator. Your reputation – for having a soul, for having taste, for being a worthy object of love, and for not being either a pompous prig or a hopeless philistine – is in some way engaged. There is competition even in the watching of a sunset as to who is feeling the most, let alone a painting, where the competitiveness is more clearly the case. True, the others may not be judging you, but you suspect they are, because you are certainly judging them and comparing their responses with yours. It is a rare day that a trip to the art museum doesn't leave you feeling something of

> a moral failure for not liking Picasso as much as you thought you should have
> or as much as the others faking liking him are liking him (*Ibid.*).

Hence, the anxious self-awareness induced by the contemplation of art in a public environment such as the museum:

> How long are you obliged to pay homage, to stay looking at the Vermeer? There is the niggling worry about when we can declare ourselves properly released from having to attend to it. The painting stubbornly stays there, available to be admired or studied until the museums closes or until your companion urges you to move on in no uncertain terms. When can you say, "OK enough" and feel you have paid proper homage? (*Ibid.*, 161).

Needless to say, a lot rests, in terms of social and cultural distinction, upon our capacity to react in the 'correct' manner to the aesthetic encounter. For what Miller is wittingly exposing here is, in fact, the notion, first expounded by Bourdieu in his *Distinction*, of the ideological function of cultural activity, and the process by which "the definition of cultural space and the positioning of subjects within it evince relationships of power" (Palumbo-Liu 1997, 5).

Moreover, as William Ray (2001) observes in his *The Logic of Culture*, whilst it divides us into relatively homogenous groups, culture also allows us a certain degree of individualization. Indeed, it is in the nature of the 'logic of culture' to contribute to the shaping of individual identity through the process of subscription to a set of accepted cultural norms ratified by a particular society. Yet, at the same time, one also has the possibility of attempting to find a way of expressing one's individuality by criticising and bending those very accepted cultural norms:

> … the cultural way of thinking imagines the social in terms of a permanent dialectic between autonomy and community, the coherence of the group and the self-realization of its members. And the ethic inscribed in this way of thinking makes the subject responsible for overcoming this tension (p. 8).

Consequently, "the identity one forges for oneself is the product of individual agency and energy, but it has meaning within the community by virtue of being constituted according to the rules of that community" (*Ibid.*, 62). For Ray, the notion of 'self-

selection' is central to the ideology of culture as it has developed in the modern era. In this view, the ethic of culture entails a number of mechanisms through which every citizen is led to express and disclose his or her preferences and intellectual capabilities. As a result, "one assumes one's place in society with a sense of self-determination, since it comes as a result of pursuing one's own interests". In other words, by enlisting individuals in the process of self-selection that ultimately results in social stratification, the logic of culture places the responsibility for social hierarchy on the individual, through the deployment of a double rhetoric, which simultaneously encourages conformity and individuation (Ray 2001, 76-78).

In this chapter, we have reviewed theories that assert that aesthetic preferences and patterns of cultural participation operate social distinctions amongst people. Writers discussing the powers of the arts to distinguish people along educational and class lines can be found within a disparate range of disciplines, from ethology and ethnology to the social sciences. However, the discussion has shown that the theories developed within the field of sociology by Weber and Simmel at the turn of the XXth century, and later developed by Bourdieu, have proved most influential, so that their elaboration of the notion of 'taste as refinement' is a most useful paradigm for understanding the claim that the arts can be agents of social stratification.

Chapter 9: Autonomy of the art and rejection of instrumentality

As was noted earlier, the claims discussed so far for the ways in which the arts can affect individuals and society as a whole have all represented different variants of what Abrams (1953, 15) defined as a 'pragmatic' theory of arts. In other words, the claims and the positions reviewed so far with regards to the 'positive' tradition, all share a fundamental belief that the arts have a function to fulfil in society (though ideas of what precisely such function ought to be, as we have seen, vary greatly). A corollary of such views of art is that, whilst aesthetic criteria remain central in the judgement of works of art, nonetheless, the extent to which the artwork in question is seen to be successful in fulfilling the function attributed to it is also an important indicator of its value. The present category, then, deals with instances of the contrary view, which posits that - whilst the arts might well have educational, cognitive, humanising or other powers - the value and importance of the work of art reside firmly in the aesthetic sphere.

In contemporary cultural policy debates, as was noted in the introduction to this paper, such views are often characterised as 'art for art's sake". However, as was pointed out earlier, this is a somewhat misleading label. It is interesting to observe how, ultimately, the theoretical reference for the present label, that is, so-called theories of art for art's sake developed between the XVIII and the XIX centuries in France and England, originated, in fact, from a misunderstanding and distortion of Kantian thought.

Even before the XVIII century, however, attempts had already been made to carve out a certain degree of autonomy for the aesthetic sphere. As we have seen, in classical antiquity, the arts, and particularly poetry and the theatre, were perceived as a moral guide and the repository of the deeply held beliefs and values of a society. As Albert L. Guérand (1936, 34) puts it "[u]p to the end of the Classical Age, Art for Art's Sake may have been practiced; it never was openly confessed, and still less professed". This *status quo* remained fundamentally unchallenged in the Early Christian times, when, as we have seen, poetry, literature and the arts were still seen as subordinate to the expression of Christian values, and the articulation of the newly

developed Christian doctrine. In his historical study of Italian literature, for instance, Petronio (1991, 34) argues that *all* the literature produced in Italy between the X and XIII century was of a religious nature. Throughout the Early Christian period and much of the Middle Ages, indeed, it was not just artistic production, but all intellectual work that was subordinated to the requirements of religion, including philosophical investigations. As Thomas Aquinas famously put it, "philosophia ancilla theologiae est" (philosophy is the handmaid of theology). Protestantism shared similar views, and Calvin repeatedly argued against any notion of art for art's sake on the grounds that any artistic expression that exists purely for man's enjoyment is false art, inspired by the devil and thus sinful (Spelman 1948, 247). As Frederick Dorian observes, "Calvin envisioned the entire world as a convent; the ritual should offer no opportunity for appreciation of the beautiful art works which adorned Christian churches" (cited in Cummings and Katz 1987, 6).

As was suggested earlier, it was during the Renaissance that Italian literary critics first attempted to ease the yoke of religion over poetic inspiration. Theories of the allegorical interpretation of classical poetry, and the defence of the moral nature of poetry were indeed attempts to free poetical works from the suspicion that the Fathers of the Church had reserved for them. The notion, put forward by the likes of Leonardo Bruni and Giambattista Guarino in the late XVI century, that a poet should be judged on the ground of his success as an artist rather than a moralist, represents the first instance of an attempt to defend a predominantly aesthetic appreciation of literature. Nevertheless, Spingarn (1908, 10) observes that whilst such ideas where not uncommon at that time, they nevertheless expressed isolated views that did not coalesce into a fully fledged doctrine coherently articulated within an aesthetic theory of poetry.

The Significance of Kant

A significant moment in the trajectory towards a definition of an autonomous sphere for the arts is represented by Kantian philosophy. Bell-Villada (1996, 20) goes as far as maintaining that "the *Critique of Judgement* eventually came to be viewed as *the* sourcebook for Art for Art's Sake", though he also points out how this often was

through a misunderstanding of or lack of direct contact with Kant's work. It is indeed with Kant that art's independence is first theorised. Earlier sections of this paper have shown that, for Kant, the aesthetic sphere has both a cognitive and a moral dimension, despite not being able to transmit universal knowledge or values. However, Kant also makes it clear that art was no longer to be seen as the handmaiden of ethics. As a matter of fact, in section 16 of the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant (1987, 78) explicitly maintains that "neither does perfection gain by beauty, nor beauty by perfection". Fine art, for Kant, is "a way of presenting that is purposive on its own and that furthers, even though without a purpose, the culture of our mental powers to [facilitate] social communication"[110] (*Ibid.*). Hence, by defining fine art as 'purposiveness without a purpose', Kant asserts that works of arts have no purpose outside of themselves, they serve no ends whatever and are thus free from any finality or function. Hammermeister (2002, 32) summarises Kant's position thus

> One reason that we can never attribute an end to a beautiful object is that every definition of an end for Kant relies on some idea of perfection, namely, the ultimate purpose of an object. Since beauty […] can never be conceptualised, no beautiful objects can ever be thought to have a purpose. And yet when we encounter it, it seems that it has been designed as if to fulfill a very particular function, since there is nothing arbitrary about it. One way to solve this seeming contradiction is to think of it as saying that beauty does of course incite pleasure in us and that this is very well a purpose. And yet the beautiful object does not exist on behalf of its viewer; it is truly independent.

An anticipation of this Kantian idea of the independence of art was already to be found in the writing of Karl Philip Moritz (1724-1804), who, writing in 1785 (that is, about five years before Kant penned the passages quoted above), asserted:

> But what brings us pleasure without actually being useful we call beautiful. …
> I have to take pleasure in a beautiful object purely for its own sake; to this end the lack of an exterior purpose must be replaced by an inner purpose; the object must be something perfect in itself (in Hammermeister 2002, 29).

---

[110] The degree to which this identification of Kant as an "autonomist" is fully justified on the grounds of the arguments put forward in the *Critique of Judgement* is at the centre of a complex debate, to which the present discussion cannot do full justice. For an exhaustive discussion of the 'autonomist' component of Kantian thought and the relationship between his aesthetic ideas and the notion of social communication (that is never defined in Kant's writing), see Haskins 1989.

