

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONCEPT 'ART' AND ITS INSTITUTIONALISATION
DURING THE PERIOD 1850-1871 IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Introduction

This research evolved as part of a personal struggle to understand my role as 'art'¹ student. As such the essay is concerned with both the theory and practice of 'art', and the relationship between the two. It is, however, my experience of the lack of an analysis of the concept 'art' as a social and historical phenomenon, and the suppression of the politics of culture² in most fine art courses,³ that has led me to concentrate on theoretical and political issues, rather than the formal aspects of painting. This essay is therefore not concerned with individual 'works of art', but with the general category 'art' as an organisational form. Despite its limitations, the essay goes beyond the personal by exploring some of the social, political, economic and cultural processes that form the broader social context in which the examination of 'art' should take place.

Within this framework, I shall concentrate on some of the processes involved in the institutionalising of 'art', in relation to particular power structures. This is crucial because it is necessary to understand that the processes whereby 'art' has been institutionalised have been dominated by the ruling classes. Therefore, the vexed question of the meaning of the concept 'art', which this essay will attempt to examine, will be approached through a wider analysis of hegemony. That is, the way in which social groups and classes attempt to impose particular ideologies or cultural perceptions on other groups and classes. Like Wolff I am assuming

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1. I have placed concepts such as 'art' in single quotation marks to indicate that I find them problematic. This applies to all further uses of single quotation marks.
 2. This is in itself political.
 3. Both at secondary and tertiary levels of education.

the concept hegemony "facilitates an analysis of the way in which political, cultural and other ideas are related to other social factors in a structured, though complex manner".¹

The processes whereby certain ideas, beliefs, values and attitudes of the ruling classes become dominant are extremely complex. So too are the processes by which people organise around and by means of (or in opposition to), such ideas, beliefs, etc. It is not within the scope of this essay to give an in-depth account of these processes, and therefore my argument will at times be rather schematic. Given these limitations, the main contention of the essay is that 'art', its practice and organisation - its role in society - is socially and historically specific.

Having briefly indicated what the emphasis of this essay will be on, I shall outline its structure, which I have divided into three chapters.

In the first chapter, I set out the methodological framework in which I view the concept 'art'. Using this framework I then try and give a broad view of the concept 'art' as a social and historical phenomenon. I look at the relationship between culture and class, and the social and historical processes involved in developing the concept 'art' around the seventeenth century, as part of the emerging 'modern system of the arts'.² I then go on to look at the 'modern concept art' which became established in the nineteenth century.

1. Wolff, J. *The Social Production of Art*, p. 80.

2. I have taken this phrase from Kristeller, P.O., *The Modern System of the Arts*, in Taylor, R., *Art an Enemy of the People*, p. 39.

The second chapter deals with the changes to the ideas about 'art', the 'artist' and their role in society during the nineteenth century in England. I begin by outlining some aspects of British society during this period, which brought about, or contributed to the changing (or entrenching) of the ideas about 'art'. I pay particular attention to the mid-Victorian period in this chapter. In the light of this I then look at parts of the work of Ruskin as an example of the ideas, assumptions, values etc. which arise from the new developments to 'art' and society as a whole. Finally, I look briefly at the nature of State involvement in the 'visual arts' in England during this period; i.e. the institutions and organisations (the material and ideological processes) in and through which certain ideas about 'art' became dominant.

The third chapter, in the light of the previous two chapters, looks specifically at the first 'formal' organisation of 'art' in the British Cape Colony during the period 1850-1871; i.e. during the period of the South African Fine Art Society (SAFAS). I begin the chapter by outlining some of the relationships and forces brought into play in the colonial social formation. In relation to this, I then go on to examine the structure and social function of the SAFAS and its relation to the Colonial State. In doing this I adduce some of the literature ('art' criticism and documents) produced during this period.

In the light of the above chapters I shall make some tentative concluding remarks. I shall, however, relate the above work more specifically, although briefly, to the contemporary South African situation. I shall address my conclusion to students and those engaged in counter-hegemonic struggles concerned with 'art' and culture.

CHAPTER I

In this chapter I shall attempt to give a broad view of the concept 'art'¹ as a social and historical phenomenon. I shall do this by giving an account, admittedly schematic, of the emergence, transformation and development of the concept 'art', as part of the 'modern system of the arts', from the seventeenth century up until the middle/late nineteenth century. In doing this I hope to achieve the following:

Firstly, to present the methodological framework within which I shall view the concept 'art', and the processes involved in establishing it throughout this period.

Secondly, I shall try, using the above framework, to uncover the social and historical processes underlying, and giving rise to, the emergence of the 'modern system of the arts' around the seventeenth century. In doing this I hope to explain, in part at least, the origins of the high-culture notion of 'art' and its 'artists' as was established during the period of industrial capitalism. I shall elaborate on this point in the next chapter where I shall focus on the period of industrial capitalism (beginning around the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century) up until the 1870's in England.

Thirdly, I hope to show that the traditional high-culture beliefs that 'art' is somehow a 'superior'² activity, and that the 'artist' is a 'free',

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1. In this essay the term 'art' will be used to refer to the bourgeois concept (this concept's antecedent being the aristocratic notion of 'art'), as it was established as part of the 'modern system of the arts' during the period dating from approximately the seventeenth century up until the present. However, the term the 'modern concept art', will refer specifically to the period of industrial capitalism.
 2. Superior in the sense that it is seen to be "somehow 'above history' and social divisions and prejudices" (Wolff, op. cit. p. 28). See also Taylor, op. cit. p. 35-7.

'individual'/'creator', are not universal perennial features of human reality. By looking at the word 'art', I shall draw attention to the fact that its meaning within the 'medieval system of the arts' differs from its meaning in the 'modern system of the arts'. Furthermore, the role of what we today call the 'artist', can also be shown to differ within the two conceptual systems.

I shall now attempt to identify the main assumptions that inform the methodological framework within which I shall be working.

In this essay I shall put forward the idea that: "the extensions to the art tradition are the outcome of a certain class situation in society Within contemporary society (for example) the sustaining of the art tradition and growth within it, stem from social processes within upper-middle class or bourgeois society."¹ I would now like to elaborate on three aspects of this view, viz. "class", "society" and "extensions to the art tradition".

The period that I am dealing with in this essay coincides roughly with that of the "'capitalist era'".² A fundamental characteristic of capitalist societies is that they are class societies. This view holds that societies in this period are constituted by conflicting interest groups, one being the owners of the means of production, the other "owning nothing and having no

1. Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 32.

2. Raymond Williams defines capitalism as "a particular form of centralized ownership of the means of production, carrying with it the system of wage labour. Capitalism in this sense is a product of a developing bourgeois society; there are early kinds of capitalist production but capitalism as a system - what Marx calls 'the capitalist era' - dates only from C16 and did not reach the stage of industrial capitalism until 1C18 and eC19." Williams, R., Keywords, p. 43.

access to means of production".¹ The struggle between these two conflicting groups is known as the class struggle. But capitalist societies are not the only class societies, and therefore the class struggles of the past are not confined to the period of capitalism. In fact, as Marx and Engels have pointed out by way of concrete historical analyses: "'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.'"² What makes capitalist society different from others however, is the "system of wage labour". The two major classes in capitalist society being capital and labour.

I have found Belinda Bozzoli's Gramscian definition of class as the most useful because it seems to suggest that the economic and cultural life of a class are inextricably linked, so that we can talk of the struggle between classes as having an economic and a cultural dimension; we can talk about class culture and cultural struggle.³ In Bozzoli's words, class "refers not only to the relationship of particular groups of people to the means and the process of economic production under capitalism, but also to their relationships in a range of economic and non-economic spheres, to other classes and to the state. Classes cannot be defined, indeed do not exist, independently of the struggle between classes which are a constant feature of capitalist society. Their economic, political, ideological and cultural characteristics are all thus historically located."⁴

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1. Dobb, M. Capitalism Yesterday and Today, p. 7.
 2. Hadjinicolaou, N. Art History and Class Struggle, p. 7.
 3. Culture is one of those concepts that are extremely difficult to define. In what follows I hope to clarify my use of the term.
 4. Bozzoli, B. The political nature of a ruling class, p. 6.

Her definition further suggests that she sees society as a unified structure of relations. In other words, within this conceptual framework, society is not divided into four separate spheres of activity: the economic, the legal, the political and the cultural. Culture is therefore not seen to be "an independent, autonomous realm of human activity ... explicable in terms of its own norms and concepts."¹ Instead, I shall assume that "culture does not exist apart from its specific determinations in a social formation; culture develops in and through the many levels, or structures of a society (economic, political, educational etc.,) which form the totality of social relations and practices."²

This is important because, by seeing society in this way, it becomes difficult to see culture as something 'neutral'. Swingewood makes it clear that "Culture is not a neutral concept; it is historical, specific and ideological."³ Therefore, if culture is "the culture of a group or class",⁴ then, "just as groups and classes are unequally ranked in relation to one another, in terms of the productive relations, wealth and power, so *cultures* are differently ranked, and stand in opposition to one another, in relations of domination and subordination, along the scale of 'cultural power'.⁵

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1. Swingewood, A. The myth of mass culture, p. 25.
 2. Swingewood, op. cit., p. 26. The term 'social formation' within this conceptual framework "refers to the complex structure of relations between the economic, political and ideological levels of human activity and to the relationships of effectivity which these levels have in relation to one another, thus embodying a conceptual framework within which their reciprocal interaction can be understood." (Bennett, T. Formalism and Marxism, p. 58.)
 3. Ibid.
 4. Clarke, J. et al in Hall, S. et al, Resistance through Rituals, p. 10. They say earlier that "We understand the word 'culture' to refer to that level at which social groups develop distinct patterns of life, and give *expressive form* to their social and material life-experience. Furthermore this distinctive "'way of life'" of the group or class, refers to "the meanings, values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of beliefs, in mores and customs, in the uses of objects and material life." Ibid.
 5. Ibid. p. 11.

From this point of view the dominant culture is seen as an instrument of the class rule and oppression. In this essay I shall view the high-culture notion of 'art' and 'artist' as being part of the dominant culture, i.e. bourgeois culture, as it emerged in the seventeenth century and was transformed and developed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The point is that the dominant culture is the culture of the dominant class, and it is this class's idea of 'art' that will be the dominant one. For, as Marx argues: "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control, at the same time, over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it Insofar as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch ... they do this in its whole range, hence, among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch."¹ However, the processes by which the revolutionary class (the bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century) struggles to become the ruling class is extremely complex as it takes place within the context of already "existing cultural patterns (which) form a sort of historical reservoir - a pre-constituted 'field of possibles' - which groups take up, transform, develop."² In the seventeenth century (but also before and after this period) the struggle for cultural power was between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, this taking place within the context of other groups and classes involved in the class struggles of the period. Similarly, the complex process of 'making' the bourgeois concept 'art' (as part of the struggle for cultural power) takes

1. Clarke, *op. cit.* p. 11-12.

2. Ibid. (My brackets)

place within the given social and historical conditions, viz. that of the ailing aristocracy. For, as Marx put it: "Men (sic) make their own history (of 'art'), but they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."¹

This process, the "extension to the art tradition" is extremely complex; "the relationship between culture and class (being) dialectical, uneven and contradictory".²

These "extensions" taking place around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and their subsequent developments, need to be explained in relation to the rise of the bourgeoisie and its struggle for hegemony.

In the words of Rachel Sharp "Hegemony refers to a set of assumptions, theories, practical activities, a world view through which the ruling class exerts its dominance. Its function is to reproduce on the ideological plane the conditions for class rule and the continuation of the social relations of production".³ But hegemony must not be seen as ever being 'complete'; it "is not universal and 'given' to the continuing rule of a particular class. It has to be *won*, worked for, reproduced, sustained Its character and content can only be established by looking at concrete situations, at concrete historical moments".⁴ It is on just such a "moment" that I shall now focus my attention, viz. the seventeenth century which marks the transition from the 'medieval system of the arts' to the 'modern system of the arts'.

1. Clarke, *op. cit.* (My brackets)

2. Swingewood, *op. cit.* p. 4. (My brackets)

3. Sharp, R. *Knowledge, Ideology and the Politics of Schooling*, p. 102.

4. Clarke et al, *op. cit.* p. 40-41.

Within the context of the framework I have outlined above, I shall try to explain the historic division between the conceptual systems of the Middle Ages and the modern period, and what social and historical factors were involved in 'making' the bourgeois concept 'art'.

