


EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

ART, SCIENCE AND GLOBALIZATION

In the Fall of 1962, this (then) nineteen-year-old editor was a transfer student at Ruskin College, Oxford. Ruskin (then and now) is a two-year institution attached to Oxford University, sponsored by the British Trades Union Congress.¹ On one occasion during that semester, Ruskin hosted another college in Oxfordshire in two friendly tournaments: a football (soccer) match, and a debate. The debaters were to propose and reject, respectively, the proposition: “This House holds that humanity owes more to the arts than to the sciences.” I was asked to propose the motion for Ruskin, and in a mood of collegiality I agreed to do this, although, as a more mature student colleague told me, “this is the sort of thing the bourgeoisie debate among themselves; you shouldn’t have any part of it.” I had already agreed to debate, and did my best, although the vote of the house went against me (largely, I was told, because Ruskin had won the football match earlier in the day and a debate outcome favorable to the other college was therefore “in the cards”).

Now, almost half a century later, I find myself thinking about the relation between science and art — although assuredly not about which contributes “more” to humanity! Can artistic approaches “tell” us things about reality that science cannot reveal, at least by itself? Any attempt to *define* the distinction between art and science, or between artistic and scientific approaches to a given object, seems to partake of the scientific side of the divide and therefore to be unfair to art, but consider for a moment a simple conception of the distinction that I draw from the cultural anthropologist Leslie White: science is about abstraction and generalization, while art is about concretization and particularization. (Leave aside the political-economy

1 I am writing in Athens, Greece, in my office at the D.Phil. Program in Economics of the University of Athens, in the shadow of the Acropolis, which is visible from my window. This doctoral program is funded and sponsored by the General Confederation of Hellenic Workers. It is not accidental or insignificant that trade unions have been central to my higher educational experiences, on both sides of the teaching divide and across many decades.

concept of “real abstraction” for the moment.) If we follow this idea a bit, we arrive at a remarkable idea:

Hegel, in tracing the process of coming to know the object, offered, famously, what has become known as the dialectic of cognition. The pre-given object, in its sensuous and disorderly perceived state, is negated in the first moment of this dialectic through a process of distillation or abstraction to reveal its essence. This is the paradoxical, even ironic, *loss* of information necessary to reveal the inner reality of the object. In the second moment of this process, the essence is used to re-order or *reconstruct* the concrete object: return, in an “outward” direction, to the original object, but now with its specificity ordered and situated within a wider reality. This second negation completes what might be called the *scientific dialectic*. Crucially, the reality of the object is constituted both by its essence and by the forms of appearance of that essence, as reconstructed into a rich totality. “Essentialism” is the loss of that unity of essence with appearance and conflation of essence with the object itself.

Now, however, we can perceive an entirely different dimension. The original pre-given object was concrete, from the standpoint of the dialectic heretofore described, but presumably not *absolutely* concrete! Suppose we start with that object, but instead of abstracting/concentrating/distilling, we go more deeply into the fissures and textures and contingent possibilities inhering in the object, by an opposite process that might be called *infusion*. We reach for the highest degree of differentiation, looking for hidden meanings, layerings, potential signifiers, emotional resonances, sensuous possibilities, to reach — in this first moment of the *artistic dialectic* — a rich *contra*-essence that, like the abstract essence of the scientific dialectic, is also invisibly present in the “naive” object. The second moment of the artistic dialectic, then, will be a return to the *reconstructed abstract* of the original object, but now with a sense of beauty, wonder, awe, outrage, connection, achieved through our journey from the posited object to its concrete *contra-essence* and then back “inward” to a reconstructed sense of a more richly determined reality.