Another crucial articulation of the autonomy of art was put forward by an illustrious contemporary of Moritz: Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805). In his *On The Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller forcefully defends the idea of the autonomy of art from moral or didactic functions. The idea of a moral or educational function of art he finds, indeed, 'self-contradictory', for – as Schiller argues in the twenty-second letter – "nothing is more at variance with the concept of beauty than it should have a tendentious effect upon the character" (in Bell-Villada 1996, 27). Schiller expands on the theme of the 'uselessness' of art and beauty in the twenty-first letter, where he explains how helpless the arts are in promoting the ethical or intellectual 'betterment' of man; all responsibility for what men make of themselves rests, indeed, firmly upon their own shoulders:

> … beauty produces no particular result whatsoever, neither for the understanding nor for the will. It accomplishes no particular purpose, neither intellectual nor moral; it discovers no individual truth, helps us to perform no individual duty and is, in short, as unfitted to provide a firm basis for character as to enlighten the understanding. By means of aesthetic culture, therefore, the personal worth of a man, or his dignity, inasmuch as this can depend solely upon himself, remains completely indeterminate; and nothing more is achieved by it than that he is henceforth enabled by the grace of Nature to make of himself what he will – that the freedom to be what he ought to be is completely restored to him (Schiller 1967, 147).

Shelling's (1775-1854) *The System of Transcendental Idealism*, published in 1800, also argued in favour of the autonomy of art from any sort of use value, whether theoretical or practical. Art, he argued, has no end outside itself, for its 'holiness and purity' can only be preserved if art is an end in itself (Hammermeister 2002, 74). Shelling's position, thus, further demonstrates how, between the XVIII and XIX centuries, a body of thinking was being elaborated in Germany that focused on the independence of the aesthetic sphere from moral and didactic considerations.

It is primarily through Kant and his influence (often mixed with misunderstandings), however, that the idea of the independence of art and the aesthetic sphere from moral and epistemological preoccupations will evolve into theories of *l'art pour l'art* that are still invoked today with a mix of frustration and nostalgia by critics of current instrumental cultural policies. Furthermore, theories of 'art for art's sake', that were first developed when the Kantian ideas illustrated above were imported into France

and England, were also key in the later development of the Aesthetic movement in the XIX century.

The attempt to trace the intellectual origins of the set of beliefs that are referred to by the label of 'art for art's sake' (for a long time referred to by the French version of *l'art pour l'art*) and the first examples of the usage of the label itself have kept art historians and literary critics engaged in lively debates for most of the XIX and XX centuries. At the turn of the century and until the 1920s, it was customary to attribute the origin of the theory to the French, although later scholars progressively brought to light the trajectory of the main ideas of the movement, from their German origin (in Kantian thought and post-Kantian German Idealism), through English mediation of the notions, to their French re-elaborations in the guise of notion of *l'art pour l'art[111]*. The identification of the first appearance, in print, of the term 'art for art's sake' has not been straightforward either, with candidates for the title of 'inventor' of the phrase ranging from the French philosophy lecturer Victor Cousin, to Gautier, Benjamin Constant, Victor Hugo or William Thackeray (Egan 1921 and Singer 1954). Whilst these issues are beyond the concerns of the present paper, they certainly testify to the complexity of the issues under discussion here, and the extent to which, in the XVIII century, ideas and intellectual elaborations were already circulating and being exchanged across Europe, in a process of continuous cross-fertilization.

Today scholars generally agree that the central tenets of the art for art's sake theory can be traced back to Kant's philosophy as interpreted and diffused (and often misinterpreted) in England and France by a number of key personalities who were fascinated by the development of idealist philosophy taking place in Germany around the first half of the XVIII century. A whole new reading of Kantian aesthetics resulted from the extrapolation of certain terms from Kant's *Critique of Judgement* and their incorporation in a new guise which appeared only superficially Kantian. Some key Kantian words that seemed to particularly capture the imagination were 'aesthetics', 'disinterested', 'free' and 'pure'. As Wilcox (1954, 362) observes, to

---

[111] This more historically solid reconstruction of the origin of the art for art's sake theory is discussed in Egan 1921, Wilcox 1953 and Bell-Villada 1996, on whose accounts this section of the paper is largely based.

these one might add 'art', 'beauty', 'taste', 'form' and 'sublime', which were part of the already established philosophical vocabulary of the time. In Kant, these concepts appeared to have acquired new meanings, and it is indeed through the interpretation (and often the misinterpretation) of these Kantian notions that the kernel of the new theory originates from. As Wilcox further explains: "There you have the rubric of *l'art pour l'art*, each the index of a large area of meaning but far from the adequate expression of that meaning. Almost any combination will recall Kant. And the greatest of these is *aesthetic*" (*Ibid.*)[112].

In particular, Madame de Staël (1766-1817), who spent some time in Weimar in the winter of 1803-4 together with Benjamin Constant, played a key role in this dubious popularization of Kant's aesthetic ideas by giving a rather imprecise account of them in her book *De l'Allemagne*. This is how de Staël presented Kant's idea of disinterestedness:

> In separating the beautiful and the useful, Kant proves clearly that it is not at all in the nature of the fine arts to give lessons. No doubt everything beautiful ought to give rise to generous feelings and these feelings stimulate virtue; but as soon as one undertakes to place a moral precept in evidence, the free impression that the masterpieces of art produce is necessarily destroyed, for the purpose, whatever it may be, when it is known restricts and hinders the imagination (cited in Wilcox 1953, 364-5).

As was noted earlier, whilst Kant affirmed the 'uselessness' of art and the beautiful, or – in other words – that art is to be valued beyond narrowly conceived notions of its practical utility, he was also clear about the indissoluble link between the beautiful and the moral. In the passage quoted above, however, Mme de Staël seems to equate the separation between the beautiful and the useful with a separation between the beautiful and the moral, thus presenting a distorted view of Kant's original position.

---

[112] Wilcox's observation is indeed confirmed by that the fact that an alternative label for the theories being discussed here is "aestheticism", and their proponents in XIX century England were referred to – albeit derisively – as 'aesthetes' (Chai 1990).

XIX Century Aestheticism

What this passage indeed highlights is the way in which Madame de Staël[113] reinterpreted Kant's work, thus elaborating one of the central tenets of the art for art's sake doctrine: the separation of art from morality and from any didactic function. In XIX century aestheticism this principle of the separation between the aesthetic and the moral sphere will be further emphasised, and art and morality came to be viewed not just as separate, but as incompatible. As Oscar Wilde put it, "no artist has ethical sympathies" (in Wilcox 1954, 350), and Nietzsche declared that "the struggle against a purpose in art is always a struggle against the moral tendency in art – against its subordination to morality. Art for art's sake means, Let morality go to the Devil" (in Kieran 2005, 166-7).

An important component of XIX century aestheticism was also the rejection of the precepts of Christian morality and consequently the refusal to accept that art and poetry ought to be the handmaidens of theology. In its place, the pursuit of beauty for its own sake became the supreme end of the artist's life. As the preface to Théophile Gautier's novel M*ademoiselle de Maupin* (published in 1835) declares:

> One of the most ridiculous things in the glorious epoch in which we have the good fortune to be alive is undoubtedly the rehabilitation of virtue. […] The fashion to-day is to be virtuous and Christian (quoted in Grieve 1999, 17).

The rejection of Christian morality is therefore the necessary prerequisite for the substitutive cult of beauty. As Gautier further explains:

> Nothing is really beautiful unless it is useless; everything which is useful is ugly, for it expresses some need and the needs of man are ignoble and disgusting, like his poor feeble nature. […] Instead of some useful, everyday pot, I prefer a Chinese pot which is sprinkled with mandarins and dragons, a pot which is no use to me at all. […] I should very happily renounce my rights as a Frenchman and as a citizen to see an authentic picture by Raphael, or a beautiful woman naked […] for pleasure seems to me the goal of life and the only worthwhile thing in the world (*Ibid.*).

---

[113] De Staël was by no means alone in this process of diffusion *cum* misinterpretation and simplification of Kantian aesthetic principles. For instance, the French academic and philosopher Victor Cousin - who was for a long time credited with having coined the expression *l'art pour l'art*, and whose lectures were heavily indebted to German philosophy - is another central personality in this process (see Bell-Villada 1996, 37-40).

It is important to note the links between the popularity gained by ideas of art for art's sake and the social and economic developments of the XIX century. As was already observed in the preceding discussion of Romantic theories of art, the doctrine of art for art's sake needs to be seen against the backdrop of the profound changes in society brought about by the process of industrialization, that had, by the early 1830s (when notions of *l'art pour l'art* begin to circulate with significant frequency and intensity) gained momentum. Ideas of the bohemian or aloof artist that come to be crystallised around this time, are borne out of the painful awareness of the tensions – if not open conflict – of the imperatives of aesthetic production, and the requirements of a prospering cultural market based on the fundamental principle of providing the public with what it wants (no matter how crude or unoriginal that demand might be). In response to such developments, artists – especially in France and England – adopted what Bell-Villada (1996, 50) defines as a "militantly defensive posture, expressed via ideals that provided solace for their resentment and a sense of superiority in their craft".

In other words, artists that espoused theories of art for art's sake turned their marginal position in the current art and literary markets into a badge of honour, whereby the unmarketability and 'uselessness' (to practical ends) of their art became not only their 'trademark', but an aesthetic, moral and political asset and the foundation for their higher ethical ground. The mission of 'art for art's sake' and of Aestheticism in general, can thus be seen as part of a quest for a set of values alternative to the ones underscored by the functioning of the market and the flourishing capitalist system. Equating art to life was one of the avenues open to artists around this time. As Chai (1990, ix) confirms, "[a]t the heart of the Aesthetic movement is a desire to redefine the relation of art to life, to impart life itself to the form of a work of art and thereby raise it to a higher level of existence".