The overriding conclusion that Roger Taylor¹ comes to in his book is that: "From the seventeenth century onwards European society increasingly classifies under the heading 'art' the activities which our own society would recognise as falling under that heading. Before this time the system of classification was clearly different". The rise of this new conceptual framework is, according to Taylor, the result of the "growing dominance of the bourgeoisie over against the landed aristocracy and court circles, the emergence of science and also, importantly, the link between the two."²

Now as I have already mentioned, the relationship between culture and class is not simply one of 'reflection'. Culture, although it is bound up with the mode of production, its division of labour and technology, is never a simple 'reflection' of these material forces; the relationship is dialectical, uneven and contradictory.³ For example, Swingewood makes the point that bourgeois culture has a longer history than the capitalist social formation, being nurtured in pre-capitalist, feudal societies,⁴ it matured over many centuries.⁵ Certainly changes that we would identify as part of the 'shaping' of the 'modern system of the arts' were already taking place before the seventeenth century. Janet Wolff points out that "the artistic labour process

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1. Taylor, op. cit. p. 42.
 2. Ibid., p. 42-3.
 3. Swingewood, op. cit., p. 44.
 4. Ibid., p. 44.
 5. Ibid.

up to that end of the fifteenth century still took place entirely in collective forms. From that date, the artistic profession began to differentiate itself from craftsmanship, and artists began to become emancipated from the guilds."¹ She goes on to ascribe the "conception of the artist as a unique and gifted individual"² to the rise of the merchant classes in Italy and France, and of humanist ideas in philosophy and religion.³ Hauser elaborates on this change which took place within the Renaissance period and which is still central to the concept 'art' today. He says: "The fundamentally new element in the Renaissance conception of art is the discovery of the concept of genius, and the idea that the work of art is the creation of an autocratic personality, that this personality transcends tradition, theory and rules, even the work itself, is richer and deeper than the work and impossible to express adequately within any objective form.... The idea of genius as a gift of God, as an inborn and uniquely individual creative force, the doctrine of the personal and exceptional law which the genius is not only permitted to but must follow, the justification of the individuality and wilfulness of the artist of genius - this whole trend of thought first arises in Renaissance society, which, owing to its dynamic nature and permeation with the idea of competition, offers the individual better opportunities than the authoritarian culture of the Middle Ages."⁴ Taylor makes the point that although people like Leonardo put forward something approaching the 'modern system of the arts' in the period of the Renaissance, there are important reservations which have to do with the system of classification. For example Leonardo does not classify architecture

1. Wolff, op. cit. p. 26-7.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Hauser, A. The Social History of Art, Vol.2, p. 61.

as an 'art', whilst he treats painting and mathematics as similar activities.¹ Taylor maintains that the 'modern system of the arts' was precipitated by the emancipation of the natural sciences. His argument is based on the work of Kristeller who says that: "the ground is prepared for the first time for a clear distinction between the arts and the sciences, a distinction absent from ancient, medieval or Renaissance discussions of the subjects even though the same words were used."² The general point that Taylor makes then is that there is an historical divide between the conceptual systems around the seventeenth century.³

As I have pointed out the explanation for this historical division "resides in those factors which give rise to the modern period",⁴ viz. the class struggle in which the bourgeoisie increasingly becomes the dominant class "over against the landed aristocracy and court circles" who are struggling to maintain the last vestiges of their power. Closely linked with, and playing an important part within this class struggle, is the emergence of science. It is this complex of social and historical processes which undermines and erodes the older conceptual habits and begins to give rise to the new and distinct forms of life. Certainly in England there is no sign of a "smooth progression" from the one to the other, nor is the modern period devoid of aspects belonging to the older period. In fact, depending on the specific social and historical conditions, class alliances etc., cultural forms dating from an earlier period play a determining role in 'shaping' new and distinct cultural forms. To what extent is this true for the concept of 'art' within the developing 'modern system of the arts'?

1. Taylor, op. cit. p. 41

2. Ibid. p. 42.

3. That is between the modern conceptual system (as it concerns 'art') which from this period "onwards is of a piece, but is decreasingly locatable the further back we go from the seventeenth century", and the older conceptual system. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

During the seventeenth century, the older social order, responding to the challenge of the new scientific and economic systems, adapts itself to this new situation. The battered ruling class (the aristocracy), whose ways of life, based on the older social order, are being transformed by these new systems which are very much part of the life of the bourgeoisie, struggles for cultural power by transforming those parts of its life which had been least affected and setting them in opposition to the distinct life style of the bourgeoisie. 'Art', as an exclusive concept of value, that is "the beliefs posit(ing) the objective superiority of those things singled out as art and, thereby, the superiority of the form of life which celebrates them, and the social group which is implicated",¹ was just such a part of life elevated by the aristocracy. Taylor says further on that "it is out of this sort of logical mystification that the category of art emerged in the first place, that is, as an attempt on the part of the older order in society to make out its life was somehow committed to a superior form of knowledge."² In other words the concept 'art' as it first appears ("a whole vocabulary to talk about something called 'art'")³ in the modern period, did so as part of the aristocracy's struggle for cultural power. It sought to grant 'artistic life' the status of knowledge, a development which took place in the face of emerging scientific knowledge. In this way, the aristocracy, who are associated with the 'artistic life' (that is, "superior activity"), attempt to counter the bourgeois scientific and economic trends which threatened, and would soon overthrow the old social order. The established ideology that the besieged older order presents to society (including the revolutionary class: the bourgeoisie) during this period

1. Taylor, op. cit. p. 48. (My brackets)

2. Ibid. p. 48.

3. Ibid. p. 44.

(the late seventeenth century) is that "artistic activity (is) of the highest, most absolute form of social and individual aspiration".¹ With regard to 'art', these are the cultural patterns directly encountered by the revolutionary class, and out of which, through the "social processes of differentiation, exclusion, incorporation and rule",² the bourgeois concept 'art' would develop.

The process (or processes) whereby the aristocratic concept 'art' was transformed and developed into the bourgeois concept 'art' is a complex one that evolved as part of the class struggles during and after the seventeenth century. Taylor gives a broad outline of the relationship between the 'making' of the bourgeois concept 'art' and the changing class relations at the time (i.e. seventeenth and eighteenth centuries). He says: "The revolutionary class, through whose activity came about the normalization of bourgeois social relations (e.g. wage labour, the labour market, the ownership of the means of production) and which contains persons having status on the basis of the older feudal set up, in its aspirations to be the ruling class has the aspiration to take over the life of the ruling class. However the life of the ruling class was lived in opposition to the life of a growing, dominant bourgeoisie, so the life of the ruling class could not be assimilated in its particularity by the ascendant class. Therefore, the general desire by the revolutionary class for art becomes the concrete project of elevating certain bourgeois practices to the status of art, and transforming (if only by means of theoretical activity - altering the theories about the nature of art) aristocratic instances of art into manageable, bourgeois

1. Taylor, *op. cit.* (My brackets)

2. Owens, C. 'Representation, Appropriation and Power' in Art in America, May 1982, p. 10.

proportions".¹ An example of this tendency (that is the production of theories which "accommodate the art concept to the general mental set of the bourgeoisie")² is the theorizing of beauty³ in relation to 'art', as being a matter of 'taste'. Beauty therefore no longer refers to truth (for example 'art's' ability to reflect the truth about the established social structure as ordained by the church). Beauty as a matter of 'taste', becomes "a matter of how human beings happen to be constituted".⁴ The outcome of the view that 'art' is, in the final analysis, a matter of 'taste', (i.e. it is no longer seen as an accurate representation of a certain social order) is that it allows "into the category of art, the degree of flexibility whereby the bourgeoisie, as the ruling class, can assimilate it".⁵ 'Art' becomes an abstract category in need of definition, and these definitions are going to be regarded as either 'good' or 'bad' depending on whose needs they meet, and this brings us back to the question of hegemony and power: "The definitions of the world (e.g. 'art'), the 'maps of meaning' which express the life situation of those groups which hold the monopoly of power in society, command the greatest weight and influence, secrete the greatest legitimacy."⁶

It seems therefore that the concept 'art' has had different meanings, and taken on different forms in history. This will be elaborated on shortly when I look at certain linguistic developments in the uses of the words 'art'

1. Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 44-5.

2. *Ibid.* p. 45.

3. Beauty as a concept is of course particularly relevant to 'art', at least during this period.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. Clarke et al, *op. cit.* p. 11 (My brackets)

and 'artist'. The dominant culture, although never homogeneous, will promote those definitions of 'art' which seem to best serve their interests. This leads Taylor, talking of the period seventeenth century onwards, to say that: "From this point onwards the development of art is tied up with the development of the bourgeoisie. This latter development is not a smooth progression, but, in itself, encompasses many revolutionary changes connected with technological revolutions and the way they are experienced socially; this complex movement is deeply embedded in the unfolding of the category art."¹

Taylor goes on to mention, as did Hauser, that the most consistent feature of the new concept 'art' (a feature has been shown to have originated in the Renaissance) is the "insistence on individualism".² I shall look at the ideology of individualism and its relation to the notion of genius in the next chapter. I would now, however, like to look at the linguistic usage of the words 'art' and 'artist', how they are inserted in new systems of classification entailing a new separation of 'arts', 'crafts' and 'sciences'.

The word 'art' in the Middle Ages is associated with activities that would not be included by the modern meaning of the word. Kristeller's article makes it clear that the concept 'art' as it developed as part of the 'modern system of the arts' was absent throughout the Middle Ages. He says: "The very concept 'art' retained the same comprehensive meaning it had possessed in antiquity, and the same connotation that it was teachable. And the term *artista* coined in the Middle Ages indicated either the craftsman or the

1. Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 45-6.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

student of the liberal arts. Neither for Dante nor for Aquinas has the term Art the meaning we associate with it, and it has been emphasised or admitted that for Aquinas shoe-making and cooking, juggling, grammar and arithmetic are no less and in no other sense *artes* than painting and sculpture, poetry and music, which latter are never grouped together, not even as imitative arts."¹ The word 'art', which comes from the Latin *artem* meaning skill, "was widely applied, without predominant specialization, until 1C17, in matters as various as mathematics, medicine and angling."² Pearson makes the point that "in the Middle Ages a broad general distinction was drawn between that of the world occasioned by human skill or agency (i.e., that which is 'artificial')³ and that occurring without human skill or agency (i.e., that which is 'natural')."⁴ The tendency, however, from the later Renaissance period is towards specialization of manual skills, on the one hand, and intellectual versatility on the other, a development tied up with the growing dominance of the humanistic conception of culture and its idea of universalism. Hauser argues that: "The versatility of talent, and especially the union of art and science in one person, has been felt to be particularly characteristic of the Renaissance. But the fact that artists were masters of several different techniques, ... is more connected with the craft-like character of the visual arts⁵ than with the Renaissance ideal of versatility In the later Renaissance we more and more seldom meet artists practising different kinds of art at the same time. But with the

1. Kristeller, in Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 40.

2. Williams, *op. cit.* p. 33.

3. 'Artificial' meaning "made by art; not natural". (The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1964).

4. Pearson, N.M., The State and the Visual Arts, p.4.

5. According to Osborne, in the Middle Ages painting "belonged to the 'sordid arts' and their practitioners were classed among the manual workers or artisans ...". Quoted in *Ibid.* The tendency, especially towards the end of the Renaissance is for practical education to be superseded by intellectual and academic education.

victory of the humanistic conception of culture, the idea of the *uomo universale*, an intellectual tendency opposed to specialization, comes to the fore again and leads to the cult of a type of versatility which is more akin to the dilettante than the craftsman. At the end of the Quattrocento both tendencies vie with each other. On the one side, the universalism of the humanistic ideal, suited to meet the requirements of the upper classes, reigns supreme. Under its influence the artist tries to supplement his manual skill with knowledge of an intellectual and cultural kind. On the other side, the principle of the division of labour and specialization is triumphant and gradually attains supreme power even in the field of art."¹

Williams, writing more specifically about the late seventeenth century, says that from this period "there was an increasingly common specialized application to a group of skills not hitherto formally represented:

painting, drawing, engraving and sculpture. The now dominant use of *art* and *artist* to refer to these skills was not fully established until 1619, but it was within this grouping that in 1618, and with special reference to the exclusion of engravers from the new Royal Academy, a now general distinction between *artist* and *artisan* - the latter being specialized to 'skilled manual worker' without 'intellectual' or 'imaginative' or 'creative' purposes - was strengthened and popularized."²

In other words, the movement seems to have been from a relatively non-specialised use of the word 'art' to an increasingly specialised use, for example, the 'fine arts' today. This takes place together with an increasingly clear cut division between

'artist', identified more and more with intellectual activity and 'creativity',³

1. Hauser, *op. cit.* p. 70. (My emphasis)

2. Williams, *op. cit.* p. 33.

3. "'There are two creators,' wrote Torquato Tasso (1544-95), 'God and the poet.' This sense of human creation, specifically in works of the imagination, is the decisive source of the modern meaning." (Ibid., p. 72). I shall deal more closely with the concept of 'creativity' in the next chapter.

and 'artisan', involving manual activity. From the middle of the nineteenth century there is a further division between 'artist' and 'scientist'.¹

It must be remembered however, that much of the information I have used above to describe how previous societies classify and organise their world, is based on theoretical sources (for example, the writings of Leonardo, Dante or Aquinas) which are as likely to be misinterpretations of the activities of their societies, as the theoretical writings about ours. Taylor is aware of this however, and backs up his assertions with archaeological information. He says, for example, that in the societies I have been dealing with so far "we would find no buildings fulfilling identical functions to the contemporary art gallery² ... we would not find in these societies, departments of governments devoted to the promotion of the arts."³

Having outlined the way in which the words 'art' and 'artist' developed as part of the 'modern system of the arts', I shall now briefly look at how they were used during the period of industrial capitalism, and what social and historical processes gave rise to their further development during this period.

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1. I refer here to the division between the 'subjective' nature of 'artistic activity', as being made distinct from the so-called 'objective' nature of 'scientific activity'.
 2. As Wolff (*op. cit.* p. 44) points out: "From about the mid-eighteenth century, however, both painters and writers faced a new situation, ... the patrons of art, as well as the central role of the Academy, were displaced by the dealer-critic system in painting." Carol Duncan writes: "Around the middle of the nineteenth century a second front began opening up, the infant gallery system ... The decisive moment was the Impressionist boycott of the official Salon in the 1870's and the coincidental rise of Duran-Ruel and the other important dealers. From then on, the dominant social relations of art production would be organised around a free, competitive market system." Socialist Review, no. 70 (vo. 13, no. 4) July-Aug. 1983.
 3. Taylor, *op. cit.* p. 41.

The increasingly specialized division of labour accelerated and became more rigid during the period of industrial capitalism. It was during this period that the concept 'art' as it had developed as part of the 'modern system of the arts' became firmly established, (what I shall call the 'modern concept art').