Could it be that classical Hegelian epistemology had hold of one pole of this combined *scientific–artistic dialectic*, but had failed to explore the other? If so, this might clarify some aspects of the relation between art and science, and their mutually supporting roles. Art, then, is not simply about enjoyment or pleasure, even higher pleasure, and this may be the final answer to “art for art’s sake”: art captures the “feeling tones” that aid in the “suspension of doubt” that is in turn necessary for science to progress. (Recall how scientists and mathematicians speak of the *beauty* or *elegance* of a concept or theorem.) It can also help reveal false abstractions, and so may play a vital role at moments of paradigm shift. It looks for the “play” in the interstices

between spaces created by scientific categories, and in this way keeps *dialectical sensibility* in the picture. It provides the necessary detachment that can only come from senses of humor, irony, emotional involvement — and, yes, outrage.

Which brings us to the multifaceted contemporary process of globalization, and a striking recent example of artistic coming-to-terms with that process.

In 2007 the Greek artist Danae Stratou presented her installation entitled “CUT-7 Dividing Lines.” She traveled to seven places around the world where fences and walls (real and metaphorical) create and sustain divisions among the people on whom they are imposed. (The seven sites are identified and described below.) She traveled for about 60,000 kilometers; took some 15,000 photographs; and eventually chose 14 of these, arranged in seven pairs (one for each site). Each pair constitutes an opposition, a unity, a tension, and in the installation (which has been exhibited internationally before settling down at the Emfietzoglou Collection in Athens) each photo is printed on a large transparent perspex and displayed opposite its counterpart, creating a diaphanous visual corridor that the viewer walks through, experiencing the horror of the division, but also the aspiration to heal, to “let the mind’s eye fill in the chasm.” In Stratou’s own words:

Seven open wounds. Seven lines on the planet where political, economic, nationalist or religious tension has long ago shaped impenetrable divisions. Some constitute natural landmarks that humans have appropriated as dividers; others are utterly artificial. A few coincide with ill-defined state borders, usually ceasefire lines. All of them are founded on unresolved issues and relentless claims. They procure fluidity, uncertainty, death. Around them, however, the desire abounds for a normal life.²

Here is a quick tour of the locations. (These are paraphrases from the documentation that accompanies the exhibit.)

The Green Line, Nicosia, Cyprus. Here is the barbed wire barrier dividing Greek and Turkish Cypriots. One photo shows a UN watchtower, houses in the occupied part of Nicosia, soldiers, sentry points, “no entry” warnings. The other, two Turkish Cypriot children playing football in the shadow of the barrier, the “Green Line,” the strain for normality within a dividing nightmare that has been in existence since 1974.

North/South Mitrovica, Kosovo(a). One shot from the northern bank of the Ibar river, another from the southern bank. The river divides Mitrovica,

2 In this case it is trite in the extreme to say that a picture is worth a thousand words. The installation is available for viewing, among many other projects, at www.danaestratou.com.

the last Kosovar city with a significant Serbian population. The north bank is their final stronghold in the Albanian-dominated province. There is a footbridge, unguarded, the last link between the two sides.

The Badme Minefields, dividing Ethiopia and Eritrea. A UN mine-clearing truck patrols the killing fields around Badme, where tens of thousands of soldiers, both Eritrean and Ethiopian, died in 1999. “Eritrea,” of course, was a creation of Italian colonialism in the Horn of Africa. The UN “resolved” the dispute by drawing an arbitrary dividing line, cutting through the local community that long pre-dated the 20th-century political entities.

Belfast, Northern Ireland. Photos of Loyalist and Nationalist murals, Shankill Road and Falls Road, respectively. The “Peace Walls,” cutting through rows of terrace houses and their backyards, grow in tandem with the peace process between Protestants and Catholics, and new sections are continuously added, often by popular demand, reflecting the profound ambivalence in the relations among wall-divided existence, the past experience of bloodshed, and social consciousness.

The West Bank, Palestine. Photos: on one side, the Israeli Army, the weapons and vehicles and structures enforcing the occupation. On the other, the Wall as a colossal prison fence. Various spray-painted messages on the Wall help ameliorate its menacing presence. The Wall meanders through the countryside, revealing a plan to control, to appropriate, and, ultimately, to divide.

