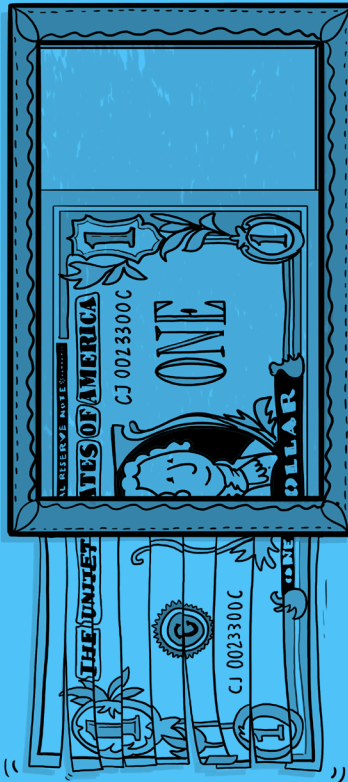




Cultural Democracy

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CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

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INTRODUCTION

The title of this Booklet joins two words, democracy and culture, which mutually support each other like exhausted travelers in the middle of a journey. The tiredness of the first word is due to its designation as a scarred reality,¹ eroded to its foundations by economic globalization, the power of the great industries, techno-politics and populism. The second is worn out because it has lost its critical and Utopian stamina in going from being a noble ideal and antidote for power to becoming its vassal, as if its passage through the Modern Era had left it exhausted.² In the words of the theologian José I. González Faus: “Just as before it was said that philosophy was the *ancilla theologicae* [the handmaid of theology], today one would have to say that culture is the *ancilla oeconomicae* (the servant of little slave of the economy).”

Xavi Casanovas, who was for many years the director of Cristianisme i Justícia, one day posed a question to me concerning why the struggle for justice seems always to be linked to a certain asceticism, incompatible with the search for beauty in the world. As if beauty, explained Xavi, were synonymous with hedonism, pleasure, and esthetics, and this makes it difficult for its being a vehicle for justice: on one side esthetics, beauty and art, and on the other, justice, as if one were dealing with two separate worlds. And so, after disassociating beauty and justice, the former remains relegated to the back room filled with useless things because its task was simply to make things pleasant.

My search is based on the hypothesis that beauty and art cannot be measured in terms of utility or uselessness. There do not exist any esthetic spasms of beauty that lead us directly to political intervention. But there is an emotional coup when confronted with beauty which can be lived as a herald of a better life.

1 For anyone who wants this idea developed, I recommend: GONZÁLEZ FAUS, José Ignacio, *Reconstruir las grandes palabras*, Mensajero (Santander, 2018), p. 21.

2 EAGLETON, Terry, *Cultura*, Taurus (Barcelona, 2017), p. 164.

Facing the tranquilizing utility of certain contemporary art, what is interesting is its transforming function on this world.³

The power of art resides in the change of awareness, which, through esthetic contemplation, transports us from a world we can touch to another with its new limits, possibilities and intolerances. My purpose in this Booklet is to distinguish which are the strategies that lead it to fulfill its functionality and which ones neutralize it. I will begin with culture in order later to take a closer look at art.

3 I am enormously grateful for the comments of the poet, professor and essayist José Luis Ángeles, who differentiates between the utility and functionality of art. His work consists in distinguishing which strategies go toward completing its functionality and which ones neutralize it. I recommend the reading of ÁNGELES BLASCO, José Luis, *Hacia una ideología de la producción literaria* [‘Toward an Ideology of Literary Production’], Bajo Cero (Valencia, 2000), pp. 163-172.

A CRITICAL SURVEY OF CULTURE

In this first section, we will be concerned with culture as a form of life, distinguishing it from culture understood as art, adopting a more anthropological vision that connects culture and society, and taking culture as a watchtower from which we can observe transformations that are with regard to both sensitivity and politics.⁴

In speaking about culture, Gramsci made many references to the “discipline of the interior I” and he invited to a “conquest of superior conscience through which one comes to understand the historical value of each person, their function in life, their rights and their responsibilities.” For the Italian thinker, man was above all spirit, a creation of history and not of nature. Only under this rubric can culture fulfill its critical task, or, in the words of Gramsci, come to affirm that “culture is critical”. Let us make, then, a little cultural survey before getting to the function of art in our time.

Let Us Distinguish Between Culture and Civilization

Around 1950 in France, Claude Levi-Strauss distinguished between *culture* and *civilization*. The former was a conglomeration of symbolic systems, and from that it seems that it was more tied to ethics, art and spirituality. On the other hand, civilization is concerned with agriculture, industry and even with the economy. It

4 This is dealt with in the book by SANTAMARÍA, Alberto, *Políticas de lo sensible. Líneas románticas y crítica cultural* [Politics of the Sensitive. Romantic Lines and Cultural Criticism], Akal (Madrid, 2020).

is worth pointing out that this distinction grants great importance to the symbolic, although, as Eagleton says, it is very probable that the symbolic and the practical were more linked in the premodern era than in the modern era.⁵ To offer an example, the mailbox is an achievement of civilization; it is not cultural, since it is only useful for society and does not symbolize anything. Nevertheless, when we decide to put the mouth of a lion on it instead of a simple slot, as we do in Spain, then we enter into the terrain of the symbolic; the lion symbolizes strength, and it is, of all the animals, the one that will best care for our letters.

Man, the Symbolic Animal

One of the great researchers concerned with the symbolic and the human being, Ernst Cassirer, considers the symbolic to be an achievement,⁶ since the human being stopped living exclusively in a physical universe, that of pure reaction to stimuli, in order to add on this new dimension. And here is where there enter language, art, myth and religion helping the human being to converse with himself instead of maintaining an immediate relationship to life as animals do. Physical reality obliges us to make a rapid response which, thanks to the symbolic, is delayed through thought. Cassirer ended up defining the individual as a “symbolic being” in contrast to the classical definition of “rational being”. He goes on to say that it is this possibility that opens a new path to the human being; that of civilization.⁷ One last thing before I close. “If we want novels, we need paper factories and printing presses. Civilization is the precondition for culture.”⁸

The Centrality of the Person Ranks Above His Culture

It is enough just to say *Mexican culture* or *French culture*, to offer two examples, for there to come to our minds a series of habits, customs, knowledge and art that we would know how to recognize as distinctive of each one. Cultures can be recognized since they are very tied to the way in which we behave. If biology and the economic system are concerned with the fact that the society can reproduce itself, culture is in charge of the fact that we can recognize it and that we can compare it with others. Terry Eagleton explains that culture is the “esthetic of

5 EAGLETON, *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

6 CASSIRER, Ernst, *Antropología filosófica. Introducción a una filosofía de la cultura* [Philosophical Anthropology. Introduction to a Philosophy of Culture], Fondo Cultura Económica (Mexico City, 2016), p. 26.