The 'modern concept art' is related to the "emergence of an abstract, capitalized Art, with its own internal principles,"¹ a development which is difficult to localise, but whose origins I have argued are to be found in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This concept however, only became general in the nineteenth century. A feature of this concept is the "association (of 'art') with *creative* and *imaginative*, as a matter of classification ... The significant adjective artistic dates effectively from mC19."²

Hauser has clearly indicated that the roots of what would become the modern role of the 'artist', can be traced back to the Renaissance (Italy) during the period of the break up of the medieval guild system, and the arguments made for the intellectual status of the painter. Pearson however makes the point that "it was only during and as part of the industrial revolution that a more elevated and specialized role for the painter and sculptor *as artist* became firmly established."³ He goes on to say that "these developments were both a part of the increased division of labour (artist being distinguished from scientist, artisan, skilled worker, etc.) and the reaction against the process of industrialization, the spread of utilitarianism and

1. Williams, *op. cit.* p. 33.
 2. *Ibid.* (My brackets)
 3. Pearson, *op. cit.* p. 5.

the growth of commercialism."¹ What these developments meant was that the words 'art' and 'artist' came to acquire "ever more general (and more vague) associations, offering to express a general *human* (i.e. non-utilitarian) interest."² Pearson supports this view of Williams. He argues that prior to the eighteenth century, understanding paintings bore no necessary relationship to understanding the painter. However, as the painter becomes 'artist' "the qualities ascribed to 'art' (creative, imaginative, special, and expressive of *human* as opposed to utilitarian values) were increasingly also ascribed to the artist. The specialness of the work became in part a function of the specialness of the person."³ Although there are historical antecedents, painting increasingly becomes defined in terms of the 'artist' and reaches its logical conclusion in this century: "'art' is something created by 'artists'."⁴

I shall attempt to show in the next chapter, how this is central to the theory of 'expressive realism' which belongs to this period (industrial capitalism).

In this chapter I have, in a rather schematic way, looked at the relationship between class and culture, and the social and historical processes involved in the 'making' of the concept 'art' as it developed as part of the 'modern system of the arts', and the 'modern concept art' which became established in the nineteenth century. In doing this I have tried to show that the 'modern concept art' as we know it cannot be regarded as being universally

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1. Pearson, op. cit. p. 5.
 2. Williams, op. cit. p. 34.
 3. Pearson, op. cit. p. 6.
 4. Ibid.

applicable. Instead, I have argued that this concept 'art', from the seventeenth century onwards, has been intimately bound up with the development of the bourgeoisie as a class, who, during the era of capitalism, rose to become the dominant class, the class whose ideas (about 'art') would be the dominant ones.

In the next chapter I will look more closely at the period of industrial capitalism, in particular the theory of 'expressive realism' as applied to painting by Ruskin. I shall do this by briefly outlining the commonsense approach to painting in which the theory of 'expressive realism' is implied (encoded).

CHAPTER II

In the previous chapter I attempted to deconstruct and locate the social and historical phenomenon 'art'. This I did at a very broad and general level of investigation in which I made the connection between the emergence of the category 'art' as part of the 'modern system of the arts', and the rise of the bourgeoisie over against the aristocracy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I also briefly looked at the development of the concept 'art' and the role of the 'artist' up until the end of the nineteenth century. I said that it was during this latter period that the 'modern concept of art' developed, and was in the process of becoming firmly established. During this period of industrial capitalism many of the changes to the ideas about 'art', the 'artist' and their role in society that had been taking place since the seventeenth century and earlier, were either further changed or became entrenched under the conditions of industrialism and bourgeois rule. It is some aspects of these developments, within the context of nineteenth century England, that I would like to examine in this chapter.

I shall be looking at the work of Ruskin as an example of the philosophies (theories) and assumptions underlying the development of 'art', the 'artist' and their role in society. In other words I shall look at Ruskin's work in relation to what was intellectually and educationally becoming the commonsense approach to 'art' and also its function in society. I shall also look briefly at the institutions and organisations (the material and ideological processes) in and through which the ideas about 'art' etc. became dominant in the Victorian period. I shall relate these factors (which contributed to the way in which the nature and practice of the 'visual arts' was being structured and shaped as part of a 'public'

culture) to the broader social, economic, political and cultural changes taking place at the time, particularly the mid-Victorian period (1850's - 1870's). Because of the nature of the relationship between the metropolis and the colony, that is between England and the Cape Colony in the nineteenth century, I see this chapter as crucial to the understanding of the way in which 'art' was first 'formally' organised as part of a 'public' culture in the colony. I also feel that a knowledge of this period is important for the understanding of the way in which 'art' has been institutionalised since 1871¹ in South Africa, and its implications for the establishment and maintenance of a particular power structure - hegemony.² And, because "there can be no adequate oppositional practice without knowledge of the power of the dominant construction against which it must work,"³ 'art' as an institution, being just such a "construction", has implications also for those who enter into struggle with it, as well as those who, at a much broader level, propose a counter-hegemonic strategy. I shall now briefly outline how I have structured this chapter.

Firstly, I shall briefly outline the context in which Ruskin's work, as part of what later became known as the "'Culture and Society'"⁴ tradition was developed and took effect. I shall pay particular attention to the

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1. In 1871 the SAFAS was incorporated when the South African Fine Arts Association (SAFAA) came into being; "His Excellency the then Governor, Sir Henry Barkly, became the first President." Kendall, F.K. A short history of the South African Fine Arts Association p. 11. Also "In 1895 an act of Parliament was passed (No. 20 of 1895), called the South African Gallery Act, by which the Government took over the National (sic) Collection from the South African Fine Arts Association in trust for the people (sic) of the Colony." Ibid. p. 14.
 2. That is the power structure in which "the structures and meanings which most adequately reflect the position and interests of the most powerful class ... - will stand in relation to all others, as a *dominant* social-cultural order." Clarke et al, op. cit. p. 12.
 3. Bommes, M. et al. 'Charms of residence': the public and the past; in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Making Histories, p. 255.
 4. Eagleton, T. Criticism & Ideology p. 102.

processes of industrialisation and capitalistic development. In doing this I shall point to some aspects of the bourgeoisie's struggle for hegemony in the economic, political and cultural spheres in England. I shall concentrate on the mid-Victorian period.

Having set out some of the important features of nineteenth century England in general, and the middle period in particular, I shall briefly look at some aspects of the Romantic movement in England of this latter period. In doing this I shall try to indicate its development from a largely radical force in society, to one which was more often than not ineffectual and reactionary. I shall point to social and historical factors which might explain the reason for this kind of development.

Thirdly, in the light of the above two sections, I shall look at the work of Ruskin by giving an outline of what was becoming the commonsense approach to 'art' with its implicit (or explicit) theory of expressive realism. In doing this I shall comment briefly on Ruskin's transition from 'art' critic to social critic.

Finally, in relation to what I have set out above, I shall look specifically at the nature of state involvement in the 'visual arts' in nineteenth century England. I shall deal with those aspects which are relevant to the understanding of the organisation of 'art' as part of a 'public' culture in the colony.

Having outlined the way in which I have structured this chapter, I shall point out some aspects of the social and historical processes which shaped Victorian society; and which are relevant to this chapter.

Early and mid-nineteenth century English society is an extremely complex one. I shall, in the context of this essay, only be able to deal with it in a rather schematic way. I shall try, therefore to give a sense of this complexity, rather than to give a comprehensive account of it. I shall be concentrating on the bourgeoisie's struggle for hegemony within the radically changing conditions of industrial capitalist society. I shall try to come to grips with the Romantic movement of the mid-nineteenth century in the light of the prevailing conditions and its tradition in English society.

Generally speaking, an important feature of the bourgeoisie's struggle for dominance - hegemony - is its struggle, over and above its use of force, for "'moral and intellectual leadership'".¹ The "'Culture and Society'" tradition is an example of just such a struggle by English bourgeois intellectuals, many of whom, for one reason or another wanted to change society.² To understand these intellectuals one needs to have a sense of the social and historical conditions which produced them.

1. Eagleton, T. *op. cit.* p. 105.

2. "The aim of exercising 'moral and intellectual leadership' is a 'product of the subjective awareness of the "lived culture" of the middle class.' Their will to intervene culturally is a product of their lived relation to the material circumstances of their own social position. Such groups articulate a middle class 'ideal'." Sutton, D. 'Radical liberalism, Fabianism and social history,' in Centre for Cultural Studies *Making Histories* p. 17. "For Gramsci, 'organic' intellectuals are those who come into existence on the basis of an emergent social class; but who then confront - and need to vanquish and assimilate - those 'traditional' intellectual categories which survive from previous social conditions. Gramsci argues, significantly enough for the English tradition, that 'The traditional type of intellectual is represented by the literary man (sic), the philosopher, the artist.'" Eagleton, *Ibid.* p. 103.

My use of the terms 'organic' and 'organicist' in this essay are taken from Eagleton, "to signify social and aesthetic formations with the supposedly spontaneous unity of natural life-forms, and more generally to denote symmetrically integrated systems characterised by the harmonious interdependence of their component elements." *Ibid.* p. 103.

Eagleton gives a concise picture of the ideological and class formation on which the complexity of the "'Culture and Society'" tradition was founded, and which gave rise to the growing dependence of these intellectuals who constitute this tradition on "'organicist'" concepts of society. He says: "Bourgeois ideology in nineteenth-century England confronted a severe problem. Nurtured in the sparse soil of Utilitarianism, it was unable to produce a set of potently affective mythologies which might permeate the texture of lived experience of English society. It needed, therefore to have constant resort to the Romantic humanist heritage - to that nebulous compound of Burkean conservatism and German idealism, transmitted by the later Coleridge to Carlyle, Disraeli, Arnold and Ruskin, which has become known as the 'Culture and Society' tradition. It was a tradition which offered an idealist critique of bourgeois social relations, coupled with a consecration of the rights of capital. The peculiar complexity of English nineteenth-century ideology, founded on a complex conjuncture of bourgeois and aristocratic classes within the dominant bloc, lies in part in this contradictory unity between what Antonio Gramsci refers to as 'organic' and 'traditional' elements. An impoverished empiricism, unable to rise to the levels of an ideology proper, is driven to exploit the fertile symbolic resources of Romantic humanism, drawing on its metaphysical sanctions and quasi-feudalist social models to ratify bourgeois property relations. The 'Culture and Society' tradition is the literary record of this ideological conjuncture"¹

Eagleton goes on to point out that it is precisely this ideological formation that Gramsci commented on, the quotes Gramsci as saying:

"'There is a very extensive category of organic intellectuals - those, that is, who come into existence on the same industrial terrain as the

1. Op. cit. pp. 102 - 103

economic group - but in the higher sphere we find that the old land-owning class preserves its position of virtual monopoly. It loses its economic supremacy and is assimilated as "traditional intellectuals" and as directive (dirigent) group by the new group in power. The old land-owning aristocracy is joined to the industrialists by a kind of suture which is precisely that which in other countries united the traditional intellectuals with the new dominant classes."² More specifically, the mid-Victorian period is one of prosperity and pacification, in which the first wave of working-class militancy (1832 - 1848) is defeated and the political ascendancy of the industrial bourgeoisie is consolidated. The mid-nineteenth century context was also one of rapidly expanding and changing industrial society, in which, with the World Exhibition of 1851, England becomes the "workshop of the world".³ This is also the period in which Victorian capitalism, transcending its earlier individualist phase, assumes increasingly corporate forms resulting in the emergence of a structural conflict within mid-Victorian ideology. There exists a tension between on the one hand, a criticism of the new industrial society's dehumanising effects on the 'free individual spirit' - those "human values, capacities, energies, which the development of society towards an industrial civilization was felt to be threatening or even destroying"⁴ - and, on the other, the belief in the danger of the kind of 'freedom' as defined by the industrial class leading to anarchy, "of the national life being dominated by laissez-faire commercialism."⁵ In other words there exists a tension between preserving the rights of the individual, and the need for social control,

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1. Op.cit.p. 103.
 2. Hauser, Vol. 4, p. 122
 3. Williams, Culture & Society 1780 - 1950 p. 53
 4. Williams, Culture & Society 1780 - 1950 p. 72
 5. Eagleton, op. cit. p. 106

be this a response to the aggressive individualism of the utilitarians, or to the threat of working class demands. This created problems with regard to the relationship between individual, the state, and society; a problem whose solution was increasingly being sought in organicist conceptions of society. In the case of Matthew Arnold this urgent need to harmonise "'all tendencies of human nature ...' within a cohesive, conflictfree order",¹ can be summed up in the word culture. And here I would like to mention two more aspects of mid-nineteenth century society that have influenced the social function of 'art', namely the decline of religion as an effective ideological form, and the rise of English studies and State-established schools. With the acute crises of the 1830's and 40's² still fresh in their mind and despite the fact that the bourgeoisie was in power economically and politically, Arnold realised the need to cultivate the phillistine bourgeoisie and to control and incorporate the working class. Arnold saw the answer to both these needs in the establishing of State run schools. It was through education, he believed, that firstly, the bourgeoisie "'would really augment their self-respect and moral force; it would (also) truly fuse them with the class above (the aristocracy) ..."³ Secondly, education will enable the bourgeoisie to fulfill its historical mission of politically incorporating the working classes. As Arnold points out: "their natural educators and initiators are those immediately above them, the middle classes. If these classes cannot win their sympathy or give them their direction, society is in danger of falling into anarchy."⁴ 'Art' and 'literature' came to play an important in this ideological project. This I shall deal with when looking at the

1. Eagleton, op.cit. p. 106

2. Open conflict between capital and labour. See Hauser Vol. 4, p. 102

3. Eagleton, op. cit. p. 105 (My emphasis and brackets)

4. Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 24

work of Ruskin. Firstly, however, I would like to look at some aspects of the Romantic movement in England at the time.

