

# Politicians Versus Artists

Stefan Morawski

*Few thinkers have forged as much size and clarity of viewpoint with respect to the central questions posed by this issue of Arts in Society as has Stefan Morawski, the outstanding Polish aesthetician and philosopher of the arts. His "Politicians Versus Artists," uniquely drawn from personal observation of the contradictions, ambivalences, and dichotomies characterizing cultural aspiration on both sides of the Iron Curtain, highlights in large societal frame the most fundamental political question of all: that of articulating the needs and uses of power with the needs and uses of creative expression.*

Over and over again in their complex history, the arts have proven they are significantly dependent on politics. Let us distinguish among three kinds of this dependence.

a) *Ideological meaning in the artwork.* Latent ideological significance is often imprinted as an integral part of the act of artistic creation. Sometimes, it will be unrecognized until explicated during the aesthetic evaluation. Yet an ideological function is inherent to art in general. Because this is so, strictly political interpretations of art objects are permissible even when these were definitely not the artist's intention.

b) *Socio-political commitments which artists seek to make manifest.* They are emphasized in artworks in order to be recognized by a contemporary public. Sometimes, but not always, later audiences perceive these allusions and the corresponding commitments.

c) *Direct impingements on art by society.* What is done by society through its official and informal institutions, when these latent ideological meanings and these overt socio-political commitments are encountered? Are the existing avenues of artistic expression left unimpaired, or are

they closed? — To discuss any side of art's dependence in connection with politics will demand that attention be paid to all of these three sides. All the same, my emphasis here will be primarily on the last. Manifestly engaged art (the second category) will generally provide the examples that provoke controversy. In addition, with regard to the third side of politics and art (this contextual aspect), I will attend mainly to the problem constituted by the governing apparatuses which possess definite executive groups and official ideologies. Looked at from this standpoint, among the commonplace mediations connecting art to politics is a censorship. By definition a censorship welcomes that which assists or at any rate does not antagonize the ruling power. It moves to block that which is problematic for the maintenance of the political power. Every political system undoubtedly has its censorial arm, whether official or unofficial. The methods and rationales for the exercise of its role are numerous. The strictly political function of censors needs to be documented and analyzed thoroughly, yet a full and close account has not been published. How very instructive it would be to discern just why and how—through many centuries, and in all cultures—the almost unceasing political control of the arts has been asserted!

As for the 'how' of political censorship of art, it can be quickly explored as *questio facti*. What are the persistent recourses of the censor? These measures, we may reasonably suggest, are organized around a prohibition of specified themes; an ideological taboo on certain approved hero-types; certain canons of style and form, etc. The 'why' of the censor's unrelenting role is a more difficult matter. A catalog of differing

explanations in different times and places could be drawn up. Yet doesn't the epitome of them all lie in the concept of the Definitively Ordered Society? More or less, the executive strata of a given society may reason thus: "Our People and our Nation comprise a hallowed, essentially positive commonwealth having as its most lofty achievement the Church or the State. Only if everybody boosts together shall we reap the benefits. What motive could anyone possibly have for getting out of line?" It is remarkable to what degree those in the executive sector do depict themselves frequently as the virtual messiahs, as those who can secure the enduring happiness of mankind if only they are aided to the hilt in imposing the Definitively Ordered Society. Whether priests or kings, military or party dictators, tyranny may be practiced while the perfect social system is proclaimed and the glaring gap is often never acknowledged.

The violence and repression which shore up rather narrow interests will be cynically dissembled; if required or perhaps induced to take public responsibility for their policy in culture, they appeal without fail to *gloria Dei, vox populi, Blut und Boden* and what have you. Glory and prestige, then, are extended to the security police and inquisitors in solemn covenant with the meek in spirit and the "healthy-minded" artist, as against the artist who is "decadent, corrupt and contagious!"

On the basis of these preliminary remarks we can already see, nonetheless, how mistaken it would be to analyze the connection of art to political power as merely and solely one of forced compliance. Let us therefore state explicitly three qualifications which are important:

First, we shall give our main attention here to the authoritarian political context, but clearly others do exist. We tend to think for example of a democratic context for the arts along the lines (which are symbolic of course) of free speech in Hyde Park, where administrative and police controls do not stop the mouth of the outspoken. It would be encouraging to think that progress is constant towards a higher civilization, accordingly political censorship of the arts will diminish. How warming to imagine that Hyde Park—or rather, a corresponding disposition of the arts policies throughout every aspect of the structures of culture—will eventually prove emblematic for the coming era. But events forbid optimism of this order. We need not consult the centuries of feudalism and of slavery to justify a somber expectation. For our English example, our paradigm of unrestricted expression, is a rare if not totally singular phenomenon. And it is worth emphasizing that the Hyde Park formula can be but a dissimulation for a political power which feels no absolute concern regarding what artists say. No doubt, in such a set-up the absolute liberty of art becomes a myth: since to be free means also to be listened to and reckoned with. I'll come back to this point in my concluding remarks. Another modern paradigm was etched on our awareness by the Nazi Third Reich: it established concentration camps for errant artists and intellectuals. And of course, just as Fascist-