7 EAGLETON, *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

8 EAGLETON, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

social conduct”.⁹ Culture gives us functions, the clearest of which is imitation. As Javier Gomá says, “Man, necessarily, imitates the example of others and is an example for everyone else”.¹⁰ The father of this idea was Rene Girard, who said that it is the desire of mimesis, of imitation, which makes us human and allows us to escape from our appetites and instincts. It is by means of imitation that we are able to form our identities since we are unable to construct them out of nothing, as if they were pure creations.¹¹

Relativizing Cultural Functions

The problem is that the foundations of those cultural functions are not always clear, although it is thanks to this possibility of recognition which our functions can question and relativize. Whether I rub bread with tomatoes to accompany meals or I accompany them and wrap them in corn tortillas does not make me a better or a worse person. They are cultural customs, particularities, “to each his own”, as a university professor of mine said, and they speak to us of the diversity and richness with which a person wishes to enculture the vital necessity of eating. The problem becomes more serious when you come to certain cultural practices. In the seizure of Afghanistan on the part of the Taliban in 2021, their cultural practices barred any man from examining a woman, even while giving birth, and given the scarcity of nurses, the consequence is a barrier to the reduction of maternal mortality.¹² This has no foundation nor any salvageable value. In order to pose an example that is further away, Adam Smith reproached Plato himself for not disapproving the practice of infanticide which was permitted in almost all of the Greek city-states.¹³

People are better and more important than the cultures in which they live and which, in turn, need always to be revised, relativized, and when they become twisted, roundly condemned. If I may be permitted a few Christian vitamins, wasn't Jesus constantly relativizing the significance of the family, the people, the political parties and even the law and morality? There where it was said “higher, greater, more”, Jesus rewrote it as “lower, smaller, less”.¹⁴ Fundamentally, Jesus

9 EAGLETON, Terry, *La estética como ideología* [‘Esthetic as Ideology’], Trotta (Madrid, 2011), p. 99.

10 GOMÁ LANZÓN, Javier, *Imitación y experiencia* [‘Imitation and Experience’], Pre-Textos (Valencia, 2003), p. 21.

11 GIRARD, René, *Les origines de la culture* [‘The Origins of Culture’], Desclée de Brouwer (2004), pp. 61-67.

12 DEIROS BRONTE, Trinidad, “El sistema sanitario afgano se asoma al colapso” [‘The Afghan sanitary system approaches collapse’], *El País*, September 4, 2021.

13 SMITH, Adam, *Teoría de los sentimientos morales* [‘Theory of Moral Sentiments’], Alianza Editorial (Madrid, 2009), V. 2, p. 15.

14 ALEIXANDRE, Dolores, *Educación para la contemplación* [‘Educate for Contemplation’], Sal Terrae (Santander, 1986), pp. 979-989.

invites us to behave that way. It is easy for cultures to climb onto the horse of arrogance and, when we absolutize them, what appears is racism, discrimination and ethnocentrism which, in themselves, have no scientific foundation. We draw cultural perimeters (“ours always first”) and it is the culture that is in charge of making distinctions and pointing.

The Lesson of Herodotus

The famous Greek historian Herodotus, an authentic reporter of his era, went around the world asking, inquiring and investigating the institutions, habits, customs and ideas of other peoples. In his *Histories*, he dedicated himself to saying things like “the Greeks got their idea from this” or “This is more reasonable than what the Greeks do”. He is an authentic “cultural historian” who teaches us to relativize cultures and not to absolutize them. One imagines him going from table to table, conversation to conversation, stealing secrets, noting, recording. And he is accomplishing all of this before philosophy started to trap reality in concepts, before it was ordered schematically with classifications as was done by Aristotle. The listening of Herodotus roamed among the flood of data and historical events that came from the people, at that time the only depository of memory. Like a good reporter, he put before him the face of the person, sitting down to listen to him and distinguishing cultural habits with the authority given to him by the ability to compare and examine. This statement of the centrality of people over the cultures in which they live serves to take on the following problem, that of culturalism.

Culturalism

The difficulty with relativizing cultures is that, at the same time, they ask for adhesion, given their communitarian character. And not just adhesion. Belonging to a cultural community is a primary good and a right. How do I relativize something to which I am obliged to adhere and which besides is a good? Here resides one of the functions of art, the capacity to produce estrangement before something that is familiar to us. Don Quixote sees giants instead of windmills in a strategy of wonder directed toward the power of the one who was holding hostage the windmills and all of the riches they produced.

For the cultural anthropologists, culture operates like a synthesis of various things and lies in an internal structure, stable, unconscious, in what we would call a *cultural mentality*. It is like the invisible thread that holds together the pearls of a necklace; we don’t see it, but without it the pearls would scatter on the floor. But it also lies over external forms, volatile and peripheral, as is affirmed by the culturists (Boas, Mead, Benedict) who were interested in how culture structures our

behaviors. Through the family, through the spaces of apprenticeship, through ritual, etc.,¹⁵ they tell us that there is no behavior which is natural. For them, everything is culture.

So, Then, Is Everything Culture?

Let's look at hunger. When one is hungry, the natural thing is for the mouth to move toward food, going to look for it with the help of the hands, and not the reverse, as we have been taught. The fork in a civilized way stabs the food on the plate and takes it to the mouth which waits patiently for the food to arrive. Does this mean that when confronted by hunger we will always respond culturally, helping ourselves with the fork and knife? I don't think so. The criticism of the culturists is that they recognize that culture is something relative, variable (depending on external forces, for example, or contact with other cultures) and, paradoxically, at the same time it determines us, which is open to criticism.

Once again, I would like to state that those things that are in contact with one another are persons, not cultures, persons carrying their own personal backpacks, among which is culture. I believe that, from this perspective, the margins widen. Now that I have spoken about hunger and forks, I have recalled the famous quotation from Marx in *Grundrisse*.¹⁶

Hunger is hunger, but hunger which is satisfied with a fork and knife is a different hunger than that which is satisfied with raw meat and making use of the hands, nails and teeth. Production produces, then, not only the object of consumption, but also the means to consume it.

What Marx is saying to us is that necessities at the same time are biological and historical. Man is what he eats (Feuerbach), but also in the way that he eats it. All of Western culture has been built on a double citizenship: that of nature and that of culture. The former builds a nest in reality and the latter in the realm of possibilities. This is the inheritance that we have received from the Enlightenment. Some contemporary anthropologists like Philippe Descola call this separation of nature and culture “naturalism”. This French anthropologist, a disciple of Levi-Strauss, went into the Amazon and lived together with the Achuar indigenous people and saw that the relationships that they established were different. They didn't distinguish between humans and non-humans. From that there was

15 SOURISSEAU, Rejane, and OFFROY, Cecile, *Etude democratization, democratie, droits culturels* [‘Study Democratization, Democracy, Cultural Rights’]. A study conducted by Opale for the Fondation Carasso (2019), p. 8.

16 MARX, Karl, “Introducción a la crítica de la economía política” [‘Introduction to Criticism of Political Economy’], in *Contribución a la crítica de la economía política*, Siglo Veintiuno (Mexico City, 2005), p. 291.

born a cosmology that integrated gods, spirits, ancestors, plants and animals, rivers and mountains. The question that is posed by Descola with his research is if we can be inspired by these groups of non-modern humans to consider another form of conceiving and putting into practice a way of living together that is more receptive to the non-human. It is all a challenge to our Western culture, but to which some artists are not strangers.¹⁷

From Culturalism to Multiculturalism

The problem created by the living together of different cultures is the problem of the other. Of us and them. In North American society, back in the 1960's, they began to study the true mosaic of ethnic groups that together formed their society. Social subgroups based on race, religion and national origins: Blacks, Protestants, Catholics, Jews, etc. It was the famous melting pot. And it is then when the concept of acculturation is born, although, in reality, it is something very old, since the history of the West is the history of its acculturation,¹⁸ that is to say, the assimilation of a foreign culture. A language teacher observes it well in his students when they are learning the language of the place through immersion. It is almost impossible to teach a language without accompanying it with the habits and usages of the place, of its culture.

This process, of which history is full of examples, is not exempt from sudden stops or violence, since it brings with it changes in models of perception and behaviors originating from one of the two groups in contact with each other. This is so including when the culture assimilating “to the other” (the foreigner, the immigrant, the migrant, the indigenous person) might seem to be more advanced or offer many attractive things, when the United States invades another country, it always uses the excuse of exporting its values and its democratic culture, supposedly more civilized. Thus, the group or the ethnicity is assimilated through the acculturation to the civilization that is supposedly more developed, although the culture might not be the defining factor and what is important might not be the greater or lesser scope of its culture and its civilization, but rather the possibility of the use of force that they have and the hidden interests which are lying behind it. In other words, what is imposed is not the most valuable culture, but rather

17 As, for example, Simon McBurney, the famous actor and theater director of the much-awarded Theatre du Complicite, for which he created *The Encounter*, based on the book by Petru Popescu, after having lived with indigenous inhabitants in the Amazon. What McBurney discovers in this theatrical creation is the idea that we have of the “I” and the centrality of conscience is not present among those peoples who are connected to the environment in which they live.