Within the Romantic movement there are basically two emphases. The first is on the "'creative imagination'",¹ the second is on the "sovereignty and autonomy of the imagination".² They were both products of a revolutionary period in which the bourgeoisie came to power, and in which England becomes "the world's first industrial capitalist nation".³

Further describing this period, Eagleton says that "a crassly phillistine Utilitarianism is rapidly becoming the dominant ideology of the industrial middle classes, fetishizing fact, reducing human relations to market exchanges and dismissing art as unprofitable ornamentation."⁴ Under these conditions the emphasis on "'creative imagination'" by the Romantics, cannot be seen from a present-day perspective as nothing but escapism. In fact it emerged "as one of the few enclaves in which the creative values expunged from the face of English society by industrial capitalism (could) be celebrated and affirmed."⁵ From this position the ideologies of the industrial classes are criticised. So is the fragmented individualism of the capitalist market place, it being contrasted with the 'organic unity' of the 'work of art'. The 'organic' and 'creative' stand in passionate opposition to the 'rational' and the 'mechanical'. 'Art' (particularly 'literature') becomes an alternative ideology in which "the imagination itself, as with Blake and Shelley, becomes a political force."⁶ The emphasis on the "'creative imagination'" during this period can be said to have been radical insofar as it saw as its task the transformation

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1. Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 19
 2. " " " p. 20
 3. " " " p. 19
 4. " " " p. 19
 5. " " " p. 19 (My brackets)
 6. " " " p. 20

of society, thereby establishing a sense of continuity between 'artistic' and social commitments. However, the second emphasis in which the imagination became less of a political weapon, and more of an "alternative to history itself"¹ reflects more closely the 'artist's' actual situation. 'Art' was increasingly being seen and treated as a commodity. In other words, 'artistic production' was being "subject(ed) to much the same conditions as general production."² Capitalism had for many years been slowly destroying the traditional social relations of 'artistic production', separating the "artist from any clear social group or class and from any secure form of patronage, as the older form of patronage was taken over by the dealer-critic system."³ The 'artist' does become, in a sense, like the intellectual in England around the 1840's, 'a free-floating, unattached individual.' It is possible therefore to see why "the artist becomes to be idealised as representative of non-forced and truly expressive activity."⁴ We can see also however, that the 'artist', despite the "rhetorical claim to be 'representative' of human kind, to speak with the voice of the people and utter eternal verities,"⁵ he/she was in fact being more and more marginalised, with no "proper place within the social movements which might actually have transformed industrial capitalism into a just society."⁶ The reverse was then the case, with the 'artist' being "driven into the solitariness of his own creative mind."⁷ The consequence of this has often enough been the 'artist's' turning to a backward-looking vision, a nostalgia for the old 'organic' England, thereby widening the gap between vision and political practice. Under particular social and historical conditions, this retreat of the "'creative imagination'" from social

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1. Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 20
 2. Williams, Culture and Society 1780 - 1950, p. 50 (My brackets)
 3. Wolff, op. cit. p. 11
 4. Ibid, p. 18
 5. Eagleton, Literary Theory, p. 20
 6. " " " p. 20
 7. " " " p. 20

and political praxis into the "'creative mind'", leads 'art' to become, for the majority of the people, an oppressive rather than a liberatory experience. Aesthetics is largely a product of this very alienation of 'art' (and the "'creative mind'") from social life, for its basic assumption is that there is some "unchanging object known as 'art', or an isolatable experience called 'beauty.'"¹ In other words, by way of 'aesthetics' "art was extricated from the material practices, social relations and ideological meanings in which it is always caught up, and raised to the status of a solitary fetish."² The concept of 'beauty' is central to the work of Ruskin, and, it is in relation to what I have said so far that I would like to look at his work as 'art' critic and social critic.

Ruskin's work as 'art' critic encodes the theory of expressive realism. This theory I shall argue is implicit in the commonsense approach to 'art', common sense because it seems to be the 'obvious' and 'natural' approach. I would like to start by explaining what is meant by the commonsense approach.

The commonsense view holds that 'art' is about life,³ that it is the expression of personal experience which is seen as the source of its authenticity. This view proposes that reading 'literature', or in the case of Ruskin, paintings, is a practice of reading in quest of expressive realism. Belsey, talking about 'literature', gives a clear indication of what is meant by the commonsense view. In her words: "Common sense

1. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 21

2. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 21

3. "The protest of the idealists against the reduction of man (sic) to 'homo economicus' was the eternal protestation of the romantic 'philosophy of life' ..." Hauser, Vol. 4, p. 101. See also Williams, *Culture & Society, 1780 - 1950*, pp. 58 - 59; "Artists ... see themselves as agents of the 'revolution for life', in their capacity as bearers of the creative imagination."

assumes that valuable literary texts, those which are in a special way worth reading, tell truths - about the period which produced them, about the world in general or about human nature - and that in doing so they express the particular perceptions, the individual insights, of their authors."¹

The first point that I would like to make is that common sense in giving us this view of 'literature' and 'art' in general, does so not as "a reasoned theoretical position, but as the 'obvious' mode of reading, the 'natural' way of approaching literary works."² Common sense presents itself as non-theoretical.

The important point that Belsey makes however, with regard to critical practice and theory, is that "there is no practice without theory, however much that theory is suppressed, unformulated or perceived as 'obvious'."³ She goes on to say that our activities of reading (about) paintings, no matter how 'natural' these activities may seem, presuppose "a whole theoretical discourse, even if unspoken, about language and about meaning, about the relationships between meaning and the world, meaning and people, and finally about people themselves and their place in the world."⁴

Having said that there is no practice without theory, I shall now look at some of the propositions which form the theoretical basis of common sense. I shall then turn to the work of Ruskin as an example of this theory as it has been applied to painting. In doing this I shall make

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1. Belsey, Critical Practice, p. 2
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Belsey, op. cit., p. 4 (my emphasis)

certain connections between his work as 'art' critic, and that of social critic. This is important because Ruskin was part of a tradition which "made the inclusive examination of both art and society a quite natural thing."¹ For as Williams points out elsewhere, with regard to this tradition: "an essential hypothesis in the development of the idea of culture is that the art of a period is closely and necessarily related to the generally prevalent 'way of life', and further that, in consequence, aesthetic, moral and social judgements are closely interrelated."²

Belsey sets out the propositions of common sense as follows: "Common sense proposes a *humanism* based on an *empiricist-idealist* interpretation of the world. In other words, common sense urges that 'man' is the origin and source of meaning, of action, and of history *humanism*. Our concepts and knowledge are held to be the product of experience (*empiricism*), and this experience is preceded and interpreted by the mind, reason or thought, the property of a transcendental human nature whose essence is the attribute of each individual (*idealism*)."³

These propositions constitute the basis of a practice of reading 'literature' or paintings, which assumes the theory of expressive realism. This

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1. Williams, Culture and Society 1780 - 1950, p. 141
 2. Williams, Culture and Society 1780 - 1950, p. 137. Perhaps I could point out here that I do not intend to propose an 'alternative Marxist aesthetics' in this essay, though I am heavily indebted to this growing body of work. I am more concerned with examining the relationship between "aesthetic, moral and social judgements" and how this tradition of 'Culture or Art and Society' has been used by the ruling classes and the state via notions such as 'public taste', of being 'cultured' or 'civilised', to incorporate people into specific forms of life, particular ways of behaving and thinking; and to provide some of the moral and spiritual values which legitimate the use of force by the state.
 3. Belsey, op. cit., p. 7

is the theory, according to Belsey, "that literature reflects the *reality* of experience as it is perceived by one (especially gifted) individual, who *expresses* it in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true."¹ One could replace 'literature' by 'art' or painting; in the case of the latter, the discourse would be a complex of assumptions about how we talk, and think, as well as how we see.

Although the expressive-realist theory was established in relation to literature, it found in Ruskin its first theorist concerned with painting. In his book Modern Painters, Ruskin writes about painting "by invoking in relation to the visual arts the theory already widely current in discussions of poetry ... treating poetry as 'synonymous!'"² By looking at Ruskin, whose influence was certainly felt in the Cape colony,³ I hope to give a clear formulation of the expressive-realist position. Belsey defines this position as the fusion of "the imitation of reality"⁴ and "the new Romantic conviction that poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', *expressed* the perceptions and emotions of a person 'possessed of more than usual organic sensibility."⁵ This fusion is very much part of the mid-Victorian ideological conflict between rationalism and irrationalism, empiricism and idealism, fact and imagination, as it is the merging of the mimetic and the expressive. Furthermore the meticulousness of Pre-Raphaelite painting, of which Ruskin became the spokesperson, "is in accordance not only with the naturalistic tendency of European art in general, but at the same time with that bourgeois ethic of good workmanship ..."⁶ (But then Ruskin also defends Turner!)

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1. Belsey, op. cit.
 2. Belsey, op. cit. p. 8
 3. See Chapter III
 4. Belsey, op. cit., p. 7
 5. Belsey, op. cit., p. 8 (My emphasis)
 6. Hauser, Vol. 4, p. 105

I shall now examine the salient features of Ruskin's theory as it has been summarised by Belsey. Her references are to Ruskin Vol. 3, p. 133-9.

For Ruskin the landscape painter "'must always have two great and distinct ends: the first, to induce in the spectator's mind the faithful conception of any natural objects whatsoever; the second, to guide the spectator's mind to those objects most worthy of its contemplation, and to inform him of the thoughts and feelings with which they were regarded by the artist himself".¹

What does Ruskin's formulation mean for the 'artist'?

- (a) The 'artist' must faithfully 'represent' on canvas, the objects portrayed.
- (b) The thoughts and feelings that these objects evoked in the 'artist' must be expressed.

In other words the 'artist' does not simply 'photograph' everyday 'reality', but, as Williams points out, "perceives and represents Essential Reality, and he does so by virtue of his master faculty Imagination."²

What does this formulation mean for the reader?

- (a) The reader must look for truth to nature,
- (b) and must be sensitive and receptive to the expressive aspects of the paintings.

Belsey points out that "there is no doubt in Ruskin's view that the second aim is the more important, because it leaves the spectator more than

1. Belsey, *op. cit.*, p. 8

2. Williams, *Culture and Society 1780 - 1950*, p. 56. Also "the artist's business is to 'read the open secret of the universe'", p. 56. Ruskin's standard as 'art' critic is "the absolute evidence, in works or art, of the 'universal grand design'." p. 141

delighted - enobled and instructed, under the sense of having not only beheld a new scene, but of having held communion with a new mind, and having been endowed for a time with the keen perception and impetuous emotions of a nobler and more penetrating intelligence."¹ But as Belsey makes quite clear, this creates a difficulty. Every spectator can comprehend and appreciate truth to nature, i.e. the representational aspects of painting. But not everyone can comprehend the expressive aspects, which "'can only be met and understood by persons having some sort of sympathy with the high and solitary minds which produced it - sympathy only to be felt by minds in some degree high and solitary themselves."² Ruskin's criticism avoids confronting this difficulty by concentrating first and foremost on the representational aspects. He argues that the "representation of facts"³ is the foundation of all 'art', because without having achieved this it is impossible to achieve the "representation of thoughts".⁴ Hauser talking about Pre-Raphaelite painting says it is "just as 'poetic' as the whole of Victorian art ... With its Victorian spiritualism ... its moral allegories ... it unites a realism which finds a delight in minute details"⁵ The difficulty is resolved by Ruskin, in the following manner; he says: "'I shall look only for truth; bare, clear, downright statement of facts; showing in each particular, as far as I am able, what the truth of nature is, and seeking for the plain expression of it."⁶ For Ruskin, as Belsey points out, 'art' is both truth to nature and expressive, and that these are not separate qualities, but are in fact one. In other words, the portrayal of a universal and eternal truth, is the expression of a "personal and particularly incisive perception of that truth."⁷ This is however a contradiction in terms.

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1. Belsey, op. cit., p. 8
 2. Belsey, op. cit., p. 9
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Hauser, Vol. 4, p. 105
 6. Belsey, op. cit.
 7. Ibid.

What underlies the thinking of Ruskin is firstly the common sense acceptance of the natural world of objects, of "'bare, clear, downright statement of facts'", as unproblematically given. It is taken for granted that the natural world simply has to be experienced for one to have universal knowledge of it (empiricism), and that it is possible to represent this world on canvas. Secondly, it is equally accepted that the mind of the spectator, and the (nobler and more penetrating) mind of the artist, are there already to perceive these natural objects (idealism).

But the confluence of empiricism and idealism in the thought of Ruskin is problematic; a tension exists between the two. On the one hand, the facts of nature, because they are universally given (according to Ruskin), are accessible to everyone and can be "plainly" expressed by them. On the other hand, certain people like 'artists' - those with high and solitary minds - have a much keener perception of these facts, with the result that they portray these 'obvious', 'natural', 'given' 'facts' of nature "invested with a nobility not apparent to everyone".¹ In other words, the 'artist' represents them differently; but their representations are nevertheless true. This clearly contradicts the theory of expressive realism, with its single authoritative meaning (the 'artist's') embodied in the painting, in that the world "may be perceived and represented in different ways without either way simply being false, and that the work of art may be read in different ways by different spectators".² Ruskin recognizes the problematic nature of his empiricist-idealist position, but avoids confronting it by falling "back on an uneasy separation of 'the representation of facts' from 'the representation of thoughts'".³

1. Belsey, *op. cit.*, p. 9

2. *Ibid.* p. 9-10

3. *Ibid.* p. 10

I have looked briefly at the formulation of Ruskin's position, his expressive-realist theory as it is put forward in his book Modern Painters. I would now like to look at Ruskin the social critic. This I shall do in relation to what has been said already about his expressive-realist theory. In doing this I shall briefly explore how the "aesthetic, moral and social judgements are closely interrelated."¹ and what the implications are for using "the art of a period to judge the quality of the society that was producing it."² This is an extremely complex issue and I shall have to be somewhat schematic. I can only say here that such ideas about 'art' and 'society' cannot be properly understood outside of the particular power structure in which they are 'formally' organised.

Ruskin's work belongs to the intellectual history of the nineteenth century. I have looked at his work so far in relation to this and the social and historical conditions which produced it. To this I would like to add the fact that Ruskin together with Mill, George Eliot and their followers was one of "the first representatives of an 'unattached', 'independently thinking' intelligentsia".³ The development of such an intelligentsia in England is the result of the increased specialisation brought about by industrial capitalism. What happens, as part of this process, is that either the class from which this intelligentsia arises rejects them, or the intelligentsia deserts them, becoming 'freed' from all social ties. There are two tendencies which emerge as a result of this, both of which hold true for Ruskin and many other intellectuals of the nineteenth (and twentieth) centuries. Firstly, there is "an attempt

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1. Williams, Culture & Society 1780-1950 p137. This view arose out of the development of the concept 'culture' to mean "'a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual'". Williams, Culture & Society 1780 - 1950, p. 16.
 2. Williams, Culture & Society 1780 - 1950, p. 138
 3. Hauser, Vol. 2, p. 128

to realize the ideal of the total all-round human being"¹ A 'common humanity' is stressed which is more often than not a 'common humanity' within hierarchy.² This is an important part of liberal humanism and its various brands of paternalism.