XX Century Elaborations

Ideas of the autonomy and 'uselessness' of art remained central to debates over the nature and role of the arts within society in XX century England. In his *Civilization*, first published in 1928, Clive Bell (1938, 61) maintains:

> He who possesses a sense of values cannot be a Philistine; he will value art
> and thought and knowledge for their own sakes, not for their possible utility.
> When I say for their own sakes, I mean, of course, as direct means to good
> states of mind which alone are good as ends. No one now imagines that a
> work of art lying on an uninhabited island has absolute value, or doubts that
> its potential values lies in the fact that it can at any moment become a means
> to a state of mind of superlative excellence. Works of art being direct means
> to aesthetic ecstasy are direct means to good.

In 1951, however, the popularity of theories of art for art's sake appeared to be losing ground, or – at least - so thought E. M. Forster. In the opening of one of the essays included in his *Two Cheers for Democracy* and actually entitled "Art for Art's Sake", he (1951, 96) declares: "I believe in art for art's sake. It is an unfashionable belief, and some of my statements must be of the nature of an apology". He further elaborates his ideas of what art for art's sake means to him thus:

> A work of art, we are all agreed, is a unique product. But why? It is unique not
> because it is clever or noble or beautiful or enlightened or original or sincere
> or idealistic or useful or educational – it may embody any of these qualities –
> but because it is the only material object in the universe which may possess
> internal harmony. […] The work of art stands up by itself, and nothing else
> does (*Ibid.*, 99).

As was the case for the Aesthetic movement of the preceding century, Forster's declaration of faith in the art for art's sake principle needs to be understood in the broader context of coeval cultural, economic and scientific developments. Indeed, scepticism towards the widely-held belief in the powers of science to bring order to the world is an important component of the reasoning behind the proclamation of the values of art for art's sake that Forster makes in the passage above. In the same essay, he (*Ibid.*, 97) points out the dominance that he saw in his time of preoccupations with the question of order: "In the world of daily life, the world which we perforce inhabit, there is much talk about order, particularly from statesmen and politicians". Science, which many held as the prime source of order in the world, had shown its limitations. Writing in the early 1950s, the memories of two world wars still fresh in his mind, Forster observes: "she [science] gave us the internal combustion engine, and before we had digested and assimilated it with terrible pains into our social system, she harnessed the atom, and destroyed any new order that seemed to be evolving". Hence

his conclusion, in the closing lines of the essay: "Works of art, in my opinion, are the only objects in the material universe to possess internal order, and that is why, though I don't believe that only art matters, I do believe in Art for Art's Sake".

Forster, indeed, is representative of the XX century versions of art for art's sake theories and contemporary elaborations of the importance of protecting the autonomy of art from encroachments (be they moral, epistemological, political, etc.). Whilst rejecting the most extreme forms of dissociation between art and morality, this position however highlights the view that the value of art does not lie in the connection of the aesthetic sphere with non-aesthetic and utilitarian preoccupations. Other interesting articulations of this position can be found, for instance, in the writing of Bertolt Brecht. In positing *pleasure-giving* as the central concern and function of theatre, he (1964, 180-1) clearly suggests this as prevalent over theatre's ethical and educational functions:

> From the first it has been theatre's business to entertain people, as it also has of all the other arts. […] We should not by any means be giving it a higher status if we were to turn it e.g. into a purveyor of morality; it would on the contrary run the risk of being debased, and this would occur at once if it failed to make its moral lesson enjoyable, and enjoyable to senses at that: a principle, admittedly, by which morality can only gain. Not even instruction can be demanded of it: at any rate, no more utilitarian lesson than how to move pleasurably, whether in the physical or in the spiritual sphere. The theatre must in fact remain something entirely superfluous, though this indeed means that it is the superfluous for which we live. Nothing needs less justification than pleasure.

Whilst aware of the educational and political significance of theatre, Brecht (1961, 22-3[114]) makes it clear that art and knowledge are two equally deserving yet completely distinct fields of human activity, so that:

> Whatever knowledge may be contained in a poetic work, it must be completely converted into poetry. In its transmuted form, it gives the same type of satisfaction as any poetic work.

---

[114] The essay referred to here is included in the already cited anthology of Brecht's writings collated and translated by John Willett under the title "Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction"; however, this section draws on the translation of the same piece by Edith Anderson and published as Brecht 1961 with the title "Theatre for Learning", on the grounds of the better clarity and fluidity of Anderson's English version.

The rejection of narrowly utilitarian views of the function of the arts in society is indeed at the heart of the intellectual position explored in this chapter. As the aesthete and museum curator John Pope-Hennessy (1913-1994) declares:

> My life has been devoted to studying works of art and putting them to use. To the material well-being of the world neither activity is of much consequence; it does not make the poor less poor, it does not sustain the hungry, it does not diminish suffering or redress injustice (cited in Carrier 1997, 6).

A similar point was raised, on the opposite side of the Atlantic, by David Mamet in the already mentioned essay *Three Uses of The Knife* (1998). Here Mamet too underlines the uselessness of a conception of the arts as a tool for social action or change:

> Drama doesn't need to affect people's behavior. There's a great and very, very effective tool that changes people's attitudes and makes them see the world in a new way. It's called a gun (p. 25).

Mamet, furthermore notes that the idea of the arts as a way to modify behaviour is not merely misguided, but ethically suspect; it places the artist in a position of moral superiority, which Mamet does not consider justifiable. He (*Ibid.*, 26-27) articulates these concerns compellingly:

> Now I've been working with audiences thirty years or more, in different venues. And I've never met an audience that wasn't collectively smarter than I am, and didn't beat me to the punch every time. These people have been paying my rent, all my life. And I don't consider myself superior to them and have no desire to change them. Why should I, and how could I? I'm no different than they are. I don't know anything they don't know. An audience (a populace) can be coerced, by a lie, a bribe (a gun); and it can be instructed/preached at. By anyone with a soapbox and a lack of respect. But in all the above this audience is being abused. They are not being "changed", they are being forced. Dramatists who aim to change the world assume a moral superiority to the audience and allow the audience to assume a moral superiority to those people in the play who don't accept the views of the hero. It's not the dramatist's job to bring about social change. There are great men and great women who effect social change. They do so through costly demonstration of personal courage - they risk getting their heads beat in during the march on Montgomery. Or chain themselves to a pillar. Or stand up to ridicule or scorn. They put their lives on the line, and that can inspire heroism in others. But the purpose of art is not to change but to delight. I don't think its purpose is to enlighten us. I don't think it's to change us. I don't think it's to teach us. The purpose of art is to delight us: certain men and women (no smarter than you or I) whose art can delight us have been given dispensation

from going out and fetching water and carrying wood. It's no more elaborate than that.

Mamet is raising here a number of crucial issues that are central to a discussion of the function of the arts and artists in society. Whilst a detailed discussion of the full implications of these issues goes beyond what it is possible to explore here, it is worth highlighting their relation to contemporary debates over instrumental cultural policy. The link between ideas of the autonomous value of the arts and the constrictions of present-day cultural policy have been extensively discussed by John Tusa, Managing Director of one of Britain's flagship cultural organisations, The Barbican in London. Over the years Tusa has been waging a personal battle (though by no means alone) against the need for the arts to be 'relevant' to the public and against pressures from government and funding bodies to ensure the arts' "utility and immediate comprehensibility to the broad public" (Tusa 2000, 29). Tusa's own diagnosis of the present malaise of the arts world reads thus:

> For we have lost a vocabulary and an area of permitted public discourse where values are valued rather than costed; where inspiration is regarded as heaven-sent rather than an unacceptable risk. Instead, we have a materialistic debate where the immaterial is dismissed as pretentious rather than welcomed as essential; where art for art's sake is pigeon-holed as a personal obsession rather than recognised as a vital social ingredient; where the public good is dismissed as a chimera so long as it cannot be quantified on a balance sheet (*Ibid.*, 29-30)

Tusa's argument, and the many other complaints over the extent to which arts organisations and funding bodies are "consumed by the political" – to cite the title of a recent philippic by cultural commentator and ex-Tate curator Andrew Brighton (2006) - are part and parcel of the dichotomy between the 'instrumental' and the 'intrinsic' value of the arts that – as will be remembered - we have characterised as a central feature of contemporary cultural policy debates. We have thus come back full circle to the problem of the lack of an appropriate language to describe how the art affect people and, thus, societies. However, in the light of the taxonomy of claims presented here, the lack of arguments for articulating the role of the arts in society that Tessa Jowell (2004) laments in her essay simply shows how far the current policy

debate has become detached from two and a half millennia of rich intellectual discussion of precisely this issue.

Conclusions

Before we turn to a discussion of the conclusions that can be drawn from this review, a number of caveats need to be mentioned. As already explained in the introduction, the review of the writings of philosophers, artists, novelists and dramatists that our taxonomy of claims is based on aims at being representative rather than exhaustive. In view of the broad time span under consideration, our approach to authors and works considered necessarily had to be selective. Other authors could have been considered, and readers of this paper could no doubt have come up with omissions, under-representations, or suggestions of classifying intellectuals and ideas in different ways. To a certain extent, this is in the nature of the study itself, as - on the one hand - exhaustiveness is beyond reach and, on the other, the interpretation of ideas produced centuries ago has been in many cases, the object of controversy and debate (for instance, of Aristotle's notion of dramatic catharsis, or the post-colonial critique of XIX century ideas of the civilizing nature of Western culture. Nevertheless, we would argue that there are a number of interesting conclusions that can be drawn from the classification of arguments made here and that have implications for contemporary cultural policy debates.