18 RUDMIN, Floyd W., “Critical History of the Acculturation Psychology of Assimilation, Separation, Integration and Marginalization”, *Review of General Psychology*, 7 (1), pp. 7-37.

the one that can deal the strongest blow. Let's look at these relationships of strength between dominant cultures and those dominated and the processes of separation that are produced.

De-culturalization and Other Cultural Terms

On the inside of a society, if this process is accompanied by the loss of the original culture, it is called de-culturalization. It can be a loss or a transformation or it can be accompanied by tensions, laments for the loss, and many times conflicts in the bosom of the affected communities. It is a transformation that occurs between two groups, the dominant and the dominated. The following are its variants:

a) The *acculturation* can have a unidimensional aspect: the culture of the receiving country simply is subsumed, is assimilated and the culture of the dominated is reduced, at best, to the private sphere. From the point of view of the dominated culture, whether immigrant or indigenous, it is called *assimilation*. In sum, the culture of the society of destination absorbs the other one.

b) When the immigrant decides to continue on with his cultural practices, and, besides that, participates in those of the society that has received him, we would be talking about *integration*. He becomes a bicultural being. Nevertheless, the problem is that both cultures are independent and do not always get to interact.

c) And when the immigrant values his culture and rejects that of the welcoming or dominant group, we are talking about *separation*. This separation when operated from the point of view of the dominator is called *segregation*, because it rejects the culture that comes with the immigrant.

d) When the interest or the possibility of maintaining the culture of the place of origin and participating in that of the place of arrival is small, we talk about *marginalization* and the places where that occurs are *ghettos*. When this is done by the dominating society, we would talk about *exclusion*.

Canada, a country with a long history of welcoming, was the first country that worked on this process, taking into account that acculturation could be dealt with in a different form. Canada began to define itself as a plural society, a bilingual and multicultural community.¹⁹ With this declaration, what was expressed was the necessity of preserving distinct cultures within its bosom. In order to do that, it is necessary for both the dominant and the dominated cultures mutually to adjust to each other. Because, with regard to the cities, for example, the places

19 RETORTILLO OSUNA, Álvaro, "Evolución de los modelos psicológicos de aculturación en Norteamérica y Europa, de la unidimensionalidad a la bidimensionalidad en el tratamiento de la inmigración" [Evolution of the Psychological Models of Inculturation in North America and Europe, from Unidimensionality to Bidimensionality in the Treatment of Immigration], *Revista de historia de la Psicología*, Publicacions Universitat (Valencia, 2009), Vol. 30, #1, pp. 73-86.

where these processes are mostly seen, the question is how much diversity is a city capable of hosting and managing?

The Tendency of Art to Fuse When Faced with a Cultural Separation

So, I believe that the city is capable of hosting and managing a lot of diversity if what is offered is a passionate look at this multiplicity and complexity. Democracy is complexity if we understand it as government by discussion,²⁰ and we don't judge it solely by the institutions that it generates. And even more so if we affirm the centrality of art in a city, because the specialty of an artist is to interrogate "the other" in order to understand each other better and to argue with him. Traditionally, art provided a universal vision of the human being and his culture, but today, in a world that is dominated by a diversity of cultural experiences, the function of art runs the risk of being converted into just one more version of culture. Losing its capacity to challenge and criticize, it is turned into something marginal, suffering the same cultural processes: separation from society, the ghetto, marginalization.

Art is impure and mestizo, it is a mixture, it is a filigree of encounters; art is promiscuous and a bastard. For art, identities are neither complete nor definitive. In literature, the examples are very clear, and some, like *The Divan of East and West* by Goethe, a pioneer of fusing the cultures of the East and the West, are the World Patrimony of Humanity. In Spain, we have a great tradition of works that drink from various cultural fountains, from the latent Arabian influence in *El Libro de Buen Amor*, that we also find in *El Quijote*, or in the poetry of St. John of the Cross, to the indebtedness to Greek culture in *El conde Lucanor* (through Aesop) together with its Arabic and Scholastic tradition. So, literature and art seek for ways to move from one container to another, to osmose, and they distance themselves from an identity conceived as a closed mold.²¹

20 SEN, Amartya, *La idea de justicia* ['The Idea of Justice'], Taurus (Barcelona, 2010), p. 17.

21 GOYTISOLO, Juan, *El universo imaginario* ['The Imaginary Universe'], Espasa (Barcelona, 1977), p. 95.

CULTURAL CAPITALISM

Up to this point, we have placed ourselves into a disposition to do a cultural critique when we see that culture is moving away from diversity. It separates and even gets closer to a form of very subtle racism disguised in a costume of culture.

We have seen that those cultures, since they are a form of behavior, allow themselves to be compared, and one of the ways where they come to seduce each other, where there is mutual friction and infection, enriching each other, is art. But there is such an important task or more which is that of comparing them with modernity and that institutionalized social order²² that is capitalism. And the difficulty not only lies in critiquing it culturally and developing a critical theory, but rather in finding alternatives with values and a foundation. Alternatives which try to pull culture out of its enclosure in the framework of the production of merchandise, and also to recognize that critical discourses are not enough, since that social order is capable of absorbing its own contradictions. The last possible refuge seems to be the halo of artistic work because it is capable of acting as resistance to instrumental reasoning.²³

22 FRASER, Nancy, *Los talleres ocultos del capital. Un mapa para la izquierda* [‘Workshops of Capital. A Map for the Left’], Traficantes de Sueños (Madrid, 2020), p. 26.

23 GOMÁ LANZÓN, Javier, *Imitación y experiencia* (Imitation and Experience), Pre-textos (Valencia, 2003), pp. 310-315.

The Mercantile Character of Culture and Art

It was Walter Benjamin who, following Marx, began to research the idea that the destiny of culture, already in the 19th century, was not any other than its mercantile character. Until that time, a work of art lived out of a series of inherited concepts like mystery, creation and wit. It is enough to read Kant in *his Critique of Pure Reason* in order to understand this vision of the artist as a creative genius whose product is art.²⁴ This is an idea that still lives on, and we find it, for example, in some collections that are sold as “the great geniuses of music”, or of painting, or any of the fine arts. Benjamin was particularly interested in the ability of the works of art to be reproduced. It wasn't as if the reproducibility were something new; already the Greeks had forged and minted coins, or the very lithographs of the 19th century, were examples of a reproduction technique. What Benjamin could see was that the ability to be reproduced deprived the work of art of its authenticity, which he called the “here and now” when a physical presence is needed. Benjamin worked with the concept of *aura*²⁵ in a work of art. He defined it as “the irreproducible manifestation of a distance”. That is, the aura is when we are dealing with something close by, it appears to be something far away. The opposite, Benjamin continued to explain, is the “footprint”.²⁶ It is the footprint of something that shows us its nearness when it no longer is, when it has passed away. By means of the footprint we take power over the thing. The opposite occurs with the aura. It is the aura that takes power over us. So, then, instead of being in front of an unrepeatable presence needed by a here and now, the aura is diluted by being massively reproduced. And by being reproduced in copies, skipping over the direct contact and depriving it of its aura, art appears to us as something ordinary, without the possibility of esthetic rapture or of becoming critically uncomfortable.