Mary, by Nancy Grossman, 16½" h., wood and leather, 1971. Courtesy of the artist.

style repression is widespread prior to 1939 so is it still today. Europe's *caudillos*, 'black colonels' and other tyrants conduct a conspicuous and often very effective campaign against the poets, painters and composers. The results are equalled and often surpassed elsewhere. Haiti provides an abominable instance of thoroughness for the remainder of Latin America in breaking the human mind, nor will the passing of "Papa Doc" in itself relieve the agony in Haiti or elsewhere. Such nations as Thailand and Indonesia cannot claim any praise for indulging the socio-political views held by their controversial artists. And no survey of this matter, however brief, can leave aside the socialist systems. If their Marxist ideology were to serve as the norm and test, the socialist countries should come to stand as the fullest embodiments of artistic liberty. The theoretical assumptions and ideological promises however remain unfulfilled.

*Second*, we must again qualify the issue of art as coerced by its political context, by taking into account the periods of revolution. The phrase *Inter arma silent Musae* doesn't fit. Rather, a great number of artists in such exceptional historical times (including the best among them) lend a hand to the socio-political upheaval—either directly in their writing and deeds, or by giving moral support. At such times it becomes ridiculous to speak of the connection of the artist to politics in terms of the former's submission. Just the contrary occurs in these periods. Where the artist is dedicated to the revolution and has a sense of responsibility for the outcome, his political stance is freely adopted. Here the artist's spontaneity does not imply an estrangement from the dynamics of political power, but the opposite. Nor will the civil authorities have cause to apply coercion to the artist. And the political power that emerges from the uprising—however harsh it may be on counter-revolutionaries—generally is benign towards the non-revolutionary artist. His cooperation is sought. The revolutionists seek to win him over, to make him see his partnership in the struggle. This attitude builds on the mutual sympathies that predate the uprising. For during the time of the *Sturm und Drang* incubation of revolt, many artists of stature enter

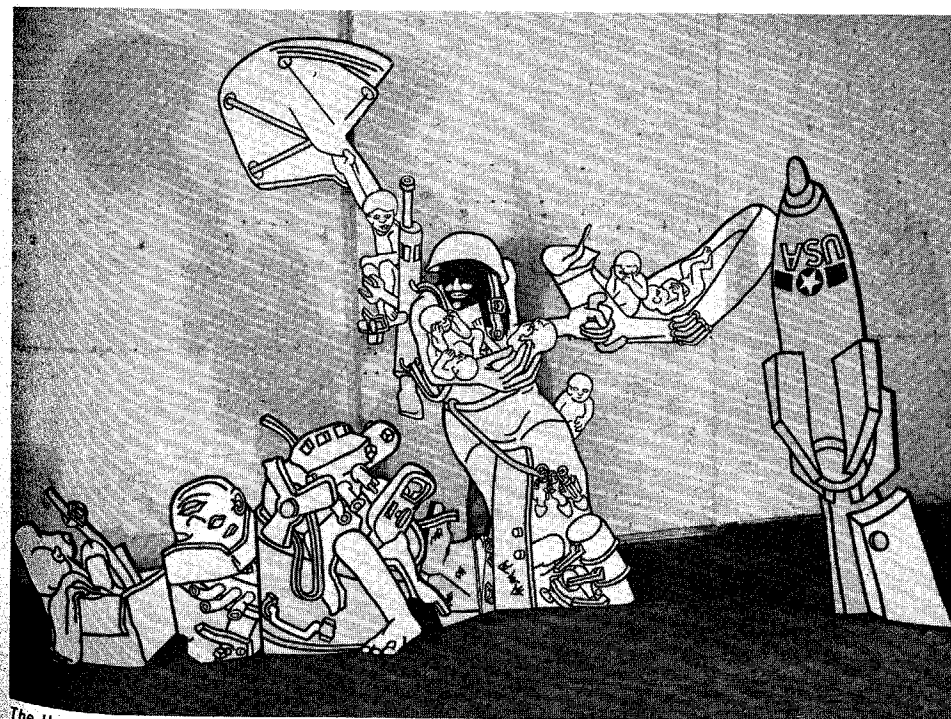
the political torrent, either aiding with political acts or indirectly through novels, poetry, musical composition, theatre pieces, political manifestos. In the countries which have feeble democratic traditions owing to their historical destinies (e.g., the Slavic and Balkan nations), the creative intelligentsia even tends to step in and assume the missing political function. Where this has occurred the revolutionary ardor and selflessness of the artists can be extraordinary. Naturally in such circumstances, the emerging revolutionary government will seek welcomingly among the artists for comrades. It is reasonable to expect an art which is political in the sense that it is eager for the victory of the insurgents and the establishment of a new social order.