The Line of Control, Kashmir. The LOC forms along a mountain ridge and a river, natural barriers turned into human ones. There are military convoys, checkpoints, sentries, lines, fences, dividing long-existing communities, victims of the dispute that emerged from the British-engineered division of one country into India and Pakistan.

Pacific Ocean Border Fence, U. S.–Mexico border. Rails from railroad lines have been (mis)-appropriated, used as vertical poles jutting out of the sand on the beach, dividing two communities of beach-goers. This “fence” is strikingly symbolic: easy to walk through, it is still surrounded by patrol jeeps, helicopters, electronic surveillance devices. On the southern side, Tijuana folks simply enjoying the beach. Further inland, the U. S. National Guard continues to upgrade the fence dividing Mexico from the United States, with Israeli wall-builders contributing their expertise.

The various walls, fences, no-man’s lands, and barbed-wire barriers have complex and varied histories, and the motivations behind their construction undoubtedly differ. Barriers have been erected to forestall invasion, to forestall cultural, economic or political penetration, to contain ethnic divisions, to inflame ethnic divisions, to regulate the flow of labor. Ostensibly varied as the motivating conflicts may be — often stemming from religious, ethnic, and linguistic divisions that have deep roots in past history — the

barriers have become part of the landscape of capitalist globalization, and derive their present functionality from that context. Their spread rivals the worldwide surge of markets, commercialization and finance; indeed, it is part of that surge. The intensely contradictory unity of barrier dissolution and barrier erection is one of those moments which art and political economy (science) can only work together to grasp.

Herein lies the importance of Danae Stratou's CUT-7 Dividing Lines. Danae's husband, Yanis Varoufakis (also, hardly coincidentally, a long-time *Science & Society* contributor and Contributing Editor), in a statement accompanying the project exhibit, sums up his view of the wider significance of CUT as follows:

Not too long ago, globalization was being heralded as the process to dismantle all borders. It has not. Instead, as trade and capital are liberated from border controls, the fences and dividing lines that separate people keep getting less porous, taller, more intimidating. Allah and God are often blamed, but, in truth, they are just scapegoats for purely secular forces that would never even allow the competing gods the impossible task of drawing "just" borders between their people. Therein lies the Great Paradox: the more we develop reasons to, and means for, dismantling the dividing lines the less powerful the forces who are working for their dismantling. Deep divisions, patrolled by merciless guards, seem to be the homage that our enterprise culture pays to misanthropy.

Two great lessons are emerging. First, *globalization is, inescapably, capitalist globalization*. Just as Marx, 150 years ago, pointed to the glaring contradiction of capital, seeking its own fulfillment, calling into existence the proletariat, the agent of its own ultimate destruction; so today capitalist globalization calls into existence — however slowly, and painfully, and partially — a worldwide working class with universal consciousness, capacities, and aspirations. This system can and must globalize capital, but it cannot globalize labor, without seriously compromising its own capacity for self-reproduction. And so, the Paradox: markets, and walls.

Second, the artist's view of this monumental contradiction is not just a supplement; it is not merely icing on the political economist's cake. It represents the second half of the complete dialectic of cognition: we grasp reality, and acquire the capacity to change reality, *not only* by following the classical Hegelian path to the abstract essence and then back to the reconstructed concrete, *but also* by reaching for all of the sensual and contingent determinations in the contra-essential ultimate concrete, subsequently returning to the reconstructed abstract, armed with a full sense of the power and beauty and latent possibility that is part of the reality itself. We can then grasp the universality of the human experience, which gives us the moral and political weapons to tear down the walls; the rich uniqueness of each

human life; and the awe-inspiring endless beauty of each moment of life's experience — and that of course is what makes the struggle worthwhile.