Consumption Mutilates the Qualities of Beauty

The insight of Benjamin is having noted the importance of the fact that merchandise is presented so that it can be seen and desired, as in a shop window, and upon desiring it, all of the distance becomes hazy. Once it is desired, the delicate attention which exists in the distance is lost. It is desired and the desire controls. You have to touch it, stain yourself with it, and then there is no longer room for adoration. In other words, consumption mutilates the qualities of beauty. For Simone Weil, the beautiful was that which we desired without wanting to con-

24 KANT, Immanuel, *Crítica de juicio* [‘Critique of Pure Reason’], Austral (Madrid, 2019), p. 250.

25 BENJAMIN, Walter, *La obra de arte en la época de reproductibilidad técnica* [‘The Work of Art in the Era of Technical Reproducibility’], *Discursos Interrumpidos, I*, Taurus (Buenos Aires, 1989), p. 3.

26 BENJAMIN, Walter, *El Libro de los pasajes* [‘The Book of Voyages’], Akal (Madrid, 2004), p. 450.

sume it, without eating it,²⁷ with the addition that, under capitalism, an artistic work is no longer created for a consumer with a face. There does not exist that relationship between a patron (the Church, the royal court, etc.) where there exists a tie between the artist and the person who commissions the work. Now the artist produces for a receiver of the work who is a consumer whose face is unknown. It is enough to think about the works exhibited in a museum. The artist does not know any of the persons who will come to visit it and no one who visits the works is there in order to buy it. Let's say that he produces in an abstract form and for a face that is invisible to him. He produces for the masses. And this is also one of the great qualities of capitalism that effects culture and art so much: the dissolving of personal ties.

High Culture and the Investment Produced in the Culture of the Masses

Afterwards, still in the ashes of the Second World War, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer proposed a more pessimistic approach to the culture of the masses, working with the term “cultural industries” and distinguishing between public and mass culture. The public would include those who would be spiritually enriched by taking in cultural offerings, while the masses are passive consumers. That is what is understood by culture of the masses. On the opposite end of the scale, high culture, explained graphically, is like a receptacle that warehouses a series of esteemed works of art, ones that cannot be prescinded with, which in a vertical form, from top to bottom, comply with the task of elevating the cultural level of the population. It would be like a sieve which allows through its filter those books, pictures, symphonies and social practices that come upon those individuals with the intention of making them cultivated. The work *Pygmalion* of Bernard Shaw is an example of its functioning. In the play a flower seller of the lower class becomes educated to perfect her accent and conversation in determined social situations, receiving “high culture”.

If we go back to the 18th and 19th centuries, artists produced art and they fed the high culture because that was how they earned a living. They were a minority working for a majority. It was this majority that had to form their taste and develop their esthetic sensitivity. As a remnant of the legacy of Kant, the person was considered as a receptacle that had to be filled with art, beauty and culture. This appears as similar to the trickle-down effect in economics which falsely theorizes that if we lower the taxes on the rich, more wealth will be generated and this will act like an overflowing cup and soaks even the poorest in the form of benefits. Pope Francis has already refuted this in *Evangelii gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), #54. The culture of the masses would be, according to Adorno and Horkheimer,

27 WEIL, Simone, *La paysan et la grace*, Plon (Paris, 1991), p. 170.

the result of a process of vulgarization of the high culture. It was Berthold Brecht who best described the culture of the masses:

Society is in constant evolution for the simple reason that it produces contradictions. Destruction can well form a part of subsistence, but at the same time can put it into danger through its specific form. In order to live, I can need drugs and at the same time put my life in danger because of them. Perhaps circumstances oblige me to ask art to give a narcotic quality to its creations, and perhaps I have to ask it, at the same time, to eliminate those circumstances. For that reason, artists receive a contradictory mandate, and not only they individually, but the industry perceives that mandate, because it comes from victims that are also its clients. And here is an opportunity for artists who have to do with cinema, a small opportunity, but not the only one. They should not speculate about how much art the public is open to admit. They have to discover what is the minimum of anesthesia that the public will tolerate in their amusement. This minimum will be that maximum.²⁸

The Use Value, the Exchange Value, and the Fetishism of Goods

Benjamin gave new life to Marx's concept of the fetishism of goods that appeared in *Das Kapital*. The wise man of Treves knew how to see the relationship between work and art through their common creative force, and he saw, together with Engels, the alienation or estrangement of the worker with respect to the product of his work. In the very act of production there was produced the secret of the alienation:²⁹ the work that I do, because it is for another, no longer belongs to me. Once it is externalized, I no longer live it as a reality of my being. Also, it is overly well known that the use value of an object resides “in the body of the merchandise”, as Marx explained, and it covers a necessity (as the keyboard with which I am writing this text covers one). Now the good itself is illusion, optical illusion or deception, where the exchange value covers up the use value. Adorno found a kind of use value of a work of art in the imitation it did of sensual pleasure:³⁰ it was the esthetic enjoyment.

The moment of pleasure that is offered by the work of art, a protest against the universal character of mediation of goods, also has a certain character of media-

28 BRECHT, Berthold, *Escritos sobre teatro* [‘Essays on Theater’], Editorial Alba (Barcelona, 2004), p. 249.

29 DIEZ RODRÍGUEZ, Fernando, *Homo Faber. Historia intelectual del trabajo, 1675-1945* [‘Man the Maker. An Intellectual History of Work’], Siglo XXI (Madrid, 2014), p. 333.

30 ADORNO, Theodor, *Teoría estética*. [‘Esthetic Theory’], (1970) Workbook edition, (<http://mateucabot.net>) version 0.4 15/12/09, p. 38.

tion. Whoever disappears into the work of art thus remains dispensed from the misery of a life which is always too ignoble.³¹

The exchange value is the expression of abstract work that goods contain, thanks to which they can be sold in the marketplace. We say that their exchange value is not determined so much by the natural or created properties of the object, but rather by the social relationships that adhere to them. In spite of his economic analysis of society, Marx found in esthetics and in art a refuge against the mutilation of the human caused by work.³² Because if a person is creative activity, he cannot help but to estheticize the world, to live it artistically. And his disciple Adorno never ceased to see that in a work of art there is found a latent desire to produce a better world, this being its use value.³³

The Autonomy of a Work of Art

In a capitalist society, a work of art is productive when it finds a market which distributes it and buys it. We no longer have the Church or princes who commission works from the artist and, since their exchange value can only be established thanks to such a subjective category as what is called price, the artist gets trapped in the dictates of the marketplace and whoever controls it. The creator does not any longer expect that someone is going to kneel in front of his work (as would happen on completing a commission in a church), and even less that they would commission a work to protect from some evil or some danger (a magical or animistic character of a work of art). The great novelty is that, when these great patrons disappeared (the Church, royalty, aristocracy), and when a market was constructed that substituted for them, the artist depended less on the caprice of an individual. He gained in autonomy because he did not have to give too much of an account to anyone, except to the artistic marketplace. It is this that gave birth to art professionals. Although the number of sales in the market is important, not all of the legitimation of his art comes from these sales. There exists a form of legitimating the work through esthetics or by consecrating it intellectually. The proof is that there are artists who produce many works but have few sales who continue to enter into the artistic canon.

31 ADORNO, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

32 SÁNCHEZ VÁZQUEZ, Adolfo, *Las ideas estéticas de Marx. Ensayos de estética marxista* [‘The Esthetic Ideas of Marx. . Essays on Marxist Esthetics’], Era (Mexico City, 1965), p. 48.

