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# Culture and State: Creative Autonomy, Political Struggle and Instrumentalisation

*Joaquim Rius-Ulldemolins*
UNIVERSITAT DE VALÈNCIA / INSTITUCIÓ ALFONS EL MAGNÀNIM

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between State and culture has been a tricky one since the mid-19th Century. Vicent Dubois in his book (Dubois, 1999) reminds us that the origins of cultural policy lay in attempts to clip the State's wings and stop it instrumentalising culture for its own purposes. Indeed, it would not be until the mid-20th Century when the relationship between culture and State would again be presented as an alliance (which we have traditionally termed 'cultural policies'). Philip Urfalino, in his book on the genesis of French political culture (often taken as the birth of this kind of policy action in the mid-20th Century) characterises the new cultural policy as a utopian, reformist project in the social and political spheres (Urfalino, 1996).

The cultural policy drawn up by André Malraux aimed to stem America's then incipient dominance of the cultural industry. US cultural influence was seen as la machine à rêves — a kind of juggernaut that brought out the worst in the masses, letting their brutish instincts run riot. Cultural policy was seen as a way of unifying national society through 'High Culture' and was based on the idea that mere contact with it would enlighten citizens and help pioneering creators in their quest for aesthetic innovation — something that was often poorly understood at the time. Such cultural policy aims were clearly over-ambitious. The first sociological analyses by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel (2003) revealed that the great cultural

institutions catered to a relatively narrow audience. Cultural policy might raise the profile of new creators and boost middle-class interest but it encountered structural hurdles to fostering cultural participation among the working classes and the young. Furthermore, these grand aims were never matched by the funding and public initiatives needed to achieve them. This created one of the most long-lasting features of cultural policy: the contradiction between grand ritualised discourses and half-hearted practical implementation that involved a fair amount of back-scratching among the elites but did little for the masses.

## CULTURE AND THE POLITICAL SPHERE: THE POLITICISATION OF CULTURE

The modern conception of Art began to take shape at the beginning of the 19th century. It was one in which Art was seen as a civilising influence and the artist as a hero who could create something from nothing and subvert the dehumanising machinations of Capitalism (Chiapello, 1998; Moulin, 1992). This process has been considered as artistic criticism of Capitalism — an argument made by César Graña (1964) — was to foster commitment among intellectuals to causes that criticise the system. In supporting these causes, intellectuals use specific accumulated capital (symbolic, cultural capital) to intervene in the political arena (Bourdieu, 2001, 2002). While there have been episodes during the 20th Century of "an aesthetic treatment of politics" — denounced by Walter Benjamin (1983) as a way of instrumentalising the arts to manipulate the masses. Later reaction by cultural sectors to such issues and the cultural policy rolled out after The Second World War prevented such political instrumentalisation by States (Urfalino, 1989, 1996). Yet one could also make the contrary argument by saying that there was undoubtedly political instrumentalisation of the Arts and culture by the cultural services of the Capitalist powers in their propaganda war with the Soviet bloc. Here, 'Western' countries presented their Arts and culture as examples of the social welfare and individual freedom achieved through the Capitalist system. However, this political use of Art sprang from a pre-existing pioneering movement (such as Abstract Neo-Expressionism) and cannot be considered as merely a product of this cultural policy. Rather, it should also be seen as part of the process of aesthetic renovation and the symbolic struggle among groups in the artistic field whose outcome was Modern Art (Bourdieu, 2002). In the 21st Century, the relationship between politics and Art has already shifted, with economic and policy instrumentalisation by development agencies and the financial elites. There is also a different interaction between artists and social movements. It is not so much that social entities use artists to boost the impact of their message on the masses as part of a new aesthetic — something that was the case in the First and Second Pioneering Movements and in May 68 (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002; Chiapello, 1998). Rather, it is that there is now a re-orientation of part of this Bohemian segment and a

confluence of its aims with new social movements springing from the anti-globalisation struggle in the 1990s and mass protests.

## POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY AND THE INSTRUMENTALISATION OF CULTURE

Contemporary sociologists broadly agree that the 1970s marked the beginning of a new period, which has been dubbed 'Post-Modernism', characterised by the waning importance of industry and manufacturing and the waxing importance of knowledge and consumption (Bell, 1991; Featherstone, 1991; Lash, 1994). The key role now played by consumption is paralleled by the expansion of the cultural sphere in society and the economy. Some authors have termed this 'Cognitive Capitalism' (Scott, 2007). In the process, culture's autonomy as a social sphere separate from politics and religion has been eroded and de-activated some of culture's self-referential dynamics (Bourdieu, 1977). In the Golden Age of Artistic Modernity, running from the end of the 19th Century to the mid-20th Century, the artistic sphere greatly influenced the political and economic spheres, as Daniel Bell (2007) notes. Since the advent of today's Post-Fordian society and its post-Modernist dynamics (Bell 1976, Jameson 1986), the artistic sphere has gradually fallen under the influence — if not the thrall — of other spheres such as economics and technology (Morozov, 2013). This last aspect has gained importance to the point where various authors have raised the spectre that a new digital culture will replace all cultural means of production, dissemination and consumption (Lessig, 2005) and that this will lead to deep changes in social and economic organisation (Kelly, 1998).

In any case, one can say that we are witnessing a growing political and economic instrumentalisation of culture (Gray, 2007). In the context of this transformation, the development of a 'creative city' has become one of the political priorities to attract investors and highly-educated, skilled professionals — the so-called 'creative class' (Florida, 2002). This yearning to foster a 'creative city' implies public policies aimed at crafting settings for 'the creative class' and the exhibition of 'creative images' leading to elitist, gentrifying policies (Peck, 2005). A strategy that forms part of the so-called 'entrepreneurial turn' in local policies (Harvey, 1989), stresses urban renewal based on big architectural projects, cultural institutions (Bianchini, 1993), glitzy events (García¬, 2004a), and the creation of cultural industry clusters (Scott, 2000, 2010). In redefining the aims of cultural policy, the agents of economic and tourism development now carry more clout than those nominally in charge of cultural policies. The former have instrumentalised culture in ways that takes precedence over aims such as social integration or promoting intrinsic cultural values (García, 2004b). In this context, the appearance and promotion of new neo-Bohemian districts can be interpreted as changing the functions of central urban areas to meet

the symbolic manifestation of creative industries and by so doing, configure cities as a leisure and consumption space for the new middle classes (Lloyd, 2010; Zukin, 1995).

## THE AESTHETICISATION OF POLITICS

In our view, a subject that has received less attention is the metamorphosis of social movements in what is termed 'the aestheticisation of politics'. The term was originally used to denounce the manipulation of the masses by totalitarian States and was coined by Walter Benjamin (1983)[1]. Other authors have used a similar concept, the 'artification' [*artistización*] of politics, to denounce the way cultural legitimisation is used to push bad urban renewal policies (Delgado, 2008) or to banalise political activism (Delgado, 2013). However, we shall use the concept of 'artification' in a similar way to that in Heinich and Shapiro (2012), is describe the expansion in production and consumption patterns in Art and other spheres, and the emergence of new policies and kinds of creativity in new urban social movements. These movements forge a new relationship between culture and technology in ways that reflect the patterns found in ICT [Information and Communication Technologies] and cultural consumption (Ariño Villarroya, 2009). Likewise, culture and technology are seen as a chance to forge new social relationships and free creativity — something that has been termed a 'Cyber-Utopia' (Morozov, 2012, 2013) and as we shall see, defines the political attitude of the urban neo-Bohemians. Cyber-Utopianism idealises the capabilities of cybernetics and thus, by extension, ICT in helping to build an ideal society (Ouellet, 2009).