IN THIS ISSUE

At a time when globalization and interest in a (perhaps) newly forming *transnational* capitalist process are forcing a turn away from Lenin and the Leninist tradition, the emergence of a new interest in that tradition is to be welcomed; this refers especially to the appearance of Lars Lih's *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? in Context*. The question, however, is: *which* context? August H. Nimtz, in "A Return to Lenin — But Without Marx and Engels?", argues that Lih's linking of Lenin with the European Social Democratic politics of Kautsky has the effect of effacing the differences between the mainstream of Social Democracy at the end of the 19th century and the fully loaded political legacy of Marx and Engels. Of course Lenin's purpose was to apply (what had come to be called) the Marxist program to the specific conditions of Russia, and to the rest of the Tsarist Empire. But that context, Nimtz argues, was itself contradictory and multiple, and the line from Kautsky to Lenin should not be used to obscure the even more vital link to Marx. Put another way: the Bolshevik position was indeed in part a product of Russian realities, but it was also the embodiment of a necessary revolutionary critique of the ideology of the mainstream of Western European working-class political movements at the turn of the 20th century. Readers may want to look at the special issue of *Science & Society* on Lenin (59:3, Fall 1995), for additional context relevant to this debate.

Alex Saxton returns to the theme of religion (see his "Marxism, Labor, and the Failed Critique of Religion," *S&S*, 70:3, July 2006) in his new paper, "The God Debates and the Materialist Interpretation of History." Like Nimtz' study, Saxton's takes off from recent publications, the works of certain atheist writers on religion that have reached the best-seller list. He concludes that Fundamentalist power has actually peaked in the United States; that the political right will be seeking alliances with ecumenical religious leaders, as well as trying to rebuild their relations with the scientific community; and that elitism is a danger on both sides of the religious divide. By rejecting elitist and arrogant approaches toward religion, the left can take advantage of the present opportunity to reach across the divide and develop common perspectives and programs.

Unusually, among materials in preparation for this issue, two book reviews — one by Helena Sheehan on Saxton's recent book, *Religion and the Human Prospect*, the other by Alan Shandro on Lih's *Lenin Rediscovered* (the object of August Nimtz' study) — are directly related to the articles by Nimtz and Saxton, and offer additional insights into their respective topics. While we do not normally cover book reviews in "In This Issue," the unexpected synergy between two articles and the two lead reviews could not pass without comment.

Brian Lloyd's detailed study of John Dewey, William James and the origins of pragmatism ("Liberty Philosophy: Nationalism and the Making of American Pragmatism") traces a fascinating intersection between the development of intellectual traditions, on the one hand; and the exigencies of ideology, in this case nationalism in the context of World War I, on the other. American pragmatism is often portrayed as a unitary philosophy with Dewey and James as harmonious co-founders, and as a direct descendant of British empiricism drawing upon the unique U. S. historical and cultural experience. Lloyd shows, to the contrary, that the Hegelian tradition played an important role in the development of Dewey's thought, although anti-German sentiment in the war years caused Dewey to distance himself from his own intellectual roots. Moreover, the relation between Dewey and James is much more complex and conflictual than is usually assumed. The ideological character of a "non-ideological" doctrine is clearly established in this story, which also traces the effects of standard interpretations on recent developments in social theory.

Two review articles round out the issue. William K. Tabb's "Three Ways to Understand the Current Crisis" provides both valuable summary and trenchant critique, of recent works by Charles R. Morris, Martin Wolf and George Soros, each of whom offers useful analysis of the present "great recession" and its sources; none of whom, in Tabb's view, gets finally to the heart of the matter. This discussion, of course, will continue in our pages, leading up to the forthcoming special issue on "The Current Crisis" (see the Call for Papers in our last issue, July 2009). Finally, David Laibman ("The Western Left, the Soviet Union, and Marxism") reviews the recent work by Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union*, and asks whether it is finally time for the "Western" (*i.e.*, programmatically anti-Soviet) left to confront the nature and roots of its own core, and largely un-examined, assumptions. Now *that's* an invitation to a lively discussion, if ever there was one!

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