33 ADORNO, *Op. cit.*, p. 32.

Price and the New “Artistic Values”

It is also a truth that now what happens is that, placed in front of an artistic work, if we find it to be interesting, we ask how much it costs. As Boris Groys says so well,³⁴ the price immunizes the art from the taste of the public. Because of the price, many works are freed from being thrown in the trash in some museums,³⁵ that is, because of their financial value. Fortunately, in a work of art there is always something that functions beyond the laws of the marketplace, so that its other current value is that of the event; a work of art has as much more value as it has the capacity to draw people. We have seen it in the exhibitions that have broken records for the number of visits and in those where people go again in order to say that they have been there. The third value is moral, that is, to what point is its consumption edifying? As if art were not also anti-art and were incapable of destroying an idealized and all-inclusive ideal of beauty. A certain moral value that flees from the ugly and dissonant, which, like it or not, contains reality.³⁶ It is what is done by Beckett, Joyce, and Kafka with their works. These are the three great values in which a work of art moves today: the financial value (how much it costs), the value of the event (how many people is it capable of drawing) and the moral value (to what point is it edifying).³⁷

Cultural Capitalism (and the Need for Vigilance)

Capitalism has undergone numerous mutations over the course of history and that is one of its qualities: the ease of adaptation. The other is its capacity as a social system that goes beyond economics to absorb and transform critical attitudes that are born out of art like space of resistance and domesticating them through objects and forms converted into goods. Also, in the 21st century it has gone from having a basis in industry to moving more and more toward the production of symbolic and cultural goods. The economy is doing the same thing. Let's repeat that. The economy is looking toward a sphere which historically has been

34 GROYS, Boris, *Volverse público. Las transformaciones del arte en el ágora contemporánea* [‘Going Public. the Transformations of Art in the Contemporary Marketplace’], Caja Negra (Buenos Aires, 2020), p. 46.

35 This is an incident that really occurred. A cleaning person at the Museo Bolzano in Milan, cleaned up by mistake a work of art created by a pair of vanguard artists, Sara Goldschmied and Eleonora Chiari, when she confused the work with the waste from the night before. <https://www.elmundo.es/cultura/2015/10/30/56332e1ce2704e477b8b4600.html>

36 GOMÁ LANZÓN, Javier, *Imitación y experiencia* [‘Imitation and Experience’], Pre-Textos (Valencia, 2003), p. 315.

37 MICHAUD, Yves, *L'art, c'est bien fini. Essai sur l'hyper-esthétique et les atmosphères*, Gallimard (Paris, 2021), p. 68.

separate, i.e., culture. In addition, we are facing another problem that is the fruit of the immense power of the great digital enterprises (Google, Meta, Twitter, etc.) which are changing human conduct into material for commerce in the form of data. We think that we are using Google, but in reality, it is Google who uses us when it manages to obtain so much information about us and our behavior that, treated in the form of data, they are converted into more fictitious goods.³⁸

From Buyers and Sellers to Suppliers and Users

There exist three spheres that are differentiated and yet interact among themselves, like three legs that support a table: the social sphere (which includes economy, technology and work), the political and the cultural. The basic rule of the economy is the optimization of resources. Participation is the rule in the political sphere, and in the cultural sphere what is prioritized, as we have already mentioned, is symbolism and the development and realization of the person.³⁹ Jeremy Rifkin says in *The Age of Access* that the values of the political and cultural spheres, on being pulled along by the economic sphere, have become monetized, and in a world that idolizes speed, subjected to the power of the immediate moment, faced with a kind of life built on the recognition of duration, property as an institution becomes slow. Before, business was carried out face to face, negotiating and signing contracts for buying and selling, and all of this took time. On the other hand, now the relationship of buyer-seller has been substituted by that of administrator and user. Leasing and subscription (the example of the digital platforms like Netflix) provide immediacy by means of the Web, and immediacy, the nanosecond, has replaced the traditional market.

We have gone from a regimen of property based on goods that was supported by amply distributed property, to a regimen of access which is sustained by guaranteeing limited use for a short term of goods controlled by networks of providers.⁴⁰

38 Once again, I am grateful to the suggestion of José Ignacio González Faus to include vigilant capitalism after reading the book by Shoshana Zuboff titled *The Age of Vigilant Capitalism. The Struggle for a Human Future Confronting New Frontiers of Power*. Gonzalez Faus sees it as a consequence of the system founded in the struggle of capital against labor in the desire for the maximum benefit, as opposed to the author who, according to Gonzalez Faus, sees it as an accidental deformation of capitalism.

39 BELL, Daniel, *El advenimiento de la sociedad pos-industrial* [‘The Coming of Post Industrial Society’], Alianza (Madrid, 1976).

40 RIFKIN, Jeremy, *La era del acceso. La revolución de la nueva economía* [‘The Age of Access. The Revolution of the New Economy’], Paidós (Barcelona, 2022), p. 17.

If what is given first priority is economic survival and the rapidity of exchange, from where will we take the time for the contemplation necessary for art and the esthetic experience?

Intellectual Capital: a New Motivating Force

Today, “intellectual capital is the motivating force of the new age, and the most coveted.” We understand that well when we study the language of offers of work. From the 19th century until the ‘60’s of the 20th, the language is homogenous, a boring literary universe based on knowing how to do something (“worker wanted who knows how to solder”), where what counted was the ability, dexterity, as opposed to the current “worker wanted who is creative, ready to innovate, and with an entrepreneurial spirit”. The change takes place in an affective and cultural revolution. The statement of Joseph Beuys that “every human being is an artist” – a beautiful esthetic posturing, but impossible to have in reality – has morphed into “every human being is an entrepreneur of himself”. Expressions like “creative talent” reflect language that ties together creative marketing and artistic innovation. The labor market wants us to be creative and a “happy-ocracy”⁴¹ where unhappiness is considered as a psychological state and not the result of an unjust structure that can be managed by using the will.

The Design of the Self

Where before we attempted to design “esthetically” the soul before God through spiritual exercises and with the help of a spiritual art, what counts now is how we wish to present ourselves before others. It is the pure design of self, since we are asked constantly what form we wish to give to ourselves.⁴² In other words, it is the hedonistic search for happiness as a political goal facing the search for justice.⁴³ Now there are no more structural problems, but rather individual psychological deficiencies, problems of a kind that are remedied by esthetic surgery, self-help books, a spirituality of relaxation that is not committed to anything, a whole marketing technique for taking care of the self. The self is converted into an esthetic problem and the neoliberal economy is dressed up in the clothing of

41 ILLOUZ, Eva, and CABANAS, Edgar, *Happycracia. Como la ciencia y la industria de la felicidad controlan nuestras vidas* [‘Happyocracy. How the Science and Industry of Happiness Control Our Lives’], Paidós (Barcelona, 2019).

42 “The body takes the form of the soul; the soul becomes body.” GROYS, Boris, *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

43 It is enough to take a quick look at contemporary art. The highly valued artist Jeff Koons, creator of a giant plated dog, the Balloon Dog, whose only merit is to see ourselves reflected in the mirrored design, would declare: “[...] learn to be confident in yourself and in your own history. This is also what I want to transmit to the observer of my works; one should feel their own pleasure of living.” “Jeff Koons uber Vertrauen”, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 17, 2021.

art and culture in order to hide its shame. The disguise it chooses is called “cultural capitalism”.

The New Creative Cities, Spaces of Cultural Capitalism

All content needs a container or, as Henri Lefebvre said, “there is no social relationship without support.”⁴⁴ And these containers are the “creative cities”, looked upon so favorably by politicians as an “amalgam of hardware, software, education and esthetics”.⁴⁵ Creativity is the new manna and the processes are more important than the organizational dynamics. An institution is, basically, an organization, and process is what the artist carries out from the origin until the final result of a work. Processes are uncertain, full of searching and experimentation. Genet made fun of artistic creations that had planned out the point of beginning and that of the end. It seemed to him that this had more to do with a bus route than a work of art.