Firstly, the historical review presented indicates that the 'negative tradition' – that is, the view persisting over time that the arts have a negative influence on individuals and society as a whole – resounds as strongly as the 'positive tradition', which maintains that the arts are 'good for you' and which can be seen as predominant in today's debates over cultural policy and arts funding. As a matter of fact, one could even argue that the 'negative' tradition, despite being largely obscured in today's policy discourse has, historically, resounded more strongly. Indeed, as has been shown, many of the arguments on the cathartic, ethical or humanising powers of the arts were first elaborated in response to 'negative' theories that were perceived as dominant at the time. So, for instance, Aristotle's *Poetics* and his theory of dramatic catharsis (which – as was noted – has had a pivotal role in the development of the 'positive' tradition) was an attempt to counteract the fierce attack on poetry that Plato waged in his *Republic*. The attempt on the part of the Italian Humanists during the Renaissance to come up with a moral defence of poetry built on the notion of poetry

as an allegory of religious truths was but an attempt to redeem poetry and the theatre from the hostility that the Christian Fathers of the Church (think of St. Augustine, for example) had turned into a firm tenet of Christian doctrine.

Furthermore, the authors of the 'negative' view of the arts, from the very start, were acutely aware of the importance of translating their concerns about the corrupting and distracting powers of the arts into concrete measures and policies. Plato attempted to put into practice the political utopia of his *Republic* twice in Syracuse (albeit with little success, and a great deal of consequent personal trouble); the Fathers of the Church repeatedly, though equally unsuccessfully, attempted to have the theatre outlawed in Rome. The Puritan pamphleteers of XVI century England proved equally determined and altogether more successful. Indeed, as we have seen, a number of measures progressively reducing the freedom of actors to come together and perform to a public culminated in the outright closure of all English theatres in 1642. In contemporary times, the persistence of the suspicion that the theatre is capable of influencing behaviour and morality adversely is confirmed by the continued existence, in Britain, until as late as 1969, of a system of theatre censorship. Today, the existence of bodies such as the Board for Film Classification testifies to the persistence of the idea, Platonic in its essence, that it befalls upon the state to protect vulnerable and impressionable groups (such as the very young) from the damaging effects that might arise from exposure to certain types of films.

A second important observation that can be made on the basis of the present study is that the claims for what the arts 'do' to people and the ways in which the arts have the powers to deeply affect both individuals and communities are in truth a lot more complex and layered than contemporary cultural policy debates tend to reflect. As we have seen, the basic arguments on the functions and powers of the arts were first elaborated in the work of the illustrious triad represented by Plato (V century BC), Aristotle (IV century BC) and Horace (I century BC). The kernels of both the 'negative' and the 'positive' traditions, thus, had already been theorised over two thousand years ago, and have been evolving in different directions ever since. Yet, little of the richness of this intellectual tradition seems to have found its way into policy debates, and this might go some way to explaining the shallow and often unquestioned assumptions about the beneficial effects of the arts that dominate the

public debate around the involvement of the state in the funding and support of the arts and culture.

Indeed, a third important advantage of a historical approach to understanding the impacts of the arts is that it brings to light the more problematic issues that are rarely questioned or subjected to scrutiny in policy debates. For instance, we have seen how the rhetoric of the civilising powers of the arts was systematically and coherently employed, in XIX century Europe, to provide a moral justification for the colonial enterprise. Similarly, the idea that the arts can help to shape people's beliefs and sense of identity had a central place in the uses (and abuses) of the arts and culture for propaganda purposes in non-democratic and totalitarian political systems throughout history (the Fascist, Nazi and Soviet regimes being only the most recent, if striking, examples).

In other words, a historical approach of the type we have advocated in this paper - far from proposing a 'total history' and a search for some broader metanarrative or overarching principles to justify or explain the development of thinking about the arts and cultural policy - rather aims at the very rejection of such a totalising scheme. We have, in fact, attempted to concentrate our analysis on describing differences, transformations, contingencies, continuities and discontinuities in the ways in which a kernel of basic beliefs and theories about the ways in which the arts can affect human beings have changed over time and in accordance with the political, cultural and intellectual climate of the time. This has been, therefore, an exploration of trajectories of ideas, which – as we have seen – rarely evolve in a straightforward and easily traceable manner. Nor was our intention to present a teleological view of the evolution of Western aesthetic and philosophical thinking and indulge in a false progressivism. On the contrary, the most useful contribution a historical perspective can make to the study of the ways in which the arts impact on people is precisely to help *problematize* commonly and a-critically held assumptions.

Nor is the aim of the present enquiry to derive from the historical narrative a-historical or a-political conclusions that can 'explain' the present or direct us towards a better future. For one further advantage that accrues from the adoption of a historical perspective is that it soon becomes clear that views of how the arts relate to

society, and views of their transformative powers, have always been at the centre of highly politicised debates. Consequently, the cries against the excessive politicization of the Arts Council in England and the laments over the excessive pressures and demands placed by governments of today over the subsidised arts[115], when seen in a long-term historical perspective lose their polemical edge. For instrumentalism is, as a matter of fact, 2,500 years old, rather than a degeneration brought about by New Labour. The arts have been a tool to enforce and express power in social relations for as long as the arts themselves have been around. We would argue, that, in fact, the first lucid, cogent and systematic theorization of instrumental cultural policy can be found in Plato's *Republic* (Belfiore 2006a).

One of the most interesting aspects of the historical review presented here is that there has, in fact, never been a time, in the West, when discussions of the role of the arts in society and their effects on audiences have not been at the centre of incensed and passionate debates. Moreover, any author that put forward his or her own contribution to the debate displayed a clear awareness that this involved participating in a long-standing argument. Indeed, many authors considered here were quite explicit in asserting their intellectual allegiances as well as the ideas and thinkers they were attempting to discredit. It is in the second half of the XX century that this awareness appears more tenuous and explicit references to earlier, millennial debates seem to become more infrequent.

In conclusion, we hope that the present study might help cultural policy researchers, policy-makers and cultural administrators to gain a clearer sense of where commonly accepted views on the impacts of the arts actually originate from. Hopefully, by highlighting the problematic aspects of the 'art is good for you' rhetoric, and by tracing the lively trajectory of what we have called the 'negative tradition', the simplistic characterization of the social impacts of the arts that seems orthodox in contemporary policy debates can be successfully overcome in favour of a more sophisticated understanding of how the arts can affect people and be catalyst for social and political change (or, if we take the opposite view, to consolidate existing power relations within society). This, we posit, would be a first, important step in

---

[115] As was already mentioned, John Tusa (2000 and 2002) and Andrew Brighton (1999 and 2006) represent typical examples of this position in the British context.

reconnecting – *mutatis mutandis*, of course - this long-standing tradition of thought in Western civilization to present debates over why governments should fund or regulate the arts. Of course, the world we live in and the ways in which human society is structured and intellectualised has dramatically changed in the course of the 2,500 years that have elapsed between the times when Plato penned his *Republic* and Tessa Jowell caused a stir with the publication of her essay *Government and the Value of Culture* in the summer of 2004. Consequently, it is only logical that many of the arguments elaborated in this long and eventful time-span will no longer be relevant. It is safe to argue that - whatever the reader's feeling for the theatre might be – some of the arguments which were current in the intellectual weaponry harnessed by the Puritan writers in their attack on the stage can be put aside without too much regret.

However, despite the inevitable inconsequences and irrelevances, we would argue that an understanding of how current beliefs in the transformative powers of the arts have developed over time and the trajectories through which they have become commonplace beliefs is the starting point for any serious attempt to investigate the social impact of the arts in today's world. Indeed, in the long term, it can point us in the direction of an intellectual route that can allow us to overcome the false and sterile dichotomy between 'intrinsic' and 'instrumental' value of the arts in which cultural policy debates seem presently stuck. Moreover, we would argue that the humanities have a crucial role to play in this process, in that they can help to clarify what the role and functions of the arts in present society might be. The humanities are indeed best placed to take up the challenge raised by Jowell (2004) when she asks "How, in going beyond targets, can we best capture the value of culture?". By taking up the challenge of finding new and rigorous ways to discuss issues of cultural value in the XXI century, the humanities can offer a useful contribution to the understanding of the ways in which the general public experiences the arts and might be affected by them, while at the same time facilitating the construction of a strong and coherent theoretical framework for the elaboration of more rigorous arts impacts evaluation methods.

Bibliography

N/A (2004) "For Art's Sake", in *The Guardian*, 18 June 2004.

Abrams, M. H. (1953) *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic theory and the critical tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Abbagnano, N. and Fornero, G. (1986) *Filosfi e Filosofie nella Storia*, Vol. 1, Turin: Paravia.

Adams, D. (2000) "Can pornography cause rape?", in *Journal of Social Philosophy*, Vol. 31, n.1, pp. 1-43.

Adams, P. (1992) *Art of the Third Reich*, New York: Harry N. Adams Inc.

Adams, S. (2004) *Quatremère de Quincy and the Instrumentality of the Museum*, Working Papers in Art and Design, Vol. 3, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire.

Adorno, T. W. (1974) "Commitment", in *New Left Review*, n.87-88 (1st series), September-December, pp. 75-89.

Adorno, T. W. (1981; first published in 1967) *Prisms*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Aleksic, T. (2002) "*Benevolent racism*: can the *other* represent itself?", in *Facta Universitatis; Series: Linguistics and Literature*, Vol. 2, n. 9, pp.349-357.

Alridge, D. (1996) *Music Therapy Research and Practice in Medicine: From out of the silence*, London and Bristol (Pennsylvania): Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Amin, S. (1988) *Eurocentrism*, London: Zed Books.

Androutsopoulou, A. (2001) "Fiction as an aid to therapy: a narrative and family rationale for practice", in *Journal of Family Therapy*, Vol. 23, n. 3, pp. 278-295.