*Third*, we may cite another qualification of the coerciveness of political authority. Like the second, our third concerns a category of artists whose response to that power is favorable, even enthusiastic. We speak here of artists who are comfortable with the governments that resist social ferment. Let's call them the *adherents of the court*. Thus, the similarity with our second category is superficial. This is a different breed entirely. The artist who is committed to revolution must often run risks. His commitment may cost him sorely. The historical tide may submerge him utterly. The artist who adheres to "the court," however, runs no equal risks. He fears only the contempt of those in his own time better than he is, and the ill repute that posterity may mark out for his career. Does he even have moral scruples? The more astute among the revolutionary artists will mull over every last aspect of such issues as revolutionary terror. They will not abide it comfortably, but will suffer with each suffering inflicted. Such artists are introspective about their allegiances. Where they agree to restrictions of liberties, they will say to every listener that it is because conditions must be prepared that will permit the more complete democratic exercise of freedoms. The courtier artist lacks such reasonings; he does not reflect on means and ends. The means are what serve *his* ends most opportunely. He takes despotism in his stride and swallows sophistries with his daily tea. He seeks for the virtue in the "human face" of his despot.

And so closely is the court artist identified with the prevailing order that the political censorship never comes up as a problem for him. We don't care whether his complacency is genuine or feigned. It is functional. He feels no burden in living up to the expectations of the political power. And we may add that the role of the commercial artist is very like that of the artist as careerist. The commercial artist develops an apathy or a skepticism towards the political authority, and his sense of distance relieves him of a guilty conscience. Because there is nothing of social, philosophical, or ethical convictions in his work (whether or not his "real" attitude is shown), there is nothing that can call down a disapproving response from the powerful. Many authoritarian regimes open the doors to commercial production no matter how junky; it is a way to conceal the manacles placed on artistic integrity. "Liberalism" of this stripe pays off, too. However, the artists who live under this state of affairs and dissent against it may take their revenge. They may enter the commercial art field and use an Aesopian choice of words and images to sabotage the

socio-political oppression. The affronted censorship then grows hyper-cautious; it treats small scandals as major confrontations. This is what happened when the Tsarist regime started to tyrannize over the character of cabaret and variety shows, advertising placards, etc.

**II.** We have portrayed a spectrum with the truly revolutionary artist (however few there may be of these) at one end, and the sycophantic or the merely well-adjusted "court artist" at the other end. Yet there is another question that must be asked in this regard: shall we judge these artists' works as genuinely artistic? Or is there something about the absence of conflict with political authority in them that must be traced to a non-art status of the work? We shall have to be brief in our answer. In my view, no kind of content should be judged antithetical to the character of art. Content is not what gives art its specific properties. Rather that character is essentially provided by mastery and what generally is termed the formal structure. Both the revolutionist outlook and the cour-



*The Heart of the Matter*, by Bernard Apteckar. Courtesy: Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York.

their outlook are compatible with achievement of the basic artistic attributes. Those familiar with the history of art will surely agree.

Another distinction must be outlined, however, which has bearing on the uncertainty that underlies the above question. I mean to draw a difference between the craft, *métier*, of the artist and his *vocation*. Some of my readers may object. They may urge that the true artist wants only to perfect his craft, and that is his sole vocation. I will not deny this is often the case. Such artists may raise their art, their craft, to a virtuoso pitch—and even so, a depletion, a certain impoverishment, and perhaps a distortion of their original potential will result. If artist 'X' or 'Y' is a true virtuoso we can only admire and applaud that trait. However, to regard this trait as the single virtue of an artistic *oeuvre* would be deplorable. Isn't it true that we judge as rather decadent and perhaps second-rate those periods where the pure virtuoso is the most lauded artist and a finished and refined style the most praised? Well then, why? It is because the artist also has a vocation—and I concede the ambiguity of that term—to incorporate his craft with yet other aims. No doubt such purposes are inconsistent from individual to individual, from era to era. Yet we could say that two very significant goals continually recur. What are these aims, set by the artists themselves? One is the role of the innovator in art—the protean *bricoleur*, who seeks and discovers new techniques, forms, means of expression, and thereby also extends the possibilities of human experience. The other is that of a volunteer in the social conflicts—a combatant who seeks to bring the experience of living more into line with the humanistic ideals. The second is an extra-artistic aim; the first isn't. As between the revolutionist's attitude and the courtier's career as species of the vocation-options of the artist, most will agree that the former outlook advances the humanistic ideals on the whole, while the courtier neglects if he does not betray them. The reader will recall, I believe, that we see no complications or obstacles in respect to the standpoint of craft. Since artistic craftsmanship is available to all contents, the issue of *métier* or craft is neutral in relating politics and art.