Secondly, there is the "illusion that things of the mind live in a realm beyond the distinction of class. The intellectuals try to believe in the absoluteness of truth and beauty, because that makes them seem the representatives of a 'higher' reality"³ 'Art' is an institution which became, particularly in the nineteenth century, one of the representatives of a "'higher' reality". The intellectual, in believing him/herself to be a representative of a "'higher' reality", compensates for her/his lack of influence in society.⁴ But 'art' also lends moral and spiritual authority to the ruling classes and groups within those classes. I shall look at this shortly, when I look at some aspects of how and why the state involves itself in the 'visual arts'. Firstly, however, I would like to look at one last point concerning Ruskin, and that is his conception of the State. This I think is important because it brings together the concept 'art' and its relation to "'organic form'", and his conception of an ideal society.

1. Hauser, Vol. 2, p. 126

2. This notion of a 'common humanity' is part of the 'organic' conception of society. In the case of Ruskin, this is not a socialist idea, but an authoritarian one, emphasising the hierarchy of classes. Speaking of Ruskin, J.A. Hobson makes this point clear. In his words: "This organic conception everywhere illuminates his theory and his practical constructive policy: it gives order to his conception of the different industrial classes and to the relations of individual members of each class: it releases him from the mechanical atomic notion of equality, and compels him to develop an orderly system of interdependence sustained by authority and obedience." Quoted in Williams, Culture & Society 1780 - 1950, p. 146 (My emphasis)

3. Hauser, Vol. 4, p. 126

4. Hauser, Vol. 2, p. 126

Central to Ruskin's thinking about society is his idea of 'Vital Beauty':
 "'the felicitous fulfilment of function in living things, more especially of the joyful and right exertion of perfect life in man'."¹

For Williams the word "function" carries "an escapable reference to the idea of design."² These words refer to 'social order', which Ruskin conceptualises in relation to the idea of an 'organic' society. But as Williams points out, and this is particularly relevant to nineteenth century Colonial rule in the Cape, "the basic idea of 'organic form' produced, in Ruskin's thinking about an ideal society, the familiar notion of a paternal State. He wished to see a rigid class-structure corresponding to his ideas of 'function'."³ Within Ruskin's "paternal State" "the ruling class must be the existing aristocracy, properly trained in the function: 'The office of the upper classes ... as a body, is to keep order among their inferiors, and raise them always to the nearest level with themselves of which those inferiors are capable.'"⁴

I hope to show that such a conception of 'art' and 'society' is one of the dominant ones held in the Cape Colony, particularly by those who, within the quasi feudal set-up of the colony, first organised 'art' as part of a 'public' culture. Before I do this in the next chapter, I would like to look at the Royal Academy, the state, taste, the state art education system, and the relationship between them during the mid-nineteenth century. Again I shall have to be brief.

During the nineteenth century, the Royal Academy was a forum for the ideological and material production of the 'fine arts' in England. It played an important part in "defining the nature of the fine arts, and setting the conditions for opposition to the established and establishment

1. Williams, Culture & Society 1780 - 1950, p. 145 (my emphasis)
 2. " " " " " " p. 145
 3. " " " " " " p. 151
 4. " " " " " " p. 151

definitions of art."¹ Although not the first example of State patronage of the 'visual arts', its foundation is the first major instance of State involvement in promoting the visual arts as part of a 'public' culture. In doing so it set a precedent, a model and form, of State intervention in the 'visual arts'. Pearson refers to this as the "Quasi-Autonomous-Non-Governmental-Organization (quango)"² model. Within the English political system the "Head of State" is "the Monarch;" therefore the Royal Academy being established "by an Instrument of foundation granted by the King",³ is in a position to be ideologically powerful because it could be "seen as an independent and private institution, while at the same time being established and supported by the Head of State as Head of State - without, of course any direct reference to what we can call the machinery of State (Parliament, the Civil Service, 'public accountability', etc.)"⁴ Alongside this development is that of 'art' exemplifying 'free', individual expression. There have consequently been many arguments about the dangers or necessity of State involvement. These arguments mirrored, in a way, the very nature of the Royal Academy, I have already mentioned. They suggested "forms of State involvement in and support for the visual arts that lent the authority and power of the State to particular views of art, while at the same time appearing to minimize the role of the State in art."⁵ I shall come back to this shortly when I look more closely at the nature of the relationship between the Royal Academy, the State and taste, bearing in mind the tradition at the time in which "aesthetic, moral and social judgements are closely interrelated."

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1. Pearson, N.M. The State and the Visual Arts, p. 8
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid. p. 10
 5. Pearson, op. cit., p. 11

The mid-nineteenth century State was itself changing. This too was a response to a rapidly changing and expanding industrial capitalist society. The State expanded "through the construction of organization, laws, inspectorate systems and information gathering committees and enquiries in many fields."¹ Such investigations² were part of the process whereby the State sought to affect and control a rapidly changing society.³ These investigations were concerned with 'public taste', and this being related to public morality and public behaviour and order was the concern of the State. 'Art' was seen as a means of developing 'taste', and having 'taste' or being 'artistic' in terms of Ruskin's model of society would imply being like the aristocracy, for Arnold, being like the middle and upper classes - i.e. being 'civilized'. I have mentioned that in this sense, the state's concern with 'public taste' can be seen as a concern with incorporating people into specific forms of life.⁴ There is however another argument for State concern with regard to 'public taste' and therefore 'art'. This argument is an economic one based on the assumption that raising public taste would improve consumer discrimination which would have the ripple effect, the end result being "a better competitive position in international markets".⁵ I would now like to take a closer look at the nature of the State in relation to its interest in raising public taste and morality - a general cultural upliftment - which was the concern of both Ruskin and Arnold.

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1. Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 11
 2. For example the Royal Commission on the Academy 1863. There were a number throughout the nineteenth century, *Ibid.* p. 10
 3. *Ibid.* p. 11
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. Pearson, *op. cit.*

The State is a complex political concept which has been the subject of various interpretations. It is not within the scope of this essay to deal at length with, and provide a comprehensive definition of, the State. It is my view however, that an understanding of the State is central to an understanding of the economic, political and cultural life of the Cape Colony during the period being examined.

The State is not morally neutral; moral and spiritual values are crucial to its existence. It cannot rule for long by force alone. These values are necessary also for the regulation of law.¹ Gramsci says of the State: "Every State is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the need of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interest of the ruling classes."² Again one can see the work of Ruskin and Arnold as attempts to do this. But it is important for me to clarify how I see the mid-nineteenth century British State, because this will affect my understanding of how the State functions to achieve the above.

Pearson, drawing on the work of Gramsci, describes this State as "a complex set of relations which shape and are part of a wide range of economic, social and cultural activities. The State is not a discrete organization or machine."³ It is a set of practices, relations and forms of authority bound up with many aspects of daily life."⁴ For example, he says elsewhere

1. Pearson, op. cit., p. 2

2. Ibid, p. 28

3. It must be remembered that the State is a historical phenomenon, subject to change under different social conditions. Bozzoli, in talking about the State in S.A. 1890-1933 talks about the "narrow and the wide States", i.e. "the system of government" and "the wider system of class domination itself". Bozzoli, op. cit., p. 270

4. Pearson, op. cit., p. 3

that the State's activities are a combination of two basic educative functions. The school, which performs a positive educative function, and the courts which perform a negative educative function. He goes on to say that "while laws are passed through Parliament as a series of discrete measures dealing with particular activities, it is the totality of legal and other acts and initiatives that constitute the shape, direction and form of the State - that reveals a combination of relations, forces and powers that restrict or marginalize certain activities, outlaw some, encourage and assist others, and in total tend to structure and shape the possibilities for individual action and initiative."¹

So far I have mentioned the State's interest in raising "the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level." I also suggested that 'art' comes to play a significant part in this process. I indicated that this process comprises the State activities of the school and the courts. But in addition to these, Pearson quotes Gramsci as saying that "in reality, a multitude of other so-called private initiatives and activities tend to the same end - initiatives and activities which form the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes."²

The State then cannot simply be seen in terms of force, nor is it simply the processes of government. The State is also the wider system of class domination itself. As Pearson puts it: "The State ... is a complex set of relations and forces including the direct political organization of Government, but also numbers of other forms of related authority and power.

1. Pearson, op. cit., p. 28 (My emphasis)

2. Ibid., p. 32

In the broad sense of the word 'political' the State is the political organization and expression of a society. It is the 'expression' of a society in the sense that the State is bound up with moral expressions of a society expressed in phrases like 'national interest', 'national heritage' and 'national purpose'. The State both shapes and is defined by the organization of a society. It is not separate from the economy, the distribution of wealth and power, and the structuring of knowledge opportunities. It is shaped by them, is the expression of them, is the organization of power and authority that maintains and reproduced them and is the form of authority and power that in turn structures and shapes them. It is a set of relations of power and authority which is both defined by and defines individual behaviour and actions."¹

Having looked at the Royal Academy, the State and 'public taste', I would now like to make some brief points about the State art education system in relation to the above.

The State-run art education system introduced during the 1830's, was based on the separation of 'fine art' from 'applied art', 'design', etc. In this sense it reproduced in a fundamental way the institutionalized ideology of the 'fine arts'. As Pearson says: "For, while the Royal Academy catered for pure art and for the artistic elite, the national State system was to deal with applied art and with the taste of the general population. This combination of freedom at the Academy level and control at the mass level is important, for in its freedom and independence the Academy thus fulfilled an ideological role: it represented unfettered creativity."² The education system covered three broad views:

1. Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 44-5
 2. *Ibid.* p. 14

the schools should inculcate 'taste', secondly, they should train individuals in specific skills, and, thirdly, opportunities for the study and practice of 'fine art' should be made possible at a broad level. 'Taste', not only as an aesthetic concept, but as a moral concept¹ is again one of the reasons for State involvement - "this relating to our discussion of the State as, amongst other things, a set of moral relations and forces".²

Having briefly outlined the context in which the work of Ruskin developed and the tradition to which this work belonged, I would like to conclude this chapter by restating some of the points made in this chapter that are relevant to understanding the way in which 'art' was first 'formally' organized in the Cape Colony.

The main features of nineteenth century England, particularly the mid-Victorian period, that I have concentrated on in this chapter have been: (i) the development of England as an industrial capitalist nation; (ii) the rise to economic and political power of the bourgeoisie, the growth of the working class and socialism, and, consequently, the bourgeoisie's struggle for hegemony and, particularly, to fulfil its need to achieve "'moral and intellectual leadership'"; and (iii) the Romantic movement, as a response to, and attack on, the dehumanising effects of the new society. I then went on to look at the work of Ruskin not only as 'art' critic but also as social critic. From this I went on to look at the belief that "aesthetic, moral and social judgements are closely

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1. A moral concept in the sense that it ('taste') is the alternative to "'wrong taste'". 'Taste' is seen as positive moral good "which would bring the general population, and particularly the working classes, into order." (Pearson, op. cit., p. 18)
 2. Ibid. p. 17

interrelated". I did this within the context of Ruskin's conception of society. Then, in the light of the above, I looked at the Royal Academy, its ambiguous relation to the State, and its powerful ideological role in the mid-nineteenth century. I then looked at the nature of the State and its involvement in the 'visual arts'. I said that 'art' had come to be associated with moral and spiritual values and argued that this was one of the reasons why the State, which needs to be a moral force as well as a coercive force, became involved in the 'visual arts'.¹

The involvement of the State also lent authority to the Royal Academy and whatever organizations it promoted. This is true also of the art school system and the development of the museum system. As Pearson says: "In involving the State in these organizations they were also lending them significance, power and status they might otherwise not have had. Equally, of course, since some of these institutions are concerned with the most prestigious aspects of art, they gave to the State (and to the nation) an added prestige and authority."² Finally, I considered the concept of 'public taste' as one that mediated between, and brought together, on moral grounds, as well as economic, 'art' and the State.

In the light of these observations, I shall in my final chapter look at the first instance of 'formally' organized 'art' in South Africa. I shall do this within the Cape Colonial context of 1850 - 1871 and its 'colonial connection', i.e. between the metropolis and colony.

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1. State patronage of the visual arts is nothing new, but its involvement under the conditions of industrial capitalist society is somewhat different. The foundation of the Royal Academy establishes a particular model and form of State intervention in the 'arts' which set a precedent for the way in which 'art' was to be 'formally' organized as part of a 'public' culture in the Cape Colony, albeit under different conditions.
 2. Pearson, op. cit., p. 45

CHAPTER III

In this chapter I shall look specifically at the first 'formal' organisation of 'art' in the British Cape Colony during the period 1850 -1871, i.e. the period of the South African Fine Art Society (SAFAS). It is the main contention of this chapter that the SAFAS, as the first material and ideological forum for the production of the 'fine arts' in South Africa, cannot be examined without a critical analysis of the power structure in, and through which, it came into being. For the sake of clarity, I shall divide the chapter into two parts, the second to be seen in the light of the first.

In the first part, I shall outline some aspects of the different relationships and forces brought into play in the colonial social formation. In doing this I shall elucidate three basic themes related to British imperialist and colonial domination at the Cape; the economic; the cultural, particularly what I shall call the 'colonial connection'; and thirdly, the role of the State. It is not within the scope of this essay to go into any depth with regard to these themes, and I shall therefore deal only with those aspects which seem most relevant to the main contention of this chapter. I shall focus on the notion of 'superiority' as an idea that links the three themes, and relates them to the key concepts of 'power', 'domination' and 'art'.

In the second part of this chapter, I shall examine the structure and social function of SAFAS and its relation to the State. I shall attempt to show that, within the colonial social formation as outlined above, it tends to be established almost exclusively along aristocratic lines, with bourgeois economic and British nationalist and imperialist interests

being subsumed under the rubric of 'taste'. I shall do this by firstly examining the structure of the organisation and its aims; and secondly, by trying to show what and whose interests were being served by the organisation. Having done this I shall examine the available 'art' criticism (theory and philosophy of 'art') emanating from the SAFAS, as part of the broad educational functions set out by the organisation. In doing this I shall examine firstly, how the 'fine arts' (painting) are defined; and secondly, what the social role of the 'artist' is according to this definition.