Anthony, R. (1932) *The Jeremy Collier Controversy 1698-1726*, New York: Benjamin Blom.

Argyle, M. (2001) *The Psychology of Happiness* (2nd edition), London and New York: Routledge.

Arnold, M. (1993 [1869]), *Culture and Anarchy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Arts Council England (2005) *'Hard choices in a tough climate' - Arts Council announces three year funding strategy* (17 march 2005) available from: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/pressnews/press_detail.php?browse=recent &id=415 (accessed on June 26 2006).

Arts Council England (2004), *Arts in England 2003: Attendance, participation and attitudes*, London: Arts Council England.

Arts Council England (2003) *Ambitions for the Arts 2003-2006*, London: Arts Council England.

Atack, M. (1989) *Literature of the French Resistance: Cultural politics and narrative form, 1940-1950*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Attridge, D. (2004) *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the event*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Augustine (1991) *Confessions*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Henry Chadwick, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baldick, C. (1987) *The Social Mission of English Criticism: 1848-1932*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Barish, J. (1981) *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press.

Barnard, F. M. (1969) *J. G. Herder on Social and Political Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Barry, P. (1995) *Beginning Theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Barzun, J. (1975) *The Use and Abuse of Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1988) *Selected Writings*, edited and introduced by Mark Poster, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Bauman, Z. (1987) *Legislators and Interpreters: On modernity, post-modernity and intellectuals*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (1992) *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London and New York: Routledge.

Beardsley, M. C. (1981[1958]) *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.

Belfiore, E. (2002) "Art as a means towards alleviating social exclusion: does it really work? A critique of instrumental cultural policies and social impact studies in the UK", in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 91-106.

Belfiore, E. (2004) "Auditing culture: The subsidised cultural sector in the New Public Management", in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 183-202.

Belfiore, E. (2006a) "The unacknowledged legacy: Plato, the *Republic* and cultural policy", in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*: *Special Issue – Intellectuals and Cultural Policy, Part 2*, Vol. 12, n. 1, pp. 229-244.

Belfiore, E. (2006b) "The social impacts of the arts – myth or reality?", in Mirza, M. (ed.) (2006) *Culture Vultures: Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?*, London: Policy Exchange.

Bell, C. (1938 [1928]) *Civilization*, London: Penguin.

Bell-Villada, G. (1996) *Art for Art's Sake and Literary Life: How politics and markets helped shape the ideology & culture of Aestheticism 1790-1990*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.

Bender, J. (1987) *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the architecture of mind in eighteenth-century England*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Bennett, O. (2001) *Cultural Pessimism: Narratives of decline in the postmodern world*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bennett, O. (2005) "Beyond machinery: The cultural policies of Matthew Arnold", in *History of Political Economy*, Vol. 37, n. 3, pp. 455-482.

Bennett, O. (2006) "Intellectuals, Romantics and cultural policy", in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*: *Special Issue – Intellectuals and Cultural Policy, Part 1*, Vol. 12, n. 1, pp. 117-134.

Bennett, T. (1992) "Useful Culture", in *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, n. 3, pp. 395-408.

Bennett, T. (1995) *The Birth of the Museum: History, theory, politics*, London and New York: Routledge.

Bennett, T. (1998) *Culture: A reformer's science*, London: Sage.

Bennett, T. (2005) "Cultural participation and social division", paper presented to the workshop on Arts, Heritage and Civic Renewal organised by the Institute for Public Policy Resesarch (IPPR), 7th March 2005, London.

Berezin, M. (1997) *Making the Fascist Self*, London: Cornell University Press.

Bernays, J. (2004) "On Catharsis. From *Fundamentals of Aristotle's Lost Essays on the "Effect of Tragedy"* (1857)", in *American Imago*, Vol. 61, n. 3, pp. 319-341.

Biley, F. C. (2000) "The effects on patient well-being of music listening as a nursing intervention: a review of literature", in *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, Vol. 9, n. 5, pp.668-677.

Blakeney, E. H. (1928) *Horace on the Art of Poetry*, Latin text, English prose translation Introduction and Notes, together with Ben Johnson's English verse rendering, London: Scholartis Press.

Blaut, J. (1993) *The Coloniser's Model of the World: Geographical diffusionism and eurocentric history*, London: Guilford Press.

Boal, A. (2000 [1979]) *Theater of the Oppressed*, London: Pluto Press.

Bokey, K. and Walter, G. (2002) "Literature and psychiatry: the case for a close liaison", in *Australasian Psychiatry*, Vol.10, n.4, pp.393-399.

Bondora, J. T. and Goodwin, J. L. (2005) "The impact of suicidal content in popular media on the attitudes and behaviours of adolescents", in *Praxis*, Vol. 5, pp. 5-12.

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*, London and New York: Routledge.

Bouwsma, W. J. (1990) *A Usable Past: Essays in European cultural history*, Berkeley and Oxford: University of California Press.

Brecht, B. (1961) "Theatre for Learning", in *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 6, n. 1, pp. 18-25.

Brecht, B. (1964) *Brecht on Theatre: The development of an aesthetic*, edited and translated by John Willett, London: Methuen.

Brenton, H. (1995) *Hot Irons: Diaries, essays, journalism*, London: Nick Hern Books.

Breuer, J and Freud, S. (1955) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud; Volume II (1893-1895)*, London: The Hogarth Press.

Brighton, A. (1999) "Towards a command culture: New Labour's cultural policy and Soviet Socialist Realism" in *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 41, n 3, pp. 24-34.

Brighton, A. (2006) "Consumed by the political: The ruination of the Arts Council", in Mirza, M. (ed.) (2006) *Culture Vultures: Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?*, London: Policy Exchange.

Brooks, C. and Faulkner, P. (eds.) (1996) *The White Man's Burden: An anthology of British Poetry of the Empire*, Exeter: Exeter University Press.

Brown, D. (1997) *Art Therapies*, London: Thorsons.

Bruch, D. (2004) "The Prejudice Against Theatre", in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*, Vol. 3, n.1.

Bruford, W. H. (1975) *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation. 'Bildung' from Humboldt to Thomas Mann*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Burke, P. (2004) *What is Cultural History?*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Butcher, S. H. (1951) *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art. Translated and with critical notes by S. H. Butcher*, New York: Dover Publications.

Butler, C. (2004) *Pleasure and the Arts: Enjoying literature, painting, and music*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bywater, I. (1909) *Aristotle on the Art of Poetry: A revised text with critical introduction, translation, and commentary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Campo, R. (2003) *The Healing Art: A doctor's black bag of poetry*, New York and London: W. W. Norton.

Carey, J. (1992) *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and prejudice among the literary intelligentsia, 1880-1939*, London: Faber and Faber.

Carey, J. (2005) *What Good Are the Arts?*, London: Faber and Faber.

Carr, W. (2004) "Philosophy and Education", in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 55-73.

Carrier, D. (ed.) (1997) *England and its Aesthetes: Biography and taste*, Amsterdam: G + B arts International.

Carroll, N. (1998) *A Philosophy of Mass Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Carroll, N. (2002) "The wheel of virtue: Art, literature and moral knowledge", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 60, n. 1, pp. 3-26.

Carroll, N. and Choi, J. (2006) *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Cassirer, E. (1944) *An Essay on Man*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Cassirer, E. (1979) *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and lectures of Ernst Cassirer 1935-1945*, edited by D. P. Verene, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Caute, D.(1971) *The Illusion: An essay on politics, theatre and the novel*, London: André Deutsch.

Cazzato, V. (ed.) (2001) *Istituzioni e Politiche Culturali in Italia negli Anni Trenta. Tomo I*, Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato.

Chai, L. (1990) *Aestheticism: The religion of art in post-romantic literature*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Chambers, R. (1984) *Story and Situation: Narrative seduction and the power of fiction*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Cicero (2000) *Defence Speeches*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by D. H. Berry, Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Coetzee, J. M. (2004) *Elizabeth Costello*, London: Vintage.

Cohen, L. J. (1989) *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Induction and Probability*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Cooper, L. (1972) *The Poetics of Aristotle: Its meaning and influence*, Westport: Greenwood Press.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996) *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*, New York: Harper.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Hunter, J. (2003) "Happiness in everyday life: The uses of experience sampling", in *Journal of Happiness Studies*. Vol.4, pp. 185-199.

Cummings, M. C. and Katz, R. S. (1987) 'Government and the Arts: An Overview' in Cummings, M. C. and Katz, R. S. (1987) *The Patron State: Government and the Arts in Europe, North America and Japan*: New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Currie, G. (1998) "Realism of character and the value of fiction", in Levinson, G. (ed.) (1998) *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the intersection*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dalley, T. (1984) "Introduction", in Dalley, T. (ed.) (1984) *Art as Therapy: An introduction to the use of art as a therapeutic technique*, London and New York: Tavistock Publications.

Danto, A. C. (1964) "The Artworld", in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 61, n. 19, pp. 571-584.

Danto, A. C. (1981) *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Press.

Darst, D. H. (1971) "Tragedy and tragic catharsis in the Spanish Golden Age", in *South Atlantic Bulletin*, Vol. 36, n. 3, pp. 3-7.

Davidson, C. N. (2004) *Revolution and the Word: The rise of the novel in America;* Expanded edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davies, T. (1997) *Humanism*, London and New York: Routledge.

Davies, S. (2001) "Definitions of art", in Gaut, B. and McIver lopes, D. (eds.) (2001) *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, London and New York: Routledge.

Dean, J. T. (2003) "The nature of concepts and the definition of art", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 61, n. 1, pp.29-35.