The vocation question does bring up a ticklish relationship, however. It concerns

the peculiar role of the artist in connection with the peculiar role of the politician. Because there may often seem occasion for overlap or abrasion, leading to antagonism between the politician and artist, we shall want to explore this matter closely.

What about the "overlap" into a political role by the artist? We often hear it said that the latter may exercise rational discipline but his orientation is towards achieving intimacy with the domain of the irrational—that the creative process uses emotion, imagination and intuition as its materials. Very well. Yet doesn't the politician also orient himself to these resources of his role? He too draws advantage from irrationality. He must interact with subtle awareness with the psycho-social traits of those whose approval he requires. Intuition and imagination—aren't these qualities as important as practical reason in effective, successful political work? And don't grounds accordingly exist for an "overlap"? But another objection is heard. Many will agree that an artistic process and its product are characterized in terms of a formal structure and its given sensory elements of expression. Very well. However, this is but to point to a material-technical difference in the artist's particular vocational role. We could also remark that a number of politicians—Clemenceau, Palmerston, De Gaulle, Churchill, etc.—have been distinguished stylists and spellbinding speakers.

What remains to be said in this framework about the peculiarity, the differentness, of the artist's sense of humanist vocation? That the artist, rather like a child, finds it impossible to reconcile with some distasteful yet inescapable social realities, which the politician both understands and is able to cope with? That his special competence is partly oriented to an irreducible tension between nature and civilization? Let us try to make this proposition more precise. Are we to understand that the artist jealously guards his spontaneity against attrition? That he harbors and nourishes a naive and open responsiveness towards the reality both outside and within? Perhaps that touches it. If so, then let's agree we have come closer to some points of essential distinction between the artist and the politician.

Let us put the matter thus: The artist

settles himself into a situation in the world only with some apprehension and difficulty. His "naivete," his spontaneity, bars easy agreement with rules and dogmas. The artist's bent is not to go along with events just as they occur, but rather to assess the measure and the meaning of history—to take in the world with a comprehending look. But the politician has to concentrate on the particular point that affairs have reached. By patience, devoted effort and cunning, he edges events forward just a little. The politician will be ineffective if he is unable to adjust and compromise. The artist however feels misplaced in this setting, unable to create on the basis of its pragmatic wisdom—which he frequently views with scorn. For the politician the principle *quieta non movere* is usually something like a commandment. The artist (whether by instinct or aim) is inquiet and often disruptive. The two roles, then, are counterpoised but in a dialectical way. To the artist falls the long view and the deep sounding; it is a responsibility. To the politician falls the responsibility for grasping the events where they stand and as they can be grasped. To the artist, perhaps the future is most real. For the politician, the present. Each "lives time" but how differently! The politician resolutely studies and wrestles with the living moment so as to master it. The artist experiences the *durée* yet sets his eye not so much on the passing specificity as on the composition of the pulsing Heraclitean flux. The former has pragmatic purposes and he has to be obsessed over the workable means and the immediate consequences. The artist always takes a step outside the actuality and seldom cares much about the means/ends calculus. Artists look to the "city of the sun," the promise in life, and find the contemporary world an abrasive and difficult habitat. The politician likewise may possess a vision—perhaps the same vision, encouraged by the same political ideology as has directed the artist's thoughts. But at every moment the politician must be prepared to absent himself from his vision, as it were, and attend to the multifarious details of his work, its tactics and strategies.