Having broadly outlined the structure of this chapter, I shall now look at some aspects of the colonial social formation during the period of the SAFAS.

Fransen has pointed out that "the emergence at the Cape of the fine arts as an occupation to be learnt and practised by professionals and non-professionals and as something to be appreciated by a wider public, seems to have closely followed in the wake of the second British Occupation ... there is no denying that the arrival of the English ushered in a period during which an appreciation of art, music and the sciences began to be regarded as part of a good upbringing,"¹ The idea of "good upbringing", and its association with the "appreciation of art", can be traced back to Arnold and Ruskin. These ideas whose origins and development are to be found in the different socio-economic conditions of Britain, were introduced into the South African context as part of the process of British colonial domination and subordination - hegemony. It is therefore necessary, (if we are not to isolate 'art' (and 'culture'))

1. Fransen, H. Three centuries of South African Art, p. 191

as something autonomous and separate from the economic and political,) that the Western European, British tradition of 'art', should be examined within the context of the social and historical conditions into which it was being introduced.

By the time the SAFAS was established there had already been approximately two centuries of foreign rule at the Cape. During this period there emerged a native (mainly agrarian) bourgeoisie of European origin. Capital accumulation had taken the form of merchant capitalist exchange and petty commodity production. This took place amidst pre-capitalist societies who were gradually being dispossessed of their land.¹ British occupation was achieved by military conquest, followed by a policy promoting British settlement. Apart from being of military significance, it was also a "part of the British attempt to convert the Cape into a British colony in spirit as well as in law."² Davenport describes the Cape in 1850 as being "dominated by an English-speaking element - largely urban, official, mercantile and professional in character, which rested on a numerically larger but recessive Dutch (Afrikaans) - speaking community, both depending in turn on the services of Coloured and African peoples."³ There was no national bourgeoisie as yet and no large organized working class. The industrialisation of South Africa only 'took-off' after the discovery of diamonds and gold. The urban centres were isolated and communication within them was dominated by a few newspapers depending on the size of the town. Certainly English politics, and 'art', were largely urban affairs.

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1. In describing the social and economic systems of the nineteenth century, Bozzoli points out that there existed "no less than four distinct social and economic systems: the nineteenth century was dominated by pre-capitalist subsistence agriculture (as in many African countries); semi-feudal agricultural and political forms (as in the Americas) and merchant capital (as in the 'dominions')". Bozzoli, *op. cit.* p. 109
 2. Davenport, T.R. *South Africa: A Modern History*, p. 31
 3. Davenport, *op. cit.*, p. 75



By 1850 a clear cut colour system had come into being, one in which caste and class concided virtually in all respects. The perpetuation of class relations as caste relations in a pre-capitalist mode of production where the lines of cleavage were determined in effect by birth, reproduced certain conventional standards of life and expectation among the dominant as well as the dominated classes. As far as the white, English-speaking community was concerned, this served to 'naturalise' an attitude of moral, cultural and political superiority. This was tied up with the identification with, and continuation of, ideas, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions and ways of perceiving and interpreting the world that originated in the metropolis. This continuation and importation of ideas that evolved in Britain, is what I have called the 'colonial connection'. This factor, given the necessary socio-economic developments, is probably the most important factor determining the way in which 'art' was first organised in South Africa. Before I go on to look at the ideological function of the 'colonial connection', I must mention that, as Duminy points out, "the most striking feature of the South African English-speaking community was its disunity."¹ This disunity, he goes on to say, "can be explained in a number of ways ... settler communities were composed of individuals who, although of common national origin, were divided according to the ethnic division which existed in the mother country In addition, the mid-nineteenth century society was highly individualistic."² The development of newspaper and commercial rivalry further fractionated the community. This probably accounts for the absence of any significant nationalist group appeal. But I am more

1. Duminy, A.H., The English-Speaking Dimensions in South African Politics, p. 3

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid, p. 6

concerned with the Cape Town community. Duminy furthermore goes on to say that "an equally noticeable feature (of the English-speaking community) was its long-lasting identification with Britain."¹ It is on this 'colonial connection' that I shall now focus my attention.

The identification with the mother country, or 'parent culture', took the form of particular styles of home-building and garden landscapes,² overseas correspondence, subscription to British newspapers, etc.³

Furthermore this 'colonial connection' was reinforced by the attraction of the British settlers to the attitudes and values dominant in Britain, and which gave to them a sense of moral and cultural superiority. This sense of superiority being reinforced by their lived relation to the material circumstances of their own position in the Colonial social formation. The ideology of the 'colonial connection' was also mediated by the church (whose clergy were trained in Britain), the schools (whose teachers were similarly trained in Britain), the English press and 'literature' and from 1850 onwards, by 'art' (the 'fine arts') also.

Together these institutions produced the reproduced a corporate sense of superiority, of prejudices and beliefs which were reinforced by class. These attitudes, Duminy mentions, "were further reinforced, as the nineteenth century progressed, by the growth of British power, based on her industrial strength and her mastery of the seas. With such evidence before their eyes, Britons everywhere became more and more convinced of their superiority and of the superiority of British institutions,

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1. Duminy, A.H. The English-Speaking Dimensions in South African Politics, p 6.
 2. For a fascinating study of "the development of white racial ideology in South Africa in the context of changing imagery of landscape and Social Darwinist notions of face fitness," see Rich, P., Landscape, Social Darwinism and the Cultural roots of South African racial ideology.
 3. Duminy, op. cit., p. 6

particularly those of government."¹ Articulating with class position and the moral and cultural attitudes of superiority are the Victorian attitudes of 'race', in which "the superiority of the British or Anglo-Saxon race gained common acceptance"² during the nineteenth century.

I would now like to look at the 'colonial connection' in relation to its effectivity in shaping the attitudes and relations to the indigenous majority, and then also in relation to the Afrikaner majority. Thirdly I shall look at it in the context of the British colonial State. In doing this I shall look at three interrelated themes, the needs of an expanding capitalist economy in its mercantile phase, the ideology of liberal humanism and the Victorian and colonial attitudes of 'race' and moral and cultural superiority. This is necessary to understand the way in which 'cultural production' in South Africa (e.g. the SAFAS) was structured and defined in relation to, and as part of, a particular power structure. I shall again have to be somewhat schematic.

Under mercantile capitalism in the Cape, a specific kind of segregationist society had been produced, in which some pre-capitalist modes of production were preserved, even encouraged.³ Dispossession of land however, had resulted in limiting the land necessary for an economy based on communal possession. Already in the mid-nineteenth century it was realised (e.g. by Sir George Grey in the Cape Colony) that these areas⁴ would become the source of cheap labour.⁵ There also existed landless African and 'Coloured' peoples in the Western Cape, existing as farm

1. Duminy, *op. cit.*, p. 7

2. *Ibid.*, p. 7

3. For example certain forms of subsistence farming.

4. The "reserves" etc.

5. Experience in these matters had already been gained elsewhere in Africa.

labourers or as skilled tradesmen in the urban areas. Underlying the relations between colonizer and colonized, particularly with expansion of the colony after 1840 and again after 1867, was the need, so that the accumulation of capital could take place, for cheap labour. Collins points out that "the ruling classes, in the interest of maximising profits, need to reproduce the special kind of labour force needed at a particular period in history. One of the ways ... of reproducing such a labour force who will possess the appropriate skills and attitudes is by way of schools."¹ At the time in the Cape Colony black schooling was in the hands of the English-speaking missionaries. This educational practice was set up within the "integrationist and liberal/academic"² framework of the missionaries. But before looking further at early black schooling, it is necessary that we understand something about liberalism. I shall try to show that what liberalism does is to separate the cultural from the economic.

Erwin and Webster define liberalism in the following way: "It has been argued that liberalism is best understood, not as a set of eternally valid abstract principles, but as the expression of the interests of a rising capitalist class anxious to throw off the shackles of feudal restriction by emphasising the freedom of individuals in a market society (MacPherson, 1963). Consequently in peripheral capitalism, where the path to development has not involved the crucial role of a liberal bourgeoisie pioneering civil liberties, calls for civil liberties remain ineffectual since they are not the expression of mighty class interests. However, although liberalism has not played this progressive role in

1. Collins, C. Black Schooling in South Africa, p. 5

2. Ibid.

peripheral capitalism, it can nevertheless play an important ideological role in providing a set of theoretical lenses through which men comprehend and legitimise the social structures they have created. It is precisely because liberals, with few exceptions, have uncritically transplanted liberal ideas from the centre to the periphery that liberal ideology in South Africa has come to play the role of legitimising and at the same time obscuring an understanding of the nature of the South African social formation."¹

The liberal humanist tradition, as it evolved in Britain, views the individual human nature as being a centre of moral values. In this way it sees human nature (the mind) being above material forces. In doing this it separates the cultural from the economic. In the light of what I have already said about the prevalent class-caste relations, it is easy to see that economic success could be explained in terms of moral constitution, and similarly with regard to economic subservience. We have seen that in the metropolis the idea of culture and moral and social judgement, were closely interrelated. In the colonial context this articulates with the added dimension of 'race'. This liberalism within the context of colonial rule with its "concern for the rights of other cultural groups,"² and its essentially paternalistic conception of society, explained inequality in terms of culture and 'race'. Furthermore as a result of this split, the liberal preoccupation with protecting other cultures against the destructive forces of capitalism, was accompanied at the same time by a contradictory policy of economic exploitation, or limited development, thereby denying the material aspect

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1. Erwin, A. et al. Ideology and Capitalism in South Africa in Schlemmer, L. et al. Change Reform and Economic Growth in South Africa, p. 92.
 2. Davenport op. cit. p. 76

essential for cultural development. Another important factor is that as far as the indigenous population was concerned, particularly with regard to those outside the urban areas, they were seen to have culture in an anthropological sense only. Culture, in Ruskin and Arnold's sense of the word was the sole preserve of the British ruling class. This, together with the dominant attitudes to 'race', are embraced by the broader liberal humanist ideology of the domination of Nature by Man.¹ Through the workings of this ideology in the mid-nineteenth century, the bourgeoisie comes to live their relationship to colonialism "not on the basis of a knowledge of its objective economic and political causes and effects but through an entirely imaginary form in which ... the individual bourgeois represents to himself his position in the process of colonization as part of an inherently meaningful and cumulative historical process."² By looking at education for Africans, we can see how much this liberal humanist ideology is a part of, and serves the interests of, mercantile capital.

The attempt, expressed in a statement by the Governor, Sir George Cathcart, to parliament in 1854, that "... we should try to make them (the blacks) a part of ourselves,"³ needs to be seen within the context of the need for the blacks to adopt British values and assumptions, mainly to do with discipline, labour, obedience, servitude and consumerism. This is

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1. I shall take this point up briefly in the second part. I could just mention here Joyce Ozinsky's observations that landscape painting can be seen "as a means of asserting and celebrating the conquest of land" and that the indigenous population is portrayed "either as tribal people or as characters, in both cases serving to reinforce feelings of white superiority." Ozinsky, J. Paper presented at the NUSAS Art & Liberation week.
 2. Bennet, op. cit., p. 124 (My emphasis)
 3. Collins, C. op. cit., p. 9 (My brackets)

part of the process of "incorporation"¹ which had long been carried out by mission schools. These became State aided in 1841. Through schooling, as Collins points out, the blacks were to become the friends and servants of the colonists, the consumer of their goods and producers for their markets. The liberal humanist tradition in the Cape, by separating the cultural from the economic, overestimates the transformative power of culture ('art'), and considers it in isolation from the determining social context. Thus its project to improve the life of the majority of the people in the colony is to assign to them a particular subservient role in the capitalist and racially oppressive system; and thereby to generally speaking, narrow down the social function of culture to abstraction.

I would now like to look at the 'colonial connection' in relation to the settler community and the British colonial state.

The idea of being British, had as much to do with not being Boer, as it had to do with not being black. The attitudes of superiority applied to the Afrikaans-speaking community as well, and were evident in the British settler society as a whole. As a result of the 'colonial connection' and "of the claim of prosperous settlers to form an upper class, on the model of the British gentry,"³ there developed out of the colonial social formation certain institutions, organisations, clubs, etc., based more along aristocratic than bourgeois, lines. The SAFAS is an example of this tendency. It grew out of a colonial social formation, whose dominant ideology was liberal, humanistic and paternalistic; in other words it grew out of a society in which "the hierarchical

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1. Collins, C. op. cit., p. 9. Fundamentally "incorporated" into the mercantilist economy of the period.
 2. Ibid. p. 8
 3. Duminy, op. cit., p. 7

order was exalted."¹ And in which "ideology did not operate to blur distinctions but to elevate them to an equivalent status with nature."² One important political consequence of this, "was that politics itself was seen as being the preserve of a small group of persons who had achieved 'position', expertise and financial security. In politics, furthermore, such individuals prided themselves on their independence. They rejected altogether notions of party discipline and ascribed to a code of honour or gentlemanliness. They had little contact with men in the street ... they deprecated 'rabble-rousing' or popular politics,"³ This is typical of the quasi-aristocratic conception of society, and is to be found as I shall attempt to show in the second half of this chapter, in the SAFAS and its ideas about 'art', the 'artist', and their role in society. A consequence of this is that politics is made both private and exclusive: "politics is seen as being to do with a particular professional group"⁴

Another consequence of colonial and imperialist economic and political domination, and the 'colonial connection', was the adherence to the British parliamentary system in the colonial social formation. Within this context, in which the British South African population was outnumbered by the Dutch (Afrikaans), and both of these by the black population, democracy, which evolved in the metropolis under specific social and historical conditions, was modified by increasing its exclusiveness. Political participation was limited to a small group,

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1. Bozzoli, *op. cit.*, p. 269. A similar concept of society is that of Ruskin mentioned in Chapter II.
 2. *Ibid.*
 3. Duminy, *op. cit.*, p. 8
 4. Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 70

thereby denying the theoretical basis of democracy and arousing resentment in those excluded on grounds of "inferiority".¹ Lewsen comments on this element of South African liberalism. She says: It "was often a conservative creed, linked with high property qualifications, with laissez-faire and the reluctance to tax the rich for the benefit of the poor. It did not intrude into social relationships or attack the class structure. It also accepted as axiomatic that the civilization of the West was superior to all others"²

I have tried to show how the British colonial State ('narrow' and 'wide') played an important part in determining the social relations in the colonial social formation, particularly the part it played in reinforcing the 'colonial connection'. I would now like to look more closely, but briefly, at how the nature of the British colonial State played a determining role in how 'art' was first 'formally' organised, and its consequent institutionalisation.