This neo-Bohemianism thus plays the key role in the convergence between creativity and political activism — a convergence that some have dubbed *Artivism* (Felshin, 1996). So, unlike the Bohemianism of the 19th and 20th centuries, today's creators not only create an alternative urban sub-culture (Fischer, 1995) but also offer hope and projects of a common or a collaborative nature by social groups opposing neo-Liberal urban re-zoning and the advance of 'Cognitive Capitalism' (Novy and Colomb, 2013). Nevertheless, one should note the limits of this *artivism*, which faces difficulties in consolidating projects that go beyond the local sphere, in creating stable organisation and in linking up to other kinds of social movements (Funke and Wolfson, 2014). Yet we should recall that much political thinking is based on the idea of free culture (Lessig, 2005) and the Cyber-Utopianism that legitimises it (Morozov, 2012, 2013). The roots of these ideas may be found in 'Californian ideology', which we can characterise as a combination of Bohemian attitudes, technological

1 **Translator's Note:** The concept can be traced back to Walter's paper *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* in 1936.

utopianism and neo-Liberalism (Barbrook 1996). Such an attitude combines lifestyle and the political views of a Bohemian Middle-Class generation (Brooks 2001) or of workers in creative industries (Lloyd 2010), whose anti-institutional, creative, flexible ethos is consistent with the needs of Post-Fordian Capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002).

## POLITICS, CULTURE AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Cultural debates have become less and less the preserve of an enlightened minority or a 'closed shop' for specialists in which intellectuals act as spokesmen. Now we find ourselves at the centre of a social and political debate (albeit one that is often distorted) on so-called 'culture wars'. It is noteworthy that the terms 'cultural politics' and 'culture war' are now used by the traditional media in general and the new digital media in particular. This reveals the extent to which such topics have become a matter of heated public debate. In addition, others — sympathising with protest movements demanding a new kind of politics — have called for the re-politicisation of culture (Barbieri, 2012) and for turning culture into a tool for fashioning hegemony for the New Left (Barcelona en Comú, 2015). The Spanish State is assailed by a crisis of political and cultural legitimacy, in what has been termed 'The Culture of the Transition'[2] (Martínez, 2012).

Nevertheless, the debate on political commitment either largely ignores or downplays the importance of the divide between the political Right and Left and the limits to public initiative in the cultural field. These structural limits reveal that the cultural field has long been a battleground for feuding elites. To this one should add that cultural sectors (especially cultural industries and cultural tourism) are favoured by those in government, which sees them as creating wealth, jobs and thus for fostering economic development and social consensus (Rius-Ulldemolins and Sánchez, 2015). One could oppose this perspective with a moralising vision of cultural autonomy or argue the need for alternatives to a world that is ever more business-oriented and run by the elites. Yet this would not help in quickly finding other ways of meeting the challenges of development in the context of a Post-Fordian, globalised economy. Furthermore, calls to turn cultural policy into a weapon in the battle against hegemonic forces are unrealistic. The barriers to such a change are prosaic but formidable: the inertia of cultural policy; the limitations placed by Administrative Law; the sheer cost of institutions fostering artistic excellence; lack of manpower and other resources in public administrations strapped for funds and weighed down by red tape (Rubio Arostegui *et al.*, 2014; Rubio and Rius-Ulldemolins, 2015). There are many criticisms one can make of the Social-Democratic vision of culture, for example its inefficiency and incrementalist

2 **Translator's Note:** 'Transition' has a special meaning in Spain, often being used to refer to the end of the country's shift from Fascist dictatorship under General Franco to democracy in the mid to late 1970s.

tendency (Rubio and Rius-Ulldemolins, 2015). Yet despite its shortcomings, it sets objectives (the redistribution of cultural goods) and mobilises the resources needed to achieve them (public cultural services throughout the country and minimum public rights to culture) (Martinez and Rius, 2010). Even so, calling for a pro-commons culture may go no further than fine words unless a link is forged between the two elements that overcomes the elitism of Neo-Bohemian and Cyber-utopian practices (Rius-Ulldemolins, 2015).

## CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEBATE

Despite this growing centralisation in cultural policy, the debate in *País Valencià* [The Valencian Country, an autonomous region of Spain] and in the Spanish State is generally very limited and based on rudimentary considerations. In these respects, it lags far behind the debates in leading countries such as France or The United Kingdom. In Spain, the debates still focus on the valid but rather outdated choice between democratising culture (dissemination of 'High Culture') and cultural democracy (recognition of cultural diversity and daily creativity). It is thus far-removed from the new trends, 'agentisation' of cultural policy, the limits of public-sector action and criticism of its inertia, *de facto* elitism and role in legitimising speculation, gentrification and the politicisation of culture and its potential and scope for transforming society.