Work in democracy consists of facilitating cultural equipment and institutions that host artistic processes without drowning the creative spirit that they carry with them. It is a challenge for cultural institutions to reduce their authority and lighten their bureaucratic mechanisms in order to be able to insure that that spirit does not die out in offices and procedures.

a) The tertiary cultural places

From this idea of welcoming processes was born that of “tertiary cultural places”: the cooperatives, the self-managed places, coworking and fablabs, etc. They are the heirs of the countercultural spaces of the 1960’s and ‘70’s, and they have a regenerative vocation. From the ruins of the industrial decline, there sprouted these green cultural blossoms that act like regenerators of spaces that had often been abandoned. Inside, in their attempt to endow all of the teams with different ways of expressing themselves, they offer interactive galleries, cafeterias of knowledge, workshops, rooms for creativity and test rooms for digital slides. Some examples are the *Medialab* Prado in Madrid (Spain), Cap Sciences (Bordeaux, France) or Quai des Savoires Toulouse, France).

To the contrary of the idea of the diffusion of culture and politics of knowledge toward the “general public”, in these places everything is designed so that visitors build up in an active and ascending way new knowledge, culture or creative slides. It is the idea of *cultural democracy* that occupies the last section of this

44 LEFEBVRE, Henri, *La producción del espacio* [‘The production of space’], Capitán Swing (Madrid, 2013), p. 431.

45 MILLER, Toby, *El trabajo cultural* [‘Cultural Work’], Gedisa (Barcelona, 2018), p. 360, digital edition.

booklet. The existence of these spaces poses a danger, in spite of their international recognition,⁴⁶ because they presuppose a distancing from the elitist idea of culture and they promote more the idea of collective apprenticeship based on *doing*.

The risk is that the culture and aesthetic that these spaces impregnate in the neighborhoods will attract the elites and the real estate developers who end up displacing the artists themselves and the population who lives there. This is a population formed by the working class who in this way become distanced from their remembered spaces, there where they found their most important social relationships. This dynamic ends up boding well for an urban model that tries to facilitate the life of the “creative classes” who are those who today sustain the progress of a society that becomes more and more digital.

b) Gentrification, a democratic barrier

The market ends up taking care of its “artistic reputation”, it colonizes it, clipping the wings of the possible cultural democracy and the neighborhoods are converted into destinations for cultural consumption. It is what George Yudice calls “culture as resource” or “conveniences of culture”.⁴⁷ in the form of “gentrification”. For that, euphemistic language always seems to appear to come to the rescue to construct successful narratives, calling urban renewal what is really a legal expulsion of a population. Then there is generated a supposed “authenticity”⁴⁸ which is adequate for the visitor to feel an individual experience as they go through the neighborhood and can consume its various offerings.⁴⁹ A famous example is the neighborhood of Shoreditch in London where there took place what was pointed out by David Harvey:

46 PEREZ MENDOZA, Sofia, “Saltan las alarmas en Medialab Prado, emblema de la innovación cultural en Madrid [Alarm Bells at Medialab Prado, the Emblem of Cultural Innovation in Madrid]”, *El Diario.es*, January 27, 2021; https://www.eldiario.es/madrid/medialab-prado-aire_1_7159473.html.

47 MILLER, Toby, *Op. cit.*, p. 380.

48 MATTHEWS, Vanessa, “Aestheticizing Space: Art, Gentrification and the City” in *Geography Compass* 4, n. 6, p. 622.

49 To go to more recent examples, we have the Raval of Barcelona, which developed a campaign based on the verb *ranalejar* instead of the usual logo. This is a verb that suggests attitudes arising from love of the neighborhood and positivism, thanks to its authenticity. See RIUS-ULLDEMO-LINS, Joaquim, *Cultura, gobernanza local y Desarrollo urbano. Políticas culturales de Barcelona y Valencia en perspectiva comparada* [Culture, Local Governance and Urban Development. Cultural Policies in Barcelona and Valencia Compared], Publicaciones Universidad de Valencia (Valencia, 2019), pp. 77-80.

If singularity and particularity are crucial to the definition of special qualities, then the requirement of commerciality means that no article can be so unique or so special as to be completely outside of monetary calculation.⁵⁰

Singularity and particularity, two qualities of a work of art, have been domesticated for use in monetary calculation. Neighborhoods are gentrified and their inhabitants supposedly more creative, but the artists have difficulty finding spaces for work and being able to pay for the rent, not to mention the expulsion of the least favored classes of people who are pushed toward the periphery. If we want there to be encounters between artists and those of the most favored classes and that there might be produced social, cultural and artistic experimentation, we need to reverse these trends in urban policies and allow for all those who take part in cultural activities to change their relationship with the community. We have seen during the pandemic, without the presence of tourists and with the sole possibility of affecting the immediate neighborhood, some artistic groups languished. And thus, the figure of the artist, that being who puts order into meanings and values through language, capable of defining himself freely through his work, showing sensitivities, imperfections, contradictions and conflicts, ends up by drawing himself out of the picture. He loses his position as critic when he transfers his values to the economy which formulates him as a consumer. Therefore creativity, art, and esthetics, which satisfy a human need and fulfill a function are evaporated in pursuit of the capacity to produce a benefit.

Culture as a Burden on the Community

If we Google the word “culture” along with the name of the principal Spanish political parties in order to evaluate the place of culture and art in their programs, we find ourselves with a very clear proposal which has to be combatted: for the right,⁵¹ culture is seen as a burden, but it could stop being so if it is applied to activating the economy. Behind this idea lies a very widespread perception that culture and art live exclusively from subsidies (the burden), and so, then, in order to rectify it, it is necessary to strengthen its entrepreneurial dynamism. It is a sector (the data comes from the *Partido Popular* itself) that brings in 3.2% of the GDP and it is a source of employment for 700,000 people. This is an effective and popular argument. Even the artists themselves use it when they try to explain to society the slow and always difficult to evaluate benefits of the impact of culture. The problem is that when culture is given a value and is left exclusively

50 HARVEY, David, “*The Art of Rent: Globalization, Monopoly and the Commodification of Cultures?*” in *Socialist Register*, 38, pp. 93-110.

51 Sol Cruz-Guzmán: “Culture has to be seen as an area to stimulate the economy and not as a burden which has to be maintained.” (<https://www.pp.es/cultura>).

in the hands of economic profitability, two things happen: it loses its soul and it fails to reach the least favored tiers of society.

An example of this is the use of cultural branding. The *Partido Popular* states on its website that “Culture is a question of State; it is Brand Spain.”⁵² It is worth stopping for a short time on the idea of a brand being associated with culture. The country-brand, that is, the country is seen like a cultural business that should be integrated into the economy, at the same time that it proposes a new form of being in the world. It would seem that States give in before those who display power, the great enterprises, and they try to emulate them. States are converted into brands and no longer need politicians at their head, only good managers, because, once you have resigned from politics, there only remains to adopt entrepreneurial strategies and the brands are what affect these strategies. Following this thread of argumentation, publicity is converted into the vehicle of transmission of the brand to the world. This is a live cultural example of mercantilization. Where there should exist conflict and deliberation, there is substituted efficiency. Culture and art, the providers of the values of social cohesion, are required to be productive. And the political community is diluted into a mere cultural brand. Thus it is that Brand Spain would compete with other cultural brands in the same way that businesses compete among themselves with the object of minimizing benefits. Like all brands it is linked to production, to an industry, and in the case of culture, it is one more feature of that cultural capitalism of which we have been speaking.

Culture and Art Seen as a Luxury

I would like to close this chapter talking about luxury. One of the affirmations that is made by the professionals of the world of culture in the artistic field, is to try to disconnect it from luxury, and add it into the common good and see it as a necessity. And I believe that there is much of this in the question of my dear friend Xavi Casanovas that I posed in the introduction of this booklet, and in what we stated that in the search for justice there is always a certain asceticism and luxury is the opposite. Certainly, art has a door with easy access to luxury which brings it close to hedonism. I think about the skull in platinum encrusted in 8,601 cut and polished diamonds, created by the English artist Damien Hirst. The idea had a production cost of 20 million euros⁵³ and its sale price was 72 million euros. In order to round out the artistic operation, the title is *For the Love*

52 “The *Partido Popular* is seeking help for the promotion and vitalization of the cultural entrepreneurial sector”. <https://www.pp.es/actualidad-noticia/pp-pide-ayudas-promocion-dinamizacion-sector-empresarial-cultural>.