In the light of what I have said so far about British political behaviour and the colonial State, I shall now point to one important way in which the State ensures that the British ruling class, and its tradition of 'arts' come to be dominant, and thereby to set up conceptual barriers around the processes of cultural production, distribution and consumption.

Stephen Watson has said that "one cannot speak of the nature of art without speaking about the nature of the State."³ His paper makes the

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1. Duminy, *op. cit.*, p. 9
 2. Lewsen, P., 'The Cape Liberal tradition - myth or reality'. Collected Seminar Papers, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, Vol. 1, in Duminy, *op. cit.*, p. 17
 3. Watson, S., 'Internationalism and Provincialism', in *Art and Liberation*, p. 27. In his introduction, Watson implies that it is "possible that (his) comments will have a wider reference." I have used this opportunity to apply some of his ideas to the 'fine art', and 'art' in general, where possible.

connection between the persistence of liberalism, and the role of the State, in the British Colonial social formation, and in the South African social formation up until the present. The majority of British South Africans, and those visiting British 'artists' and writers etc., "lived" their relationship to colonialism through the workings of nineteenth century English liberal ideology. I have said that liberalism, within the South African context, could not play the "progressive role" it did in the metropolis, as part of the bourgeois democratic revolution. But that it did "play an important ideological role." Watson argues that the persistence of this ideology as the dominant one is the result of the State's success in perpetuating a particular class structure. In doing this it institutes a particular class culture as hegemonic. As Pearson points out: "Culture is and has been shaped by and part of the class structure of society in that the dominant classes and groups are also those that control the means of education and communication: and the dominant classes and groups tend to elevate *their* culture to the status of *the* culture - arguing of course, for the objectivity of their understandings."¹ This being the dominant British metropolitan culture, whose values are those of white European (British) upper and middle class males. The State therefore perpetuates the 'colonial connection' between the British South African ruling classes (and the English-speaking community in general) and the metropolis. In doing this, through the SAFAS for example, which functions as a forum for the material and ideological production of 'art' (whose intellectual heritage is precisely this liberal (humanist) ideology), it produces and reproduces a 'reality' which has been fashioned in the image, as I have already said, of upper and middle class men, and their 'civilization'. In the colonial

1. Pearson, op. cit., p. 98

context, the ideas about 'art', the 'artist' and their role in society shared by these people in their organisations and institutions, all "actually work to legitimize and perpetuate the hegemony of Western European culture."¹ To understand 'art' in the period of the SAFAS, it is important to do so in relation to the State, because, as Pearson points out: "The State both shapes and is defined by the economy, the distribution of wealth and power, and the structuring of knowledge and opportunities. It is shaped by them, is the expression of them, is the organisation of power and authority that maintains and reproduced them and is the form of authority and power that in turn structures and shapes them."² The British Colonial State then, by ensuring the perpetuation of the 'colonial connection', and thereby a particular culture as the dominant one, a culture which embodies the trajectory of a particular group life through history, entrenches a particular concept of culture which is rooted in a "white geo-political identity and its exclusive idiom"³ The consequence of this being that "in addition to violently restructuring the continent's socio-economic relationships in order to facilitate foreign control and expropriation of wealth, colonialism brought with it a derogation of indigenous African culture and counterposed the myth of the 'civilization' of Europe and the 'barbarism' of Africa. The continuity of racist myths in the attempts of settlers and their metropolitan supporters to justify the violence of minority rule is still an important facet of ideological struggle in Africa today, especially in Southern Africa The extreme consequences of a belief in the superiority of European culture and society is starkly

1. Owens, op. cit., p. 10

2. Pearson, op. cit., p. 44. (My emphasis)

3. Manganyi, N.C., Looking through the key-hole, p. 68

apparent in the example of those settlers who, while living in Africa, set themselves apart from the cultural and social life of the continent."¹

Having looked at some of the different relationships and forces in the colonial social formation around the mid-nineteenth century, I shall now look at the SAFAS, its organisational structure, and the ideas about 'art', the 'artist' and their role in society which it produced.

The SAFAS was constituted on the 12th October 1850. The meeting took place in the Cape Town Public Library, this being a State aided institution. According to Kendall, the purpose of the meeting was "to consider the possibility of instituting Art Exhibitions."² The meeting is described by Langham-Carter as "a meeting of art lovers agreed on 'collecting together paintings and Works of Art for exhibition in the Colony'"³ The original text in the catalogue of the first exhibition states that "Several Gentlemen having expressed a desire to collect together Paintings and Works of Art, for exhibition in the Colony, a Committee has been formed to carry this object into effect, who met and passed the following resolutions:

1. That an Exhibition of Fine Arts shall take place in Cape Town, at the commencement of the ensuing year, in aid of the funds for the new Schools, as well as for the advancement of Art in this Colony, and other purposes.

2. That a Committee, consisting of about fourteen persons, of whom seven shall constitute a quorum, be appointed to carry the same

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1. Sole, K., 'Editorial Comment' in Africa Perspective No. 16, p. 4-5
 2. Kendall, F.K., A Short History of the South African Fine Arts Association, p. 5
 3. Langham-Carter, R.R. The Founding of the Public Collection in The South African National Gallery 1871 - 1971, p. 3 (My emphasis)

into effect; from whom a Sub-Committee shall be selected to superintend its details.

3. That an application be made to the Bishop of Cape Town for the use of the new School Rooms, now in the course of erection in the Government Gardens, for a period of not less than three weeks, - in which the following Works of Art be exhibited:- All Paintings of merit, whether in oil or water colours, - Drawings, executed in pencil or chalk, - Busts, Statues, Statuettes, Plaster Casts, Models, Medallions, and articles of Vertu.

4. That, with a view to give an impetus to local talent, certain prizes, proportionate to the funds received at the doors, shall be awarded to Competitors, for Works of Art sent to the Exhibition, upon subjects connected with South Africa; but that no Competitor shall be entitled to receive more than one Prize

5. That the Sub-Committee be requested to ascertain in whose possession the best Works of Art are to be found, and that the parties to whom they belong be requested to exhibit them."¹

Having outlined the basic events leading to the constitution of the SAFAS and listed the resolutions passed, I shall proceed to explore some aspects of the way in which 'art' was organised in the colony as part of a tradition of 'art' evolved in the metropolis. Because the constituting of the SAFAS evolved out of a "desire" to exhibit "Works of Art", I shall deal with the SAFAS in relation to the first exhibition in 1851.

The establishment of the SAFAS was due largely to "private initiatives", which, as I pointed out in Chapter II, according to Gramsci "form the

1. From the Catalogue of the First Fine Art Exhibition 1851. (I have included the first five points only).

apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling class."¹ I also mentioned the relationship between class structure, cultural hegemony and the state. In the light of this I shall hold the view that the small group of influential people who 'formally' organised the material and ideological production of 'art', and assumed positions of influence in the SAFAS, were part of a larger group who were in control of all the other aspects of social, economic and political life of the Colony. Having established this, I shall now go on to look briefly at the manner in which the SAFAS was constituted.

The manner in which 'art' was first 'formally organised in the Cape Colony is reminiscent of the tradition of "'men of goodwill', acting together in the 'public interest'".² This tradition is derived from the earlier tradition of "private aristocratic and upper middle class munificence and benevolence in public matters",³ and as such differs from a more open and democratic system of public patronage. This form of support tends to attract particular professional and intellectual interest groups, working within a "'mood of bewildered benevolence' and a 'consensus of goodwill'".⁴ For example, in the light of what Duminy has said of the mid-nineteenth century individualism amongst the British South Africans; the high degree of individualisation of the committee, accentuated by title and rank, tends, as Pearson says: to "lead to a search for the consensus among a number of individual opinions, rather than establish through formal debate, discussion and voting any strict divisions or balances of opinion."⁵ At the meeting in 1850 a Committee

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1. Quoted in Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 32
 2. Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 74
 3. *Ibid.*
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 76 (My emphasis)

was "appointed", and that committee then "elected" a Sub-Committee. The process of "appointment" often brings into play an informality in the procedures where hierarchies and friendships form the basis by which people come together. This was the means by which the SAFAS was structured.

This seems to go hand-in-hand with a fairly high degree of amateurism. An organisation such as the SAFAS tends to draw from the professional classes, various interest groups and organisations and "'public' figures who have a career in 'public life' and committee work, without necessarily having any specialist knowledge of the subject matter of the particular organisations. In this sense they are amateurs rather than professionals."¹ For example, in both the opening and closing addresses of the third Exhibition of Fine Art, the speakers are amateurs. Kendall points to the "'mood of bewildered benevolence'"² that was a characteristic of the amateurism that seemed to be part of the tradition of "'men of goodwill'". He says of the Rev. F.G. White, Principal of the Diocesan Collegiate School who delivered the closing address at the third exhibition: "Although the author laid no claim to be an artist himself, he had given a good deal of study and thought to the subject ... His outlook generally was orthodox and healthy, and more discriminating than one would find in any but a highly cultured man of that generation."³ Similarly the Very Rev. Dean Douglas, of Cape Town, who opened the exhibition with a 34 page lecture on 'art', opens his address by saying: "I have but little right to speak on such a subject; but I must say what I can."⁴ Rev. White also begins his closing address by saying:

1. Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 49

2. *Ibid.*, p. 74

3. Kendall, *op. cit.*, p. 10

4. Address delivered at the opening of the third exhibition of Fine Arts 1858, p. 5

"It is a task which I could well wish had fallen to abler hands; and especially into the hands of some one more conversant than myself with the Fine Arts,"¹ Both speakers are performing here in their 'private' capacities, but they are at the same time 'public figures', bringing with them, into the SAFAS, respectability, authority and a tradition of thinking about 'art' developed in the metropolis. This brings me to the next point which has to do with the establishing of a 'public' culture of 'art' out of the private collections of the wealthy classes.

Berman describes the first exhibition by saying that it "was made up largely of works of European art on loan from wealthier Cape Town residents"² Here again we have another important feature of the tradition of private aristocratic and upper middle class benevolence in public matters. This small circle of influential people who constituted the SAFAS sought to be in control of 'taste', 'art' and culture in the Colony. They were, together with those owners of private collections, still very much part of, or influenced by, the eighteenth century social relations of 'art'. Pearson describes the process of art marketing in this case as taking place "via direct transactions and commissions between artist and patron, and via major mixed exhibitions controlled and organised by artists in academies and societies"³ However throughout the second half of the nineteenth century this form of art marketing "was being supplemented by a new form of commercial marketing directed toward the new wealthy classes."⁴ In the British colonial context, we

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1. Address delivered at the close of the third Fine Art 1859, p. 3
 2. Berman, E. Art & Artists of South Africa, p. 259
 3. Pearson, op. cit., p. 40
 4. Ibid. In the colonial context the social relations of 'art' are neither pre-capitalist, nor are they truly capitalist. The style of organising 'art' is determined by the broader social context which was as I showed in an earlier quote from Bozzoli, shaped by a complex of pre-capitalist, semi-feudal and mercantile social and economic systems.

have the situation where it is not 'artists' who are controlling the exhibition of works, since there are no "local artists", but a small group of influential people who have established the SAFAS. The process whereby 'art' was to be "encouraged" and "cultivated" depended on the making 'public' of private collections. This in turn depended, as I have said on the tradition of "'men of goodwill'". It was a function of the Sub-Committee to ascertain who these "men" were, and to request that their works be exhibited. We have a situation then, in which an essentially "aristocratic and palatial style and practice"¹ is translated into a "public institution."² In other words, a private collection which relates to the taste of an individual or family, is being removed from its domestic environment for the purposes of public exhibition. This collection of the works of the wealthy classes then forms a basis for the education of the 'public' in matters of 'taste' and the general knowledge of 'art'. We have here what appears to be the democratisation of 'art works'. But these democratic ideals are based on more firmly established exclusive ideas. These latter ideas have to do with a whole set of traditional assumptions about 'art' and 'artists' which have to do with being serious and original, and therefore against popular taste. The question of 'taste', which I shall now examine, is dealt with on the cover of the catalogue to the first exhibition.

The quotation is from S. Lee's Elements of Art. It sets the tone, and attempts to give intellectual direction to the 'meaning' of the exhibition. It says: "To mature we must look, through the productions of the great Masters, and consider even the best works of Antiquity but as the Telescope of Taste, to mend our Vision, not bound our view."³

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1. Pearson, op. cit., p. 107
 2. Ibid.
 3. Catalogue of the first exhibition of Fine Art 1851

This is an example of the view which sees 'art' and culture as a received tradition within which the ideas of excellence and 'taste' can therefore be studied and learned, by seeking their common principles "in the works of excellence of all ages"¹ This seems to suggest that it is not only the works themselves, but also intellectual knowledge about 'art', that is needed for one to have 'taste'. Kendall mentions that at the original meeting of "art lovers", it was expressed that there was a need "to erect a permanent structure, classical in design" to be built ... for the display of pictures and sculptures, and conveniently arranged for the sale of paintings and delivery of lectures on Art."² In MacDougall's (Honorary Secretary of the Committee that organised the first exhibition) report to the Chairman, he makes the request for the building of a permanent gallery for "the study of acknowledged good works of art, the cultivation of taste, and consequently an improved state of society ..."³ Poynter, writing in the 1880's in England sums up the view outlined above by saying: "an acquaintance with the great works of art that are the standards of style; such works, that is to say, as have received the sanction of cultivated men of all times."⁴ Lee, like Poynter, "was involving a tradition of judgements, assumptions, beliefs and norms built up from the Italian Renaissance to the late eighteenth century"⁵ What seems to be the case here is that culture ('art'), which is being espoused by an educational elite, requires, for it to be understood, a certain degree of formal or informal education. This culture is also defined by this elite as the highest

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1. Quoted in Pearson, op. cit., p. 34
 2. Kendall, op. cit., p. 5 (My emphasis)
 3. MacDougall, Secretary's report upon the first annual exhibition of Fine Art in Cape Town 1851.
 4. Quoted in Pearson, op. cit., p. 41 (My emphasis)
 5. Ibid., p. 42

and best culture, and is therefore the culture of an elite. To try, therefore, to make this culture accessible to the 'public' seems to presuppose the 'public' becoming part of the elite.