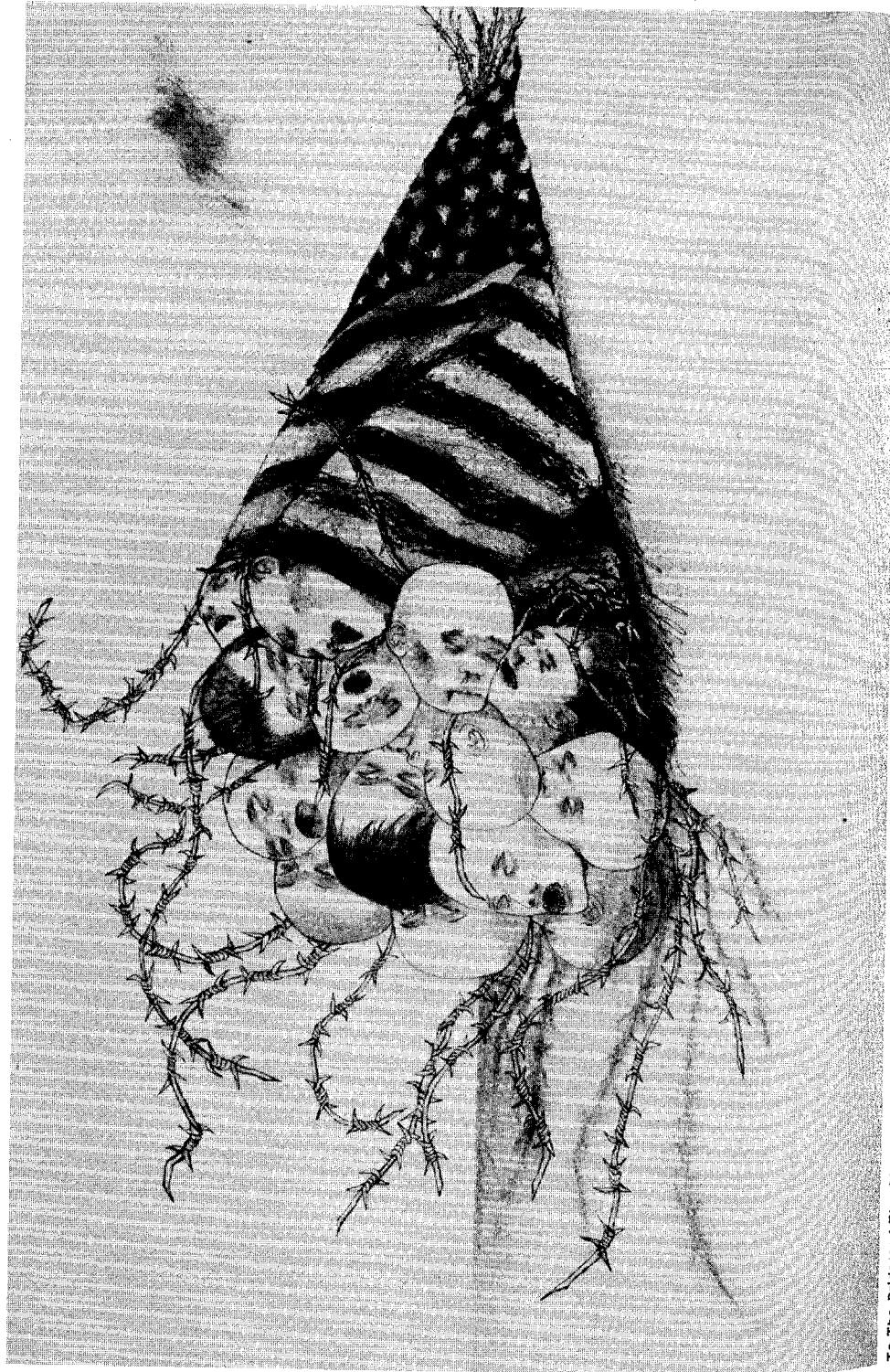
Thus, and paradoxically, of the two it appears that the artist is the more stubborn in holding to his ideology! He proves the more adherent to guidelines once adopted. The politician becomes upset if he fails to

achieve a grip on the tasks confronting him. The anxiety of the artist is different, it stems from his inherent incapacity to fit into the going social rules. Nor do the two mentalities view one another with the mutually-reinforcive dialectical relation in mind. Instead they hold distorted ideas, generally, of one another's role. To the "realistic" political mind the artist seems a utopian—a Don Quixote tilting at windmills. To the artist, the confident and tireless politician seems like a "crackpot realist," a myopic "specialist" who has a very superficial idea of the real world. While the truth is that they are oriented to—and in effect are responsible for—distinct but equally significant aspects of reality.

The politician would rather not encounter any intransigent personalities, any unwieldy alternative ideas of the world, or problems too difficult to dispel in the field of operations he commands. Where these crop up, the politician tends to think them unnecessary, extraneous. Perhaps persons not of sound mind have introduced these obdurate elements into the political field; in any case, they disrupt the route to fulfillment of the interests and objectives of the silent, happy and cooperative majority which the politician regards as confided to his charge. The artist, for his part, is most comfortable with all that is least reconcilable with the existing state of affairs. He seeks out what is awkward, brittle, "against the grain." He makes much of what seems largely neglected by those responsible for the present. His vision is nourished by what the politician finds unpalatable. He tends to want to identify those persons who walk away from what he's made his main concern. If there's a censor on watch, he'll be a little discreet. And another point of interest: the artist rather rarely indicts the social system as a whole. More often it is those who implement its power, whom he indicts by his art.

So the politician and the artist have divergent points of view, and different personality styles. They may well see and treat the same social fact in opposed ways. And when the quality of life in the society suffers a decline, these tendencies are accentuated. The artist seems to care little for the upbeat aspects and omens of improvement—although just such elements are a big part of the politician's case in





To The Pride and The Glory of The Free and The Brave, by Cliff Joseph, 1972. Courtesy of the artist.

proving the credibility of his policies.