53 “Calavera con diamantes” [‘Skull with diamonds’] at *ElPais.com*, June 2, 2007: : https://elpais.com/diario/2007/06/02/ultima/1180735201_850215.html.

of God. I have no idea in what god Hirst was thinking, but if there is anything that God abhors and curses, it is precisely luxury.

Lacordaire wrote a text in Paris in 1851, where he talks about the “antiso- cial character of luxury”⁵⁴ and clearly states that the needs created by vanity are limitless. For him, the measure would be the necessities of the body, what is physically necessary, speaking to us about a necessary frugality. But there are also those who, far from treating luxury as a moral question and criticizing it for being voluptuous or uncontrolled, consider it as being synonymous with productivity and material progress. For example, it was Hume who helped to whitewash it, endowing it with virtues during the Enlightenment. For Hume, luxury is “a stud- ied refinement in the quest for sensual pleasure.” And since the human being is invention and creativity, luxury is a stimulus that fosters it, the motor for soci- ability. The Scots philosopher said that “it is necessary to govern men by using other passions, awakening in them the desire for riches and industriousness, for art and for luxury.”⁵⁵

This affects not only art, but also culture. Culture also creates financial ex- pectations in the form of gifts, festival days to celebrate, endowments, ceremo- nies, etc. For example, it is a fairly frequent occurrence in schools to stigmatize families of other cultures because they never participate in the life of the school. The confusion is in the fact that not wishing to be integrated into the local cus- toms is a cultural question. But in reality, many times they are dealing with an economic question. For those who are barely able to make it to the end of the month, culture and art continue to seem like a luxury, an unnecessary refinement. I do not wish to go any further with this idea of Voltaire that “the superfluous is very necessary” encrusted in the genesis of our modernity, which is covered in another booklet of this series.⁵⁶ As material poverty is considered the worst of evils, its associated culture also would be. And it seems as if the culture of the least favored classes should be substituted with that of the dominant classes and their apology for luxury.

54 GONZÁLEZ FAUS, José Ignacio, *Vicarios de Cristo: los pobres. Antología de textos de la teología y espiri- tualidad cristianas* [‘Vicars of Christ: the poor. Anthology of texts from Christian theology and spirituality’], Cristianisme i Justícia (Barcelona, 2011), p. 299.

55 HUME, David, *Ensayos políticos. Sobre el comercio* [‘Political Essays. On Commerce’], Centro de Estudios Constitucionales Colección “Civitas”, (1982), p. 19.

56 GONZÁLEZ FAUS, José Ignacio, [Renouncing modernity](#), Cristianisme i Justícia (Barcelona, 2002). Booklets CJ #109.

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

We open now this last section of the booklet to enter more into a tone of investigation about the properties of art and its contribution to the binomial *culture* and *democracy*, which gives us the title for this booklet.

The Origins of Cultural Democratization

One of the most influential Ministers of Culture that Europe has had was André Malraux, a novelist and a member of the cabinet of Charles De Gaulle in France. Malraux launched a discussion about decentralization in the city of Grenoble. His idea was that everything essential that might happen in Paris should also happen in Grenoble, a decentralizing idea that still has echoes at the present time.⁵⁷ Thus was born *cultural democratization*, which in the neighboring country (France) had its origins in Condorcet and his report about the general organization of public education,⁵⁸ the genesis of popular education. Cultural democratization sought to affect the inequality of cultural distribution, and thanks to this, “cultural actions” were born that serve as a bridge between the citizen and art.

57 In the city where I live, Valencia, the Commission for Patrimony and Cultural Resources has launched a program called “Cultura als Barris” (Culture in the Neighborhoods) in a clear bet on decentralization. <https://www.valencia.es/es/cas/agenda-de-la-ciudad/-/content/cultura-als-barris-2021>.

58 Nicolas de Condorcet, *Rapport sur l'organisation generale de l'instruction publique*, presented in 1792 in the French National Assembly.

Cultural Mediation

What was being worked on then was the passage of culture from being a simple “invitation” in order to reduce the economic and territorial inequalities, to a project of “initiation”. What they were dealing with was “mediating culturally” with the people and educating by means of culture in order to overcome the existing symbolic barriers. That meant starting a series of active policies which were concretized in the ‘60’s with the creation of cultural teams throughout the French territory, each one with a mission, something that has lasted into the present. At root, was the latent universality of art and the belief that contact with artistic work creates symbolic ties and unites sensitivities among people, a modern and enlightened idea that aided in the emancipation of people. In other words, it dealt with the creation of societies oriented toward progress, the ideal of modernity, and to do it through strengthening a system of work with the culture consistent with elevating the level of the population, offering it the best of artistic creation.

Criticism of Cultural Democratization

The criticism that was made of Malraux is if in his attempt to invent a cultural policy, he wanted to make culture something that was “available” and not so much “accessible”.⁵⁹ The theoretical postulates of cultural democratization were placed into question in May, 1968, when the revolution was no longer as much a question of the accumulation of political forces as it was one of awareness. Thus, it was affirmed in the intergovernmental meeting of European politicians (Euro-cult) in 1972 in Helsinki (to which Canada was added), and where there were discussed the themes of cultural democratization, of the relationships between cultural and economic development, and cultural democracy, among others. They left behind the idea of forming men and women by imposing on them from the outside based on a cultural inheritance or a “culture of the elite”. It is no longer a territory to conquer on the basis of acquiring knowledge through a work of art, “but rather a form of behavior with oneself and those like you. with nature; it is now no longer only a field that it is convenient to democratize, but rather it itself becomes a form of democracy which needs to be put in gear.”⁶⁰

What is desired is a group of active and participative citizens to be turned into players who play in a game whose rules they understand and so have the capacity to change them. Cultural democratization is demonized and is seen as a bourgeois enterprise to legitimize a social order in which the disfavored classes pay higher prices. At the same time, there are being denounced some “cultural

59 URFALINO, Philippe, *L'invention de la politique culturelle*, Pluriel (Paris, 2011).

60 WEBER, Raymond, *La démocratie culturelle comme fondement de la démocratie*, Forum für Politik, Gesellschaft und Kultur.

rights” which supposedly were obtained by the whole world, but which at root were elaborated and concealed by a “caste of consumers of high culture and by creators, the holders of the monopolies of production.”⁶¹

Cultural Democracy: a Humanism to Conquer

Translating from Marcel Hicter, the great theoretician of cultural democracy who defined it in this way:

Cultural democracy is rather the quality of “being together” that alights on the human commitment of men and women with the competition for their active and solidifying participation, and with full consciousness of their need to express themselves and are given the complete control of the media for this expression. It means not only tolerance, it also implies the recognition of freedom of thought, freedom of expression and the right to be different. It is not defined as a theoretical right, but rather as a humanism to conquer.

A humanism to conquer, a holistic proposal, where human reason is in function of the realization of the human being and reverts to an idea of progress which has not yet achieved that we stop devouring each other, but rather that “we devour ourselves with a knife and fork,”⁶² with refinement, with the help of culture and the complacency of a certain art.