That is why this collection of papers — *Quadern de Debats. Revista de cultura, poder y sociedad* [Debating Papers. Journal of Culture, Power and Society] makes a notable contribution in getting to grips with the relationship between culture and the State. The paper by Clive Gray (professor at Warwick University, UK) reveals the difficulty of analysing cultural policy, given that there are various theoretical and methodological perspectives. Some of these approaches are oriented towards an institutional study rooted in Political Science. Others take a more critical, analytical approach to the ideological domination exercised by the hegemonic classes (from a Neo-Gramscian perspective) or by those in power (taking a more Foucoultian perspective). Both approaches are developed by Cultural Studies. That said, it is worth relating the institutionalist and critical perspectives, as does Vincent Dubois, a sociologist and politologist at *Université de Strasbourg*. From a perspective that combines sociological and political tools, Dubois makes a critique of the French system, which he argues is a model in crisis. This crisis is revealed in the model's limits, inertia and ambiguities. The French State's ambition, to paraphrase Crozier (1992), "is over-blown". France's cultural policy has serious social limitations and fails to 'democratise culture'. A combination of growing 'economisation', globalisation (with greater control by American media and multinationals) and the loss of the artistic autonomy won with the advent of modernity has rendered the French model less relevant.

Mangset at Telemark University College [*Høgskolen i Telemark* (HiT)] (Norway) considers another cultural policy model involving Arts Councils operating on an 'arm's length' basis (that is to say, with separation between politics and management). The model comes from the English-speaking world and aims to ensure autonomy in the cultural sector and avoid the self-interested bias and patronage that stem from over-dependence on the State. The 'English' model was adopted in Scandinavia and by countries in the former Soviet bloc at the end of the 20th Century. Such Arts Councils enshrine the principle of artistic autonomy and management based on independent boards of trustees and public competitions. The model has been interpreted and implemented in different ways, depending on the history and the balance between elites in each country. Such adaptation reveals that this model also suffers from dysfunctions and ambiguities. These are problems also found in the relationship between State and culture — issues that cannot be resolved merely through organisational formulas or 'best practices' as if they were some universal 'cure all'.

Pierre-Michel Menger and Gisèle Sapiro's articles take a longer-term view. In the first place, Menger, a Sociologist at the prestigious *Collège de France* lucidly analyses the links between culture, political commitment and the State in the Modern Age. He highlights the syllogism that equates the *avant-garde* with the struggle against bourgeois conformism and cultural conservatism. Here, he points out that while the elites have always been the most ardent fans of artistic innovation, a cultural policy that supports innovation for its own sake is a dead end and only leads to policies with no rhyme or reason. Gisèle Sapiro conducts an erudite, penetrating analysis of the origins of the Right-Left split in the literary field. This study (which ranges from the 19th to the mid-20th centuries) sheds light on the various kinds of political commitment shown by writers during this period. She shows that the division arose along with the expansion and organisation of the artistic field, which gave rise to its political labelling and rifts. As a result, a chasm opened up between the Left's 'committed' Art and the commercial, conservative Art favoured by the Right. Yet this political commitment cannot be understood without grasping the nature of the Art field, which is a relatively self-contained one that is reserved for battles between the elites.

Last but not least, Juan Arturo Rubio-Arostegui, Juan Pecourt and Joaquim Rius-Ulldemolins show that the notion of creativity has changed the notion of doctrine or vogue, which has been liberally used and abused. Specifically, the authors focus on two cases. The first concerns the (excessively) high regard in which creativity in and the transition to the digital field are held. The frequently ignored downside is that digitalisation weakens the focus and interaction needed for artistic creation. The second is that 'creativity' is trotted out by politicians as a pretext for big town-planning schemes/property speculation. Such schemes spawn 'White Elephants' that make a big media splash but cripple public finances and the scope for future cultural initiatives (Rius-Ulldemolins *et al.*, 2016).

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