Having briefly outlined the most important influences that shaped the nature and structure of the SAFAS, I shall now look at the secretary's report to the chairman, written after the first exhibition had closed down.

The secretary's report clearly states that the "sole object" behind the staging of the exhibition was "the promoting and encouraging of a taste for the "fine arts within the colony."¹ However the interest that such a project would serve seems varied. He starts by quoting Pippingelli in the Artists' and Amateurs' Magazine: "But when it is considered that a knowledge of art is a basis of good taste, to which an honourable distinction in society is attached; and besides, that innumerable advantages are attendant upon it both in private and popular sense, it assumes a character of serious importance, as a duty which all owe to themselves, to the community in which they live, and the world they inhabit".² Again there is in this quote a sense of a person's connection with art being associated with status, with being 'civilized' and 'cultured', of being like the upper middle classes. A knowledge of 'art' is also seen as a moral duty. Implicit in this is a belief which presupposes that a necessary relationship exists between the quality of an individual's response to 'art' and her/his general fitness for a human existence.

1. MacDougall, Secretary's Report 1851

2. Ibid.

MacDougall then goes on to say that "a latent taste for the fine arts does exist in this colony" but that "the distinguished artists among us "need to be given an 'incentive': "that great efforts will not be made without the prospect of corresponding reward, either of honour or profit, - that genius requires an incentive, - that its advancement is an object in which all are interested, - that as affecting our commercial relations with other countries the promotion of art is nationally important and would materially benefit the prosperity of the colony, -"¹

'Art', as I have said, is not only the concern of the individual, but also of the State. This is implicit in MacDougall's report.² He says that "the promotion of art is nationally important", and makes a close connection between the advancement of 'art' (cultural status) and the advancement of "commercial relations" (economic status). 'Art' receives the authority of the state by being associated with the relationships between states (nations), and the state and "nation" (and "commercial relations") receive authority from 'art'.

Finally, I would say that the language used by MacDougall gives a clear indication of the place given to 'art' as part of a particular intellectual tradition (a tradition of "civilization" "progress" "advancement" and "culture" etc.), words like: "knowledge", "distinction", "serious", "duty", "distinguished", "honour", "profit", "genius", "advancement", "benefit", and "prosperity". This tradition being associated with a particular life style, signposted on the one hand by words like "genius" and "knowledge"; and on the other, by words like "profit", "commercial" and "material benefit". The tradition being invoked here is one which

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1. MacDougall, Secretary's Report 1851 (My emphasis)
 2. MacDougall, Secretary's Report 1851.

has developed as part of the intellectual and the material life style of the upper middle classes, which is presented as the yardstick of 'nationhood' and its 'greatness'. This kind of viewpoint is also present in the introduction to the 3rd exhibition;¹ the writer says: "We will not be accused of assigning too high a place in the intellectual and moral sphere, to the fine arts, by any who respect the universal consent of civilized nations. They have always crowned with imperishable honors, along with the poet, the sculptor and the painter (P.vi) Yet we find no more decisive test of a nation's greatness than the estimation in which it held the fine arts at any period of its freedom It remains to be seen whether Taste has made sufficient progress at the Cape." (P.vii)

Having looked at the secretary's report on the first exhibition, I shall now examine the text of Douglas' address delivered at the opening of the third exhibition. I shall do so regarding this piece of 'art' criticism as being representative of this period. I shall also look at this text in the light of the SAFAS's attempt at encouraging an interest in 'art' in the settler community, and thereby to create a market for 'art works' and so make possible, or viable, the professionalisation of the 'artist'. My reference to the text will be by placing the page number in brackets after the quotation. This is to avoid lengthy footnotes.

The text addresses the question, what is painting? Because Douglas bases his investigations on the expressive-realist theory of painting, he answers the above question by way of another question: what is a painter? The common sense view of 'art' being understood in terms of an under-

1. Catalogue of the third exhibition of Fine Art, 1858.

standing of the 'artist', is central to the text. It also allows for the interrelating of "aesthetic, moral and social judgements" which again is central to the text. Douglas explains painting in terms of four qualities that together constitute a painter. The first quality is based on "what his eye sees", this is the "foundation of the painter's vision" (p. 11). He says that the "eye", and therefore also the "vision", can be improved by "culture" and will need "education". But it is essentially a quality which "God has first given" (p. 12). The second quality is "understanding" based on "great knowledge" (p. 12). The third quality is "perception" (i.e. of "beauty"), and this depends on "a right condition of the moral part of our nature" (p. 14). He singles out Christian 'art' as being "distinguished by the love of moral beauty more than of mere beauty of form" (p. 25). A patriarchal conception of beauty such as Douglas', sees beauty as 'female'. As such it is defied and shrouded by a veil of mystifying language. For example: "She is the shadow of the divine brightness cast upon earth. She is the type and symbol of the divine attributes" etc. (p. 17). But beauty is described in words that are also traditionally associated with what constitutes 'good taste', 'civilized', 'refined' and 'cultivated'; in short the life style of the upper middle classes. Words such as "pure", "modesty", "Temperance", "law", (p. 17) "calm", "serenity", "reserve", and "dignity" (p. 18). Apart from referring to the qualities of a good upbringing, it also refers to a kind of 'public order' in which the State is interested. The fourth quality is that of "imagination" (p. 18). It is this faculty that is capable of "revealing to us a great and most suggestive truth" (p. 19). This is reminiscent of Ruskin's theory of 'art' that I mentioned earlier, and which is based on a similar 'classicist' doctrine; namely that the artist's function is to "read the open secret of the universe". Douglas concludes that, in terms of a knowledge of the above qualities, "the painter

and what his art can do" (p. 21-22) is knowable. In his words: "He comes between us and nature to tell us what it is" (p. 22).

The third quality in the process of knowing the painter emerges as the most important. It determines the 'greatness' of a painter. He says: "Everything, of course, depends on what he is To make, then, a great painter, we must first find a great and noble man" (p. 23). This is essential because painting is seen as being "among the arts which elevate mankind" (p. 6). This view of painting I have shown is very much part of developments that had been taking place in the metropolis since the 1830's. For example, Ewart, speaking in Parliament in 1839, on public art galleries and other institutions, he says: "'The public libraries, the public galleries of art and science, and other public institutions for promoting knowledge, should be thrown open for the purpose of inducing men merely by the use of their outward senses to refine their habits and elevate their minds'".¹

Implicit in Douglas' approach is the belief in a universal and divinely appointed order, which is, as with Ruskin, fundamentally hierarchical in nature. For Douglas there is a hierarchy within the 'arts' - poets first; then painters, sculptors, etc. (p. 6-7). This is part of a broader system which places intellectual above manual labour, the 'fine arts' above the 'applied arts' and, importantly, the 'artist' above the 'audience'. As Douglas says to the audience: "We must go to him as to a teacher. We shall learn nothing: we shall get from him no good, unless we come to him with reverence, and believe that he can tell us truth which we know not, and beauties deeper and more wonderful than,

1. Quoted in Pearson, op. cit., p. 29

without his aid, we could see" (p. 27). We can see here what is essentially a part of the process of professionalizing the 'artist':

- "the elevating of artists ... to a social level nearer to that of their main patrons."¹ But Pearson goes on to say that: "Professionalization, however, involves more than social elevation for the practitioner: it also involves the development of a greater self-consciousness, assertiveness, and sense of having a specialist knowledge of and control over a distinctive tradition, body of skills and area of discourse."²

This process has the effect at the same time, of delimiting a specific area of 'cultural production' or 'creativity' for support. That which is not sanctioned as 'art', or does not fall under the general umbrella of the dominant culture is excluded from the material infrastructure necessary to all cultural development. And cultural movements and activities which threaten the ruling class hegemony are marginalized, excluded, and repressed. Finally Douglas looks at the problem of the means by which 'art' may be encouraged in the colony. He says that: "The nature of fine art is such that it will not grow of itself ... it must be cultivated before it can thrive" (p. 29). I have already mentioned the problems of trying to 'popularize' an elitist culture. For Douglas the situation in the colony is not a favourable one for the development of the 'arts'. It is a country where not even "men of taste can build their galleries" (p. 29). This view is echoed in the introduction to the catalogue of the third Exhibition where it says: "In countries like this, opportunities of cultivating taste in the fine arts are comparatively rare ... the great mass of people have never seen a statue or a picture that could give them the slightest conception of what

1. Pearson, op. cit., p. 25

2. Ibid.

true art can express by color and form."¹ Under such difficult circumstances, Douglas suggests that what needs to be done is to "gather books into our libraries" (p. 29) (for example) "till every work of Ruskin has adorned its shelves" (p. 30).

For Douglas, the primary objective of those concerned with 'art' is that: "We must also educate by means of art, and make art an instrument of education" (p. 39). Such an education should permeate all regions of the colonial 'way of life'. As he says, "The arts which minister to clothing, to the building and furnishing of our homes, and the like, are in the main useful; but, in so far as they aim at beauty as well as use, they depend upon the fine arts, and must be guided by the same principles And remember that this is a matter of the deepest moment for it affects the constant occupation of millions of working men" (p. 33) (My emphasis).

Douglas is clearly writing in the tradition of Ruskin and Arnold. It is a tradition that was being established in South Africa under very different conditions from those of mid-Victorian England. In the conclusion I shall look briefly at the implications of this for the subsequent cultural struggle in South Africa.

In this chapter I have looked at the social and historical process which gave rise to the first example of 'formally' organised 'art' in the British Cape Colony 1850 - 1871. In doing this I tried to show how 'art' and 'artists' were understood during this period, how they were organised, and what their role in society was.

1. Introduction to Catalogue of Third Exhibition of Fine Art 1858
(My emphasis)

Conclusion

In this essay I have looked at the social and historical processes in England that have 'shaped' the concept 'art', the practice of 'artists' and their role in society. I noted briefly the changes that took place from the seventeenth century up until the middle/late nineteenth century. I then looked at how this English/European tradition of 'art' was established in South Africa between 1850-1871. In both these related areas of investigation I tried to adhere to the main contention of this essay. Keeping to this I would now like to draw some tentative conclusions. These few concluding remarks are founded on the content of this essay, but relate more specifically to the contemporary South African situation.

The main purpose of this essay has been to problematise the concepts 'art', 'artist' and culture, and their role in the South African social formation. In doing this I have tried to show that 'art', its theory and practice, its organisational forms and the role assigned to it in society, are all profoundly political. I have therefore questioned views which see 'art' as being 'above' politics. 'Art', in my view, is not 'neutral'. It plays a dynamic (ideological) role in our society, being as it is, part of a broader means of communication which has been distorted by the unequal relations of power which have existed in South Africa, in its colonial form, since the first military conquest here. This view of 'art' has led me to believe that the liberal humanist ideology, which informed the tradition of thought-about 'art' and its practice etc. dealt with in this essay, has distorted our understanding of the social and class determined nature of human beings. This it has done primarily by dividing society into separate realms; the political, economic and cultural. This has resulted in its

inability firstly to acknowledge or defend its own ideological assumptions; and secondly to recognise the class nature of culture. As such liberal humanism has perpetrated a particular commonsense view of 'art' and culture which I have shown has historically been that of the ruling classes. Another consequence of the liberal humanist view is its attention given to 'cultural differences', perceived or imagined. Such attention may be of value, but in the South African context it has been used as a very effective smokescreen for the exploitation of the working class. I would conclude that 'art' generally, and 'art' education in particular, could begin to explore and demystify the relationship between the individual and society. This would entail a political commitment to ending exploitative and oppressive practices that threaten not only the majority of people everyday, but the entire plant. Marxist and Feminist analyses of 'cultural production' including 'art' have in recent years begun to examine these issues.

By looking at such concepts as the State, 'public taste', 'quality' and 'standards', I have tried to show the complex interrelationship between aesthetic, moral and social judgements. Again I would see it as necessary to expose the political content of such judgements, and always to ask: in whose interests are such pronouncements being made? This is particularly important for 'art' students and those struggling against various forms of cultural oppression. All these above concepts are brought into play in the school, college, university or 'art' organisation. It is here that a particular, and elitist, notion of culture and 'art' is universalised as the culture. Here one is told (or shown) what is 'best', the most 'significant' and of the highest 'quality' and 'standards'. At the same time 'art' is presented in such a way, that to understand it, one needs to have a comprehensive knowledge of the history of that particular 'art'. This means that

those who do not see themselves as part of that history are, in a sense, excluded from participating in and understanding 'art'. It is in these places of 'cultural production' that a serious attempt should also be made to break down the boundaries established between the 'fine arts' and 'crafts'. I would conclude then that at the very least, unlike the 'artists' and educators working within the SAFAS, the relationship between 'cultural producers' and the South African social formation today, should be posed as problematic. Their approach to 'art' should preferably encompass an exploration between self and society, and should include extensive coverage of the relationship between class struggle, racism and sexism in the social relations of 'cultural production' in South Africa. 'Art' should be seen by them to refer to more than the products of 'artists', it should be expanded to embrace the whole range of 'made things' and the rituals and ways of life of those who produce them. This means that 'art' should encompass the contradictions and paradoxes which comprise the South African social formation. This argument opposes any proposition for a single view of 'art', and would question seriously the meaning and desirability of a 'national art'. There exists at present in South Africa a plurality of approaches and commitments which cannot necessarily be compromised because they stand for distinct social groups and states of being. But they should be allowed to flourish within the counter-hegemonic groups and individuals. It is out of this source of engagement and struggle that the future of 'art' in South Africa shall be determined.

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