Is the foregoing a schematized contrast of the two types? Yes. But not owing to a distortion; due rather to my selection. My "artist" is a distillation of the romantic and liberal-minded tendencies which run a gamut from the rather mild bohemian, to the poet maudit, the surrealist who posits an art which is savage and convulsive, and the determinedly "outsider" artist of today. The "politician" by contrast is a clever fellow in his line, but not a fire-brand; he is a competent professional and something short of a professional revolutionary. Well, does my selection make for a falsified portrait? I think not, and for three reasons. First, consider even the ancient period. Its artists may have believed in different aesthetic principles, but on the whole they likewise regarded the hierarchal orders of their day with skepticism, and they too tended to be nuisances to political tranquility. They dissented less blatantly; their orientation towards the future was muffled and took a different aspect than we are familiar with from the romantic artist. Second, what if we look around for the politicians in all history who have had the broadest outlook, the most progressive ideology. Isn't it a commonplace that the pressing, various, overwhelming demands on their attention and their aims have the result that they bracket their ideals and put them at one side while getting on with the job of creating expedient alliances and "fighting fire with fire," i.e., beating the foe with his own methods? To struggle for power in the state is immensely demanding of pragmatic solutions; to then consolidate that power, even more so. Administration of goods, services and persons must be organized, and to this end one needs a *modus vivendi* with numerous interest and pressure groups; but the active artist, whether he is romantic or classical in attitude, can have little patience with the fulfillment of these essential tasks. Third, and finally, my reader will have noticed how closely my models of the artist and the politician do resemble their real counterparts of today. In the past century the tendency towards bureaucracy, homogeneity, anonymity in social relations has increased. In response there has been an augmenting of anxiety and barely contained frustration, which the artists often articulate. An intransigence, a

developing of a counter-culture particularly among the young today, is in one sense the broadening of those attitudes long prevalent among artists. And what is it this counter-culture protests and rejects, if not this expediency and conformity which long have been justified in the name of technology and progress, and long have spread such disastrous "side" effects?

The "side" effect in question is more than a little the one to which the artist is attuned. This has much to do with what we described as the artist's sense of his vocation. The humanistic aims in whose cause the artist enlists are shared by many intellectuals, and thus some vocational partnerships are forged. Properly the common concern should create active alliances or at least dialogue with the practical politicians, too, and with administrators responsible for pragmatic solutions. Their discussions should be based on equality and mutual respect. We have sought to understand the two dialectically-connected points of view, to see what motivates both the artist and the political administrator.

Does this allow us then to consider the censor in a certain positive light? Is there a basis for accommodation with him? No!

But why not?

We have so far concluded: a) The artist and the politician generally correspond to divergent roles in society; b) The roles have become most exaggeratedly different in recent decades; c) The divergent vocations usually have a basis in different natural dispositions of personality: restless, rebellious persons seem at home with the arts, and the Sancho Panzas are readily accommodated in politics. The basic role-conflict assures that the censor will be kept busy if his function is legitimized by a government in our era, will have trouble with the artists, from its point of view. Yet the functionaries who administrate and decide policy should (optimally) bear in mind that the "trouble" they're getting is not the result of some natural perversity of the artist. The latter wasn't born with a nettle in his hand. His vocation—at the risk of over-stressing the point, let's say it again—has its basis in the processes of a developing society. *We can only explain adequately the problems the*

artist makes, if we comprehend the underdevelopment, the immaturity, of society and of politics.

For is the artist truly a scandal and a menace to his fellows? Rather, the conditions he inhabits make his rebellion plausible. No; the artwork does not threaten society. Instead "the world is out of joint" and the creative and critical mind registers the fact. What is art's most vehement, bitter, demagogic appeal for deeds of destruction, as compared to the everyday brutality and violence, the hypocrisy and injustice of social life? To be succinct: There is nothing in the social role performed by the artist to justify the imposition of political censorship.

Given our conclusions to this point, the office of the censor would be recommended if it could be proven that the arts may corrupt and distort the public's values and knowledge so as to undermine a society. This, however, is a fantasy that never is enacted in reality. The most extreme instances of creative expression fall short of this effect. Consider an example—anti-war propaganda, carried out by artists in a

time of imperialist war preparation. The broad public already has its mind made up, we may assume, and it stands with its government "right or wrong." In this case, the artists may be attacked for "defeatism" but can we seriously believe their efforts will be effective in blocking the war effort? And where the foundations of a society are well chosen, where reason is on the side of a nation (or its ruling or prevailing sector), then what could be feared from art, that could justify a censorship? Of course, the opposite point should be made: the less well-founded a government is, the more irrational and hypocritical and out of control, and the more it lies to its people, the more it will find a censor "justified."