Debreczeny, P. (1997) *Social Functions of Literature: Alexander Pushkin and Russian Culture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport (1999), *Policy Action Team 10; Research Report: Arts and Neighbourhood Renewal*, London: DCMS.

DeRose Evans (1992) *The Art of Persuasion: Political propaganda from Aeneas to Brutus*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

DeSalvo, L. (1999) *Writing as a Way of Healing*, London: The Women's Press.

Dewey, J. (1980 [1934]) *Art as Experience*, New York: Perigee Books.

Dissanayake, E. (1998) *What is Art For?*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

Dorsch, T. S. (ed. and trans.) (1965) *Classical Literary Criticism: Aristotle, Horace, Longinus,* by T.S. Dorsch, London: Penguin.

Doumanis, N. (2001) *Italy*, London: Arnold.

Dowd, D. L. (1951) "Art as national propaganda in the French Revolution", in *The Public opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 15, n. 3, pp. 532-546).

Dué, C. (2003) *Poetry and the Demos: State regulation of a civic possession*, The Stoa: a consortium for electronic publication in the humanities (www.stoa.org).

Eagleton, T. (2000) *The Idea of Culture*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Eagleton, T. (2003) *After Theory*, London: Allen Lane.

Edgar, D. (2004) "Where's the challenge?", in *The Guardian*, 22 May, 2004.

Egan, R. F. (1921) "The genesis of the theory of "art for art's sake" in Germany and England", in *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, Vol. II, n. 4, pp. 5-61.

Elias, N. (1994) *The Civilizing Process*, Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Eliot, T. S. (1962 [1948]) *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, London: Faber & Faber.

Ellenius, A. (1998) *Iconography, Propaganda, and Legitimation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Else, G. F. (1963) *Aristotle's Poetics: The argument*, Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

Fenton, J. (2004) "Down with this access pottiness", in *The Guardian*, 29 May, 2004.

Ferszt, G. G.; Massotti, E.; Williams, J. and Miller, J. R. (2000) "The impacts of an art program on an inpatient oncology unit", in *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, Vol., 8, n. 2, pp.189-199.

Fischer-Tiné and Mann, M. (eds.) (2004) *Colonialism as a Civilising Mission: Cultural ideology in British India*, London: Anthem Press.

Forgacs, D. (ed.) (1988) *A Gramsci Reader: Selected writings 1916-1935*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Forster, E. M. (1951) *Two Cheers for Democracy*, London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (edited by Gordon, C.) (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977*, New York: Pantheon Books.

Frank, A. W. (1991) *At the Will of the Body: Reflections on illness*, Boston, New York and London: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Fraser, R. (1970) *The War Against Poetry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Fyfe, W. H. (trans.) (1932) *Aristotle 'The Poetics'; Longinus 'On the Sublime'*, London: Heinemann.

Gadamer, H. (1986) *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gaut, B. and McIver Lopes, D. (eds.) (2001) *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, London and New York: Routledge.

Geertz, C. (1993) *The Interpretations of Cultures: Selected essays*, London: Fontana Press.

Glyn-Jones, A. (1996) *Holding Up a Mirror: How civilizations decline*, Exeter: Imprint Academic.

Golden, L. (1962) "Catharsis", in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 93, pp. 51-60.

Gonon, P. (1995) "The German concept of *Bildung* and schools in the 19th century", in *Nordisk Pedagogik*, Vol. 15, n. 2, pp.66-71.

Graf, R. (2003) "Interpretation, truth, and past reality", in *Rethinking History*, Vol. 7, n. 3, pp. 387-402.

Graves, T. (2003) "Deepening diversity", in *Spiked-online*, June 13 2003.

Gray, C. (2006) "Commodification and instrumentality in cultural policy", paper presented at the 4th International Conference in Cultural Policy Research, Vienna, 12-16 July 2006.

Greenberg, I. (ed.) (1974) *Psychodrama: Theory and therapy*, London: Souvenir Press.

Grieve, A. (1999) "Rossetti and the scandal of art for art's sake in the early 1980s", in Prettejohn, E. (ed.) (1999) *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Guérand, A. L. (1936) *Art for Art's Sake*, New York: Schocken Books.

Halliwell, S. (1986) *Aristotle's Poetics*, London: Duckworth.

Halliwell, S. (1995) "Aristotle, Poetics", in Halliwell, S., Fyfe, W. H., Innes, D. C. (eds. and trans.) (1995) *Aristotle, 'Poetics'; Longinus, 'On the Sublime'; Demetrius, 'On Style'*, Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Press.

Hammermeister, K. (2002) *The German Aesthetic Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hanne, M. (1996) *The Power of the Story: Fiction and political change*, Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Hanson, K. (1998) "How bad can good art be?", in Levinson, G. (ed.) (1998) *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the intersection*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harding, J. M. (1992) "Historical Dialectics and the Autonomy of Art in Adorno's Ästhetische Theorie", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 50, n. 3, pp. 183-195.

Hare, D. (1988) *The Second Time a Farce: Reflections on the drama of mean times*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Harold, J. (2005) "Infected by evil", in *Philosophical Explorations*, Vol. 8 n. 2, pp. 173-187.

Harrington, A. (2004) *Art and Social Theory: Sociological argument in aesthetics*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Haskins, C. (1989) "Kant and the autonomy of art", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 47, n. 1, pp. 43-54.

Haslett, M. (2000) *Marxist Literary and Cultural Theories*, Basingstoke and London: MacMillan Press.

Hathaway, B. (1962) *The Age of Criticism: The late Renaissance in Italy*, Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press.

Held, D. (1990) *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hermeling, S. (2003) "Bildung – The freedom of the educated", in *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, Vol. 9, n. 2, pp. 167-181.

Herrick, M. T. (1926) "Joseph Trapp and the Aristotelian 'Catharsis'", in *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 41, n. 3, pp. 158-163.

Hill, J. (2004) "UK film policy, cultural capital and social exclusion", in *Cultural Trends*, Vol. 13, n. 2, pp. 29-39.

Hittner, J. B. (2005) "How robust is the Werther effect? A re-examination of the suggestion-imitation model of suicide", in *Mortality*, Vol. 10, n. 3, pp. 193-200.

Hobsbawm, E. (1997) *On History*, London: Abacus.

Hobson, J. M. (2004) *The Eastern Origins of the Western Civilisation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hoggart, R. (1995) *The Way We Live Now*, London: Pimlico.

Hohr, H. (2002) "Does beauty matter in education? Friedrich Schiller's neo-humanist approach", in *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 34, n, 1, pp. 59-75.

Holmes, P. and Karp, M. (eds.) (1991) *Psychodrama: Inspiration and technique*, London and New York: Routledge.

Holmes, P. (1991) "Classical psychodrama: An overview", in Holmes, P. and Karp, M. (eds.) (1991) *Psychodrama: Inspiration and technique*, London and New York: Routledge.

Horkheimer, M. and Adorno, T. W. (2002) *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical fragments* (edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and translated by Edmund Jephcott), Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Hospers, J. (1960) "Implied truths in literature", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Arts Criticism*, Vol. 19, n.1, pp. 37-46.

Hospers, J. (1974 [1946]) *Meaning and Truth in the Arts*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Huizinga, J. (1970) *Homo Ludens: A study of the play element in culture*, London: Temple Smith.

Huxley, J. (ed.) (1961) *The Humanist Frame*, London: George Allen & Unwin.

Innes, D. C. (1989) "Augustan critics", in Kennedy, G. A. (1989) *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 1, 'Classical Criticism', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jackson, P. W. (1998) *John Dewey and the Lessons of Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Jacquette, D. (ed.) (1996) *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Janaway, C. (1994) *Schopenhauer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Janaway, C. (1996) "Knowledge and tranquillity: Schopenhauer and the value of art", in Jacquette, D. (ed.) (1996) *Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Janaway, C. (2001) "Plato" in Gaut, B. and McIver Lopes, D. (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, London and New York: Routledge.

Jenkins, K. (2003) "On disobedient histories", in *Rethinking History*, Vol. 7, n. 3, pp. 367-385.

Jenkins, K. (2004) "Modernist disavowals and postmodern reminders of the condition of history today: on Jean François Lyotard", in *Rethinking History*, Vol. 8, n. 3, pp. 365-385.

Jenkins, R. (2002) *Pierre Bourdieu*, London and New York: Routledge.

Jensen, J. (2002) *Is Art Good for Us? Beliefs about high culture in American life*, New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Jermyn, H. and Desai, P. (2000) *Arts – what's in a word? Ethnic minorities and the arts*, London: Arts Council of England.

Jevons, W. S. (1883) *Methods of Social Reforms and Other Essays*, London: MacMillan and Co.

John, E. (2001) "Art and Knowledge", in Gaut, B. and McIver lopes, D. (eds.) (2001) *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, London and New York: Routledge.

Johnson, L. (1979) *The Cultural Critics: From Matthew Arnold to Raymond Williams*, London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Johnson, R. (2001) "Historical returns: Transdisciplinarity, cultural studies and history", in *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 4, n. 3, pp. 261-288.

Johnson, S. (2005) *Everything Bad is Good For You: How popular culture is making us smarter*, London: Allen Lane.

Jordan, G. and Weedon, C. (1995) *Cultural politics. Class, gender, race and the postmodern world*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Jowell, T. (2004) *Government and the Value of Culture*, London: DCMS.

Kant, I. (1987 [1790]) *Critique of Judgment*, trans. by Pluhar, W. S., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Kelley, D. R. (2002) "Intellectual history and cultural history: the inside and the outside", in *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 15, n. 2, pp. 1-19.

Kennedy, G. A. (1989) *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 1, 'Classical Criticism', Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kermode, F. (2004) *Pleasure and Change: The aesthetics of canon*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kettle, M. (2002) "Things can only get better", in *The Guardian*, July 11, 2002.