Have we arrived late so that we are just now talking about trans-humanity and about the twilight of humanism in facing the potential of biotechnology and artificial intelligence?⁶³ And above all, perhaps have democracy and culture become so damaged that they leave the artist impeded in his answers?⁶⁴

61 FEDERATION WALLONIE-BRUXELLES, “Reperes”, *Democratie culturelle et démocratisation de la culture*, # 4-5 (2014).

62 Concerning how historic progress can be twisted and, in fact, has been twisted, see GONZÁLEZ FAUS, José Ignacio, *El capital contra el siglo XXI?* [‘Capital vs. the 21st Century?’], Sal Terrae (Santander, 2015), pp. 148-149.

63 One of the defenders, not without some incongruency, is the writer Yuhai Noha Harari and his reflection concerning human freedom. See the article of BEORLEGUI, Carlos, “Yuhai N. Harari: la Libertad difuminada y desmitificada (I)” [‘Y. N. Harari: Freedom Blurred and Demythologized’], *Razón y Fe* (2021), pp. 155-171.

64 Rudolf Arnheim posed two fundamental questions which, depending upon how we answer them, would lead to our speaking about the relevance or irrelevance of esthetics: “Is the modern social, cognitive world perpetually deprived of the class of elevated order that it needs to generate a similarly organized form in the minds of artists? Or is the order of our world so pernicious as to prevent the artist from responding to it?” ARNHEIM-BERKELEY, Rudolf, *Entropy and Art: An Essay on Disorder and Order*, University of California Press (California, 1971), p. 52.

They are if the benefit is the only thing that counts, but there is something very salvageable in the statement of Hicter: “the quality of being together” that goes beyond simple tolerance (the cultural integration that we spoke about before) and that requires “the necessity to transcend the egocentric, narcissistic and isolated position” of the subject, as Erich Fromm said so well. This transcendence brings along with it “the acquisition of qualities that are specifically human”, thanks to which there is overcome “the role of being merely created.”⁶⁵

65 KUSPIT, Donald, *El fin del arte* [‘The Goal of Art’], Akal (Madrid, 2004), p. 385 of the ebook.

CONCLUSIONS: “WITHOUT BEAUTY, WITHOUT MAJESTY (WE SAW HIM), NO LOOKS TO ATTRACT OUR EYES” (IS. 53:2)

By way of conclusion, I am going to try to close the booklet by alluding to the strength of art and to that change of sensitivities of which I spoke at the beginning.

“The economy is the method, but the objective is to change the heart and soul,” said Margaret Thatcher, presenting her particular cultural battle. One of the cultural victories of that battle has consisted in domesticating beauty and the esthetic experience, eliminating the aura, and also neutralizing the critical power of art, transforming it into an invitation to consumption.

If the benefit is what counts, the task of art in a cultural democracy is to present a cultural counter-battle. For that reason, some philosophers talk about “the salvation of the beautiful”, revindicating loyalty to that like what distances us from what we are contemplating.⁶⁶ It is the negativity of which Gadamer spoke, the wound, so opposite to the actual polished surfaces, to what moves us and appeals to us to change our lives, some wounds and a vulnerability that act like doors at the entrance to the world.

This is the same way that the prophet Isaiah, in anticipation, describes Christ on the way to Calvary, disfigured and ground up, lacking any beauty, failed in the eyes of humanity, in the most generous act possible of giving his life for others. “You cannot unite yourself with my divinity, you will not transcend, if you do

66 HAN, Byung-Chul, *La salvación de lo bello* [‘The Salvation of the Beautiful’], Herder (Barcelona, 2015), p. 17.

not unite yourself first with my humanity,” say the mystics,⁶⁷ and that despite my “lack of beauty” and the distance that my wounds provoke in you. Art is the most material and concrete form that we have to relate ourselves to mystery. It began thus its journey⁶⁸ and there it continues its task: to alter perceptions about things, helping us to relate to reality in another way,⁶⁹ without offering solutions, many times drawing us closer to uncertainty, in incessant astonishment and openness.

Therefore, in order to move reality, it is necessary to experience:

- *Estrangement.* Art, the same as utopias, can be that Archimedean point of support. Art makes us unfamiliar with something, or, in a more theological language, we are converted to things and we need to be unconverted in order to be converted to something else. In order to turn our sight to what is around us, the objects, the persons, to feel them again and free them from the yoke of habit or indifference, this estrangement is necessary.
- *A growing humanization.* The change of sensitivities consists in a process of growing humanization, which is what should be required by every democracy and this humanization needs prolonged attention given to things, very much the contrary of the consumerism that needs speed in order to exist. For example, when Cezanne painted some apples, he did it as if it were the first time that he saw them, filled with infinite tenderness, armed with patience, conscious of the fact that it was not a snapshot of reality that he was producing, but an act of profound humanness.⁷⁰
- *Centrality of the processes.* Art in a cultural democracy understands democracy as governance that concerns itself with the potential capabilities of persons. And for that, processes, inherent in artistry, are as important as the institutions that make them possible. It is government as activity, with a high creative component, as opposed to government as institution.⁷¹ The right to information is not worth anything if we don’t know how to interpret that in-

67 The citation is from the Flemish mystic Hedwig of Antwerp from the 12th century. DAELEMANS, SJ, Bert, “La mística de Bill Viola: arte y espiritualidad” [“The Mysticism of Bill Viola: Art and Spirituality”], *Razón y Fe*, #1444, p. 201.

68 “Art began by being a means of hiding and of contact with what was not human, with the tangibly sacred, adornment and mask, mask with a magical meaning”, cited in SANTAMARÍA, Alberto, *Políticas de lo sensible. Líneas románticas y crítica cultural* [“Politics of sense. Romantic Lines and Cultural Criticism”], Akal (Madrid, 2020), p. 164.

69 I allude here to a form of cultural mutation, Romanticism, as Alberto Santamaria explains in his book, citing Novalis, “As soon as I give meaning to the ordinary, to what is known the dignity of being unknown, and the appearance of infinity to the finite, with all of that, I am romanticizing” and alluding to the liberating potential of the present.

70 Fabrice Midal situates here the birth of modern art. MIDAL, Fabrice, *3 minutes de philosophie*. Flammarion (Paris, 2020), p. 80.

71 Laval and Dardot: “Neoliberalism is a form of life, not only an ideology or a political economy.” FERNÁNDEZ-SAVATER, Amador, MALO, Marta, and ÁVILA, Débora, *Diario.es*, October 10, 2014.

formation; nor the right to vote if we don't know how to read; nor the right to freedom of expression without observing, understanding and reflecting before speaking. This so that people can achieve the goals that are proposed and make possible the impossible.

- *Resistance*. Finally, art is the practice of active communitarian resistance that amplifies our sensitivities and helps us to pose again our hierarchy of values. Accompanying philosophy and politics in that questioning of institutionalized social imagination.⁷² This is its great contribution to culture and democracy.

https://www.eldiario.es/interferencias/neoliberalismo-ideologia-politica-economica-forma_132_4592247.html

72 CASTORIADIS, Cornelius, *Lo que hace a Grecia. 1. De Homero a Heráclito* [‘What Makes Greece. I. From Homer to Heraclitus’]. Fondo de Cultura Económica de Argentina (Argentina, 2006), p. 322.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. The first chapter covers the relationship between “culture and civilization” and between “culture and nature”. Why is it so important for the author “to relativize culture? Do you agree with his argument?
2. In what way has capitalism entered into art and transformed it? Is there some possibility that art might exercise a critique of capitalism?
3. What does it mean to link culture and democracy? In what sense can these two concepts help each other?
4. The author talks about a “countercultural battle”. What does this mean in today’s world and what role can art play in it?

Cristianisme i Justícia (Lluís Espinal Foundation) is a study center that was created in Barcelona in 1981. It brings together a team of volunteer scholars and activists who desire to promote social and theological reflection that will contribute to the transformation of social and ecclesial structures. It is part of the network of Faith-Culture-Justice Centers of Spain and also of the European Social Centers of the Society of Jesus.

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