We may fairly conclude that where the vocations of the artist and the politician seem to collide, a heavy responsibility rests on the politician—the powers he wields need no description—to reach some kind of accommodation, not with a censorship, but with the artists. Given sufficient planning and discussion, a dialogue can be created. Not a tame one—but communication, which will minimize misunderstandings if not tension. The more the politician proves cau-

tious, tolerant and perceptive in dialogue, the more he will find the belligerency goes out of the artist's definition of his vocation. In turn the politician's pursuit of practical results should actually grow more effective, and more comprehensive.

In contrast, if authoritarian tendencies of administration are given their head, the conflict of vocations will be sharpened. The administrators of society will seize upon this predictable outcome, to "prove" to the public that the artists are privileged troublemakers and deserve all the humiliation that can be heaped on them. Made tormented and isolated by the widely-publicized charges of decadence, madness, foolishness, arrogance, etc., the artist may reply by articulating his vocational sense in a wobbling cry of righteous rage. He may also raise his arm against those who have raised theirs against him. The tyranny will probably be confirmed in its severity by either response. They are frightened even of calmly-told truths. They are foundering in the sea of propaganda which the artists denounce. They now praise the censorship as vindicated by the hatred of its particular foes. They redouble the censorship and laud it. The censorship is the fiery sword of the People. Or of God. Of course, the artist may also appear very contentious under more democratic conditions. There may seem little value in communicating with him. Under stern controls, he'll just shut up. So it appears. A "court" of deferential sycophants can be had by the show of sweet carrots and strong sticks. To these add some "professionals," detached artist-observers of the scene, who will write nothing to give offense. Yet that is not the whole result, as the censorship learns. A double reality starts to emerge in the realm: the official totalitarian reality, and the reality of experience. Censorship fosters the idea of an idyllic resolution of conflicts between artists and the patron-functionaries. Tyranny shapes in general the traits of the interplay between official and lived reality, and the difficulties which ensue from this discrepancy must be faced in turn by the governing power.

\* \* \*

I have touched on a number of points: the political content of art, the situation of art

under political control, the conflict of social roles as between the artist and politician. These points were only tentatively stated, and certainly they do not exhaust even the basic aspects of the problem. I have chiefly tried to focus on the interdependence of political and artistic freedom. My conclusions have already been stated. Let me add here that in my judgment, the socialist system will, on the one hand, bring forth out of fifty years of painful experience in the communist governed countries the full possibility for a withering away of all censorship (the political censorship, too) and on the other the conditions conducive to a role for the artist as an acknowledged, effective dialogue-partner in some kind of touch with the executive political body of society. The process of achieving this relationship must still take time—for fundamental changes in cultural policy can only follow after socio-political developments and changes. A fascist regime, an authoritarian system, cannot simply decide to agree to artistic liberty. Rather, Plato's solutions are applied: Those who think "differently" may be done away with (the extreme is the Nazi solution of extermination) or they may be controlled by censorship. There is surely also the exceptional "Hyde Park" solution available to the state: a policy of allowing the artist to say what he will, and perhaps then engaging him in debate, with the citizenry to draw its own conclusions. At least until the present this plan has also had its deficiencies, in as much as it projects only a *formal*, bourgeois-democratic liberty. The context of this policy has been capitalism, which imposes, as Lenin suggested in 1905, its own demands and requirements, in short a kind of disguised censorship. In addition to that, the basic notion of the policy in its purest form requires questioning. An artist is allowed to speak and write without hindrance: yet his effective outreach is virtually nil. The real viability inherent in the "Hyde Park" policy would be brought out, if this formal freedom of bourgeois democracy were combined with the stature and attention which is accorded the artist or scholar in the communist-governed countries. I do not refer to a purely mechanical mixture of the best cultural patterns now characterizing the socialist and capitalist states. Rather, in the new genuine socialist conditions the artists and intellectuals who had been heard



*Triangle*, from *Silencio*, *Silencio* suite, by Juan Genovés, 19¾ x 26", etching, 1970. Courtesy: Marlborough Gallery, New York.

out, and who perhaps would have provoked intensive public stock-taking and discussion, would achieve an integrally substantial impact on the *via activa* of the entire society. Censorship would have no reason to occur. Before a situation like this can come into being, however, the structure of society must necessarily undergo a profound democratizing surgery. The development towards a libertarian socialism seems to be irreversible. Yet its achievement is not reducible to a timetable. And any predictions about its development must be left—if indeed, they should be made—to experts in sociology and political science, who moreover will want to take into account the conditions of particular countries.