Kieran, M. (2005) *Revealing Art*, London and New York: Routledge.

Kierkegaard, S. (1980) *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*; edited and translated by Hong, H.V and Hong, E. H., Princeton: Princeton University Press.

King, A. (1964) "George Godwin and the Art Union of London 1837-1911", in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 8, n. 2, pp. 101-130.

Kivy, P. (1997) "On the banality of literary truths', in *Philosophic Exchange*, Vol. 28, pp. 17-27.

Kohansky, M. (1984) *The Disreputable Profession: The actor in society*, London: Greenwood Press.

Kontjie, T. (1993) *The German Bildungsroman: History of a national genre*, Columbia: Camden House.

Koopman, C. (2005) "Arts as fulfillment: On the justification of education in the arts", in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 39, n. 1, pp. 85-97.

Kostic, V. (1960) "Aristotle's catharsis in Renaissance poetics", in *Ziva Antika*, Vol. 10, pp.61-74.

Laing, D. (1978) *The Marxist Theory of Art: An introductory survey*, Hassocks: The Harvester Press.

Lake, P. with Questier, M. (2002) *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestant, papists & players in post-Reformation England*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Lamarque, P. (2001) "Literature", in Gaut, B. and McIver Lopes, D. (eds.) (2001) *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, London and New York: Routledge.

Lamarque, P. and Olsen, S. H. (1994) *Truth Fiction and Literature: A philosophical perspective*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Lamarque, P. and Olsen, S. H. (eds.) (2004) *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art – The Analytic Tradition: An anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Lane, J. F. (2000) *Pierre Bourdieu: A critical introduction*, London: Pluto Press.

Layard, R. (2005) *Happiness: Lessons from a new science*, London: Allen Lane.

Leavis, F. R. and Thompson, D. (1950 [1933]) *Culture and Environment: The training of critical awareness*, London: Chatto & Windus.

Leavis, R. R. (1960 [1948]) *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad*, London: Chatto & Windus.

Leith, J. A. (1965) *The Idea of Art as Propaganda in France: 1750-1799*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Levinson, G. (ed.) (1998) *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the intersection*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lewis-Williams, D. (2002) *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the origins of art*, London: Thames & Hudson.

Lindsay, L. (1981) *The Myth of a Civilizing Mission: British colonialism and the politics of symbolic manipulation*, Kingston: Institute of Social and economic Research, University of the West Indies.

Looseley, D. L. (2004) "The development of a social exclusion agenda in French cultural policy", in *Cultural Trends*, Vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 15-27.

Lucas, D. W. (1968) *Aristotle, Poetics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

MacKinnon, C. (1987) *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on life and law*, Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

Madden, C. and Bloom, T. (2004) "Creativity, health and arts advocacy", in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 10, n. 2, pp.133-156.

Malchiodi, C. A. (2002) *The Soul's Palette: Drawing on art's transformative powers for health and well-being*, Boston and London: Shambhala Publications.

Mamet, D. (1998) *Three Uses of the Knife: On the nature and purpose of drama*, New York: Vintage Books.

Mann, M. (2004) "'Torchbearers Upon the Path of Progress': Britain's Ideology of a 'Moral and Material Progress' in India. An introductory essay", in Fischer-Tiné and Mann, M. (eds.) (2004) *Colonialism as a Civilising Mission: Cultural ideology in British India*, London: Anthem Press.

Margoliouth, D. S. (trans.) (1911) *The Poetics of Aristotle*, London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Margozzi, M. (2001) "L"azione" per l'arte contemporanea - Introduzione," in Cazzato, V. (ed.) (2001) *Istituzioni e Politiche Culturali in Italia negli Anni Trenta. Tomo I*, Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato.

Matravers, D. (1998) *Art and Emotion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

McCarthy Hynes, A. and Hynes-Berry, M. (1994) *Biblio-poetry Therapy. The Interactive Process: A handbook*, St. Cloud (MN): North Star Press.

McCaw, R. J. (2001) "The wild man reads Castiglione: Garcilaso, courtly love, and the civilizing function of poetry", in Scarlett, E. and Wescott, H. (eds.) (2001) *Convergencias Hispánicas*, Newark (Delaware): Juan de la Cuesta.

McIllroy, J. & Westwood, S. (1993) (eds.) *Border Country. Raymond Williams in adult education*, Leicester: NIACE.

McLennan, G. (2000) "Sociology's Eurocentrism and the 'rise of the West' revisited", in *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 3, n. 3, pp. 275-291.

Megill, A. (2004) "Intellectual history and History", in *Rethinking History*, Vol. 8, n. 4, pp. 549-557.

Meisiek, S. (2004) "Which catharsis do they mean? Aristotle, Moreno, Boal and Organization Theatre", in *Organization Studies*, Vol. 25, n. 5, pp. 797-816.

Mew, P (1973) "Facts in fiction", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 31, n.3, pp. 329-337.

Meyer, H. (2000) "Taste formation in pluralistic societies: The role of rhetorics and institutions", in *International Sociology*, Vol. 15, n. 1, pp. 33-56.

Miller, W. I. (2003) *Faking It*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Pres.

Milner, A. and Browitt, J. (2002) *Contemporary Cultural Theory: An introduction*, London and New York: Routledge.

Minihan, J. (1977) *The Nationalization of Culture*, London: Hamish Hamilton.

Mirza, M. (ed.) (2006) *Culture Vultures: Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?*, London: Policy Exchange.

Monaco, P. (1983) *Modern European Culture and Consciousness, 1870-1970*, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.

Moreno, J. L. (1974 [1940]) "Mental catharsis and the psychodrama", in Greenberg, I. (ed.) (1974) *Psychodrama: Theory and therapy*, London: Souvenir Press.

Morris, E. (2003) Speech delivered at the 2003 Cheltenham Festival of literature. (available on www.culture.gov.uk).

Morris, W. (1966 [1886.]) "The Aims of Art", in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, New York: Russell & Russell.

Mukta, P. (1999) "The 'civilising mission': The regulation and control of mourning in colonial India", in *Feminist Review*, Vol. 63, pp 25-47.

Murray, P. (ed.) (1997) *Plato on Poetry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Naddaff, R. A. (2002) *Exiling the Poets: The production of censorship in Plato's Republic*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Nettle, D. (2001) *Strong Imagination: Madness, creativity and human nature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nettle, D. (2005) *Happiness: The science behind your smile*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

New, C. (1999) *Philosophy of Literature: An introduction*, London and New York: Routledge.

Nightingale, A. (1995) *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the construct of philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (1986) *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nuttall, A. D. (1996) *Why Does Tragedy Give Pleasure?*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

O'Connor, T. A. (2000) *Love in the "Corral": Conjugal spirituality and the anti-theatrical polemic in early modern Spain*, New York: Peter Lang.

Osipovich, D. (2004) "What Rousseau teaches us about live theatrical performance", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 62, n. 4, pp. 355-362.

Owens, C. (1990) "The discourse of others: feminism and postmodernism," in *The Anti-aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, H. Foster (ed.) (1990), Seattle: Bay Press.

Palumbo-Liu, D. (1997) "Introduction: Unhabituated Habituses", in Palumbo-Liu, D.and Gumbrecht, H. U. (eds.) (1997) *Streams of Cultural Capital: Transnational Cultural Studies*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Passmore, J. (1991) *Serious Art*, La Salle (Illinois): Open Court.

Patterson, M. (2003) *Strategies of Political Theatre: Post-war English playwrights*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Peacock, K. (1999) *Thatcher's Theatre: British theatre and drama in the eighties*, Westport CT and London: Greenwood Press.

Pearson, N. M. (1982) *The State and the Visual Arts*, Milton Keynes: The Open University Press.

Peterson, R. A. (1997) "Changing representation of status through taste displays: An introduction", in *Poetics*, Vol. 25, n.2, pp.71-73.

Petris, L. (2003) "'Toutes passions laissees et deposees': Hatred in Michel de l'Hospital poetry and policy", in *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 17, n. 4, pp. 674-694.

Petronio, G. (1991) *L'Attività Letteraria in Italia*, Palermo: Palumbo.

Petropoulos, J. (1996) *Art as Politics in the Third Reich*, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press.

Phillips, D. P. (1985) "The *Werther effect*: Suicide and other forms of violence are contagious", in *The Sciences*, Vol. 7/8, pp.32-39.

Pirkis, J and Blood, W. (2001) "Suicide and the Media. Part II: Portrayal in fictional media", in *Crisis*, Vol. 22, n. 4, pp. 155-162.

Plato (1993) *Republic*, Translated by R. Waterfield, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Posner, R. A. (2003) *Public Intellectuals: A study of decline*, Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Press.

Potts, L. J. (1962) *Aristotle on the Art of Fiction: An English translation of Aristotle's Poetics with an introductory essay and explanatory notes*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Prettejohn, E. (ed.) (1999) *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Quarmby, K. (2005) "Healing verses: After a bout of depression Sarah Wheeler found inspiration in a poem by Ben Okri. Now she's helping others cope through poetry", in *The Guardian*, April 19 2005.

Ray, W. (2001) *The Logic of Culture: Authority and identity in the modern era*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Read, H. (2002a [1963]) *To Hell with Culture and Other Essays on Art and Society*, London and New York: Routledge.

Read, H. (2002b [1963]) "Civilization and the sense of quality", in Read, H. (2002a [1963]) *To Hell with Culture and Other Essays on Art and Society*, London and New York: Routledge.

Rice, C. (1997) *Ungodly Delights: Puritan opposition to the theatre 1576-1663*, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso.

Riordan, R. J. and Wilson, L. S. (1989) "Bibliotherapy: Does it work?", in *Journal of Counselling and Development*, Vol. 67, n. 9, pp. 506-508.

Rockmore, T. (2004) "Truth, beauty, and the social function of art", in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 31, n.1, pp. 17-32.

Røine, E. (1997) *Psychodrama: Group psychotherapy as experimental theatre*, London and Bristol (Pennsylvania): Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Rojcewicz, S. (2004) "Poetry therapy in ancient Greek literature", in *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, Vol. 17, n. 4, pp. 209-213.

Ruskin, J. (1872) *Munera Pulveris: Six essays on the elements of political economy*, London: Smith.

Russell, B. (2006 [2000]) "The philosophical limits of film", reprinted in Carroll, N. and Choi, J. (2006) *Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures: An anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Said, E. (1995) *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London: Penguin.

Saintsbury, G. (1902) *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe*, Vol. I, Classical and Mediaeval Criticism, Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons.

Saisselin, R. G. (1970) "The transformation of art into culture: From Pascal to Diderot", in Besterman, T. (ed.) (1970) *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, Geneve: Institut et Musee Voltaire.

Schiller, F. (1967) *On the Aesthetic Education of Man; In a series of letters*, Edited and Translated with an Introduction, Commentary and a Glossary of Terms by E. M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Scholes, R. (1980) "Language, narrative, and anti-narrative", in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, n. 1. Special issue "On Narrative", pp. 204-212.

Scrogin, F., Jamison, C. and Gochneaur, K. (1989) "Comparative efficacy of cognitive and behavioural bibliotherapy for mildly and moderately depressed older adults", in *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 57, n. 3., pp.403-407.

Scruton, R. (1974) *Art and Imagination: A study in the philosophy of mind*, London: Methuen.

Scruton, R. (1982) *Kant*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Scruton, R. (1997) "Pop goes civilisation", in *The Guardian*, September 5 1997.

Scruton, R. (1998) *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture*, London: Duckworth.

Self, D. (2000) *The Single Source of All Filth: The Jeremy Collier's controversy*, Malvern: J. Garnet Miller.

Selwood, S. (2002) "The politics of data collection: gathering, analysing and using data about the subsidised cultural sector in England", in *Cultural Trends*, Vol. 12, n. 47, pp. 14-84.

Seto, M. C., Maric, A., Barbaree, H. E. (2001) "The role of pornography in the etiology of sexual aggression", in *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, Vol.6, pp.35-53.

Sharp, C; Smith, J. V. and Cole, A. (2002) "Cinematherapy: metaphorically promoting therapeutic change", in *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 15, n. 3, pp. 269-276.

Shechtman, Z. (1999) "Bibliotherapy: An indirect approach to the treatment of childhood aggression", in *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, vol. 30, n. 1, pp. 39-53.

Shelley, P. B. (1954) *Shelley's Prose or The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, edited by David Lee Clark with an Introduction and Notes, Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press.

Shields, D. S. (1983) "Happiness in Society: The Development of an Eighteenth-Century American Poetic Ideal", in *American Literature*, Vol. 55, n. 4, pp. 541-559.

Shiner, L. (2001) *The Invention of Art: A cultural history*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Shope, J. H. (2004) "When words are not enough: The search for the effect of pornography on abused women", in *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 10, n.1, pp. 56-72.

Sidney, P. (1966) *A Defence of Poetry*, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Jan Van Dorsten, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simmel, G. (1997) *Simmel on Culture: Selected writings*, edited by David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage

Simonton, D. K. (1999) *Origins of genius: Darwinian perspectives on creativity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sinclair, A. (1995) *Arts and Cultures*, London: Sinclair - Stevenson.

Singer, I. (1954) "The aesthetics of "art for art's sake"", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 12, n. 3, pp. 343-359.

Smithson, I. (1971) "The moral view of Aristotle's *Poetics*", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 44, n. 1, pp. 3-17.

Spelman, L. P. (1948) "Calvin and the arts", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 6, n. 3, pp.246-252.

Spender, S. (1961) "Social purpose and the integrity of the artist", in Huxley, J. (ed.) (1961) *The Humanist Frame*, London: George Allen & Unwin.

Sperduti, A. (1950) "The divine nature of poetry in antiquity", in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 81, pp. 209-240.

Spingarn, J. E. (1908) *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, New York and London: Columbia University Press.

Spotts, F. (2002) *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, Woodstock & New York: The Overlook Press.

Stanislavsky, C. (1937) *An Actor Prepares*, London: Geoffrey Bles.

Staniszewski, M. A. (1995) *Believing is Seeing: Creating the culture of art*, London: Penguin.

Staricoff, R. L. (2005) *Arts in Health: A review of the medical literature*, London: Arts Council England.

Steadman, J. M. (1962) "Felicity and end in Renaissance epic and ethics", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 23, n. 1, pp. 117-132.

Steiner, G. (1967) *Language and Silence: Essays 1959-1966*, London: Faber.

Steiner, G. (1996) *A Festival Overture: The University Festival Lecture*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh.

Stolnitz, J. (2004) "On the cognitive triviality of art", in Lamarque, P. and Olsen, S. H. (eds.) (2004) *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art – The Analytic Tradition: An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Storey, J. (1993) *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Swales, M (1978) *The German Bildungsroman from Wieland to Hesse*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Swingewood, A. (1998) *Cultural Theory and the Problem of Modernity*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Tallis, R. (1995) *Newton's Sleep: Two cultures and two kingdoms*, New York: St. Martin's Press.

Thompson, E. N. S. (1966) *The Controversy Between the Puritans and the Stage*, New York: Russell & Russell.

Thompson, E. P. (1980 [1963]) *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Penguin.

Thorson, J. and Öberg, P. (2003) "Was there a suicide epidemic after Goethe's *Werther*?", in *Archives of Suicide Research*, Vol. 7, pp.69-72.

Tolstoy, L. (1930) *What is Art?* Translated by Maude, A., London: Walter Scott.

Truman, J. C. W. (2003) "John Foxe and the desires of Reformation martyrology", in *English Literary History (ELH)*, Vol.70, pp. 35-66.

Tusa, J. (2000) *Art Matters: Reflecting on Culture*, London: Methuen.

Tusa, J. (2002) "Thou shalt worship the arts for what they are", in *Spiked Online*, 29 August 2002; available to download at www.spiked-online.com.

Upchurch, A. (2005) "William Morris and the case for public support of the arts", in *History of Political Economy*, Vol.37, n. 3, pp. 509-534.

Van Krieken, R. (1999) "The barbarism of civilization: cultural genocide and the 'stolen generations'", in *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 50, n.2, pp. 297-315.

Vasari, G. (1991) *Lives of the Artists* (translated with an introduction and notes by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella), Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Viswanathan, G. (1989) *Masks of Conquests: Literary study and British rule in India*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Wallerstein, I. (1997) "Eurocentrism and its avatars: The dilemmas of social science", in *New Left Review*, Vol. 171, pp. 63-80.

Ward & Trent, et al. (1907–21) *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*, Volume VI, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York: Bartleby.com, 2000 (www.bartleby.com/cambridge/). [Accessed 6 April 2006].

Ward, A. W. and Waller, A. R. (eds.) (1932) *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Watson, G. (2000) *Never Ones for Theory? England and the wars of ideas*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press.

Weber, M. (1948) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Translated, edited and with an introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Wiedmann, A. (1986) *Romantic Art Theories*, Henley-on-Thames: Gresham Books.

Wilcox, J. (1953) "The beginnings of *l'Art pour l'Art*", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 11, n. 4, pp. 360-377.

Williams, R. (1976) *Keywords*, London: Fontana.

Williams, R. (1990 [1958]) *Culture and Society*, London: Chatto & Windus.

Williams, R. (1993 [1958]) "The idea of culture," in McIllroy, J. and Westwood, S. (eds.) (1993) *Border Country: Raymond Williams in adult education*, Leicester: NIACE.

Woodward, W. H. (1963 [1897]) *Vittorino da Feltre and other humanist educators. Essays and versions: An introduction to the history of classical education*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Woolf, S. (2003) "Europe and its historians", in *Contemporary European History*, Vol.12, n.3, pp. 323-337.

Wordsworth, W. (1936) *Poetical Works: With introduction and notes*, edited by Thomas Hutchinson, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Young, B. (2002) "The tyranny of the definite article: Some thoughts on the art of intellectual history", in *History of European Ideas*, Vol.28, n. 1, pp.101-117.

Young, J. O. (1997) "Defining art responsibly", in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 37, n. 1, pp. 57-65.

Zagorin, P. (1999) "History, the referent, and narrative reflections on postmodernism now", in *History and Theory*, Vol. 38, n. 1, pp.1-24.

Zagorin, P. (2000) "Rejoinder to a postmodernist", in *History and Theory*, Vol. 39, n. 2, pp. 201-209.

Zagorin, P. (2001) "Francis Bacon's concept of objectivity and the idols of the mind", in *British Journal for the History of Science*, Vol. 34, n. 4, pp. 379-393.

About the Centre for Cultural Policy Studies

The Centre for Cultural Policy Studies provides a focus for teaching and research in the fields of arts management, cultural policy and the creative industries. Connecting with researchers, cultural managers and organisations in many parts of the world, the Centre forms part of an international network. The distinctive approach of the Centre is its engagement with both the practical realities of working in the cultural sector and with theoretical questions around the conditions of contemporary culture. As well as producing its own series of online publications, the Centre also engages in cultural sector consultancy work and Oliver Bennett, Director of the Centre, is the founding editor of the *International Journal of Cultural Policy*.

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WARWICK