And until the achievement of this fully embodied democratization? In the meanwhile perhaps the single most valuable motto to encourage would be *non nocere*. Inflict the least possible harm. But of course advice of this stripe is innocuous, trite and of no earthly use: the thought is platitudinous, the possibilities of harm are nearly unlimited. Every dictator can make statements embodying this kind of principled relativism and then swear he solemnly serves the motto in his own best way. So, we shall not invoke any "good advice in bad times." It's superfluous. Realistically considered, no one can expect even the most coherent arguments to alter the cultural policy of rulers whose thought tends in a diametrically opposed way. But the social practice may lead the rulers towards a gradual tempering of censorship. In the end, the nationally-generated, progressive "cunning of history" can alone unburden the arts of their political yoke. We will only after see an end to the ahistorical posing of the dilemma, which talks of art's "boundless freedom" but also of artistic "liberty forever in chains." Such ideas, like the predicament they attempt to embrace, will slowly be dissolved like the set smile on the face of the cat in *Alice in Wonderland*.

\*The editors offer the following liberal translation of the Tacitus quotation: Uniquely felicitous are those times when one may experience what one chooses and speak what one thinks.

In concluding his article attacking the latest instructions to the Prussian censor, Karl Marx cited Tacitus: *Rara temporum felicitas ubi quae velis sentire et quae sentias dicere licet*.<sup>\*</sup> Yet he was convinced a happy time would come when this joy would be ordinary. The future depended on socio-economic practice and the character of political administration, primarily. But this view should not be taken as negating the influence in society of self-awareness: the role of the articulated consciousness. Consciousness may be decisive for the achievement of social practice. It may determine whether the politicians' directives are carried out simply in a technically specified way, or if on the contrary a populace demands moral accountability of its politicians, and exerts its judgment over at least the long range choices of policy. Where this latter does not occur, it is fair to say that a modern course of development must go astray.

Another quote from Marx, this time from "Debating the Freedom of the Press," may be useful.

*If any form of liberty is destroyed, the whole foundation of liberty is in jeopardy and freedom will then exist only as its own shadow. For it is merely accidental in which domain the slavery will entirely govern. Slavery here becomes the rule and freedom only an exception, an outcome of an attitude both arbitrary and casual.*

Nothing need be added to Marx's own words. Let them strike with dismay those communists, who, more catholic than the pope, broaden and extend the political censorship over the arts into a sacred covenant. And, too, let these words arouse all of the fighters for civil rights and artistic liberty who are active in countries where fascism is dominant or on the threshold, whether in Greece or the Iberian peninsula, in the Americas or in Asia, encouraging them to a decisive victory. □

## Politics and Art: A Case of Cultural Confusion

Barry Schwartz

Mr. Schwartz is an author, poet, lecturer on Humanism and Culture, and Director of the Cultural Alternatives Network.

During the late sixties and early seventies, the artist, long considered a Prince Charming, got turned into a frog, and threatened to croak. Not only did some artists choose for social art, the anathema of formalist aesthetics, not only did others insist on creating conceptual art, which doesn't serve as saleable decor for homes and offices, but many, many artists organized to an unprecedented degree and hordes of them descended into the bowels of previously complacent institutions, where they engaged in protest and general mayhem.

The artists' protest was motivated by a potpourri of issues and causes. As citizens, artists joined with their contemporaries across the country to proclaim abhorrence of the war in Vietnam, outrage at the killing of students, indignation at racism and sexism in the arts, and frustration at the encroaching inhumanity of the times.

As artists they were specifically victimized by what they protested in general. A labor force of incalculable vitality and talent, they were unhappy with the conventional arrangement of poverty as compensation for freedom. These creative doers wanted also to be creative livers; a goal which requires adequate housing, reasonable financial security, and a fair cut of the large pie of art investment and art business. So they argued and demonstrated for reform, in the cultural institutions, the government agencies, and the commercial enterprises responsible for turning their creations into marketable commodities. Their cause was

just, their means outrageous, and their politics, confused. In short, they behaved in ways that conform to society's image of the artist.

Their goals, their demands, their insistence on change were not realized. Instead, they drew attention to the arts and created a new plaything for the media which provided the rationale for what has now become known as arts administration. Yet, they cared, and it is to their credit that those artists involved in art protest are, to date, the only organized group acting in behalf of the soul of the art world.

Typically, while the artists remonstrated about the crimes of society, the cultural institutions were distracted by more temporal concerns, specifically money. Against the background of artist protest, museums and other cultural institutions were expanding and going broke. While their brochures and grant applications clamored about the powers of the arts to enrich the lives of those directly exposed to them, the museum directors, boards of trustees and cultural brokers were deeply preoccupied with balance sheets.

In 1968 the American Association of Museums coughed up the Belmont Report which, though unrelated to the racetrack, did suggest that administering cultural institutions was like running horses. There would be winners and losers. The private patron was no longer the life support of cultural programming. With a rising economy, the Report argued, the stakes of culture would have to be paid by somebody else, if the institutions were to survive.

As is the cultural norm, by the time the