

NAME: Carl Becker

DEGREE: Master of Fine Art

DEPARTMENT: Fine Art

FIELD OF RESEARCH: South African art institutions

TYPE OF THESIS: Partial fulfillment for the degree of Master  
of Fine Art.

SUPERVISOR: Professor R. Brooks

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ABSTRACT.

## Section 1

Title: " South African Art Institutions - Their strategy and formation, with particular reference to the question of legitimacy."

I have examined the relationship between the art institution and its social base, and the way in which legitimacy is sought and maintained under changing social circumstances.

## Section 2

The social pattern of 'avante garde artist' vs. 'philistine public' has tended to be the context within which 20th century art has developed. The consequent disjuncture between the public art institution and its social base was subsequently accepted as the natural condition of Fine Art production. During the 1980's, two significant factors were to influence this 'natural' condition:

- i) The demise of 'modernism' internationally, which broadened the scope of allowable objects for consideration as Fine Art.
- ii) Political mobilisation in South Africa was accompanied by calls for democratisation and charges of 'elitism' being levelled against many public institutions.

These factors have combined to make the S.A. art institutions (public galleries, tertiary teaching institutions and national art competitions) re-assess their legitimacy, particularly in terms of 'accountability' and 'representativeness'. A close examination of these two factors is essential if one is to gain insight into the current condition of the public art institutions.

### Section 3

This research is an attempt to understand the history and the current nature of the shifting relationship between the art institutions and the 'public' in South Africa. A further goal is to assess the extent to which concepts that are valid within the realm of the polity can be transposed into the cultural realm: A tendency prevalent within the cultural debate in South Africa during the 1980's.

### Section 4

The emphasis of this mini thesis is on the artworld's perception of its social role. I therefore look at the way changing attitudes are reflected in the statements and writing of leading figures within this sector. The method is to critically analyse texts that pertain to my chosen area of research.

SOUTH AFRICAN ART INSTITUTIONS: THEIR FORMATION AND STRATEGY,  
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY.

CARL BECKER

I would like to thank the Human Sciences Research Council for providing the financial resources which made this research possible. I am also indebted to Ruth Becker and James Whyle, who provided the typewriter and word processor. And to Robert Brooks for his patience and understanding.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

My aim in this research has been to look closely at how changes occurred within the relationship between the art institution and its social base. My concern has been with two main aspects;

- i) That of the institution's perception of its standing in relation to the public, and
- ii) How these perceptions have led to differing factions, struggling for dominance within the artworld itself.

Differing perceptions of the social role and responsibility of the art institution have led to significant conflicts within the artworld. Questions as to what extent art institutions should be answerable to the public have always been contentious, particularly over the last decade. However, the roots of attitudes and the critiques of these attitudes, are rooted in historical circumstances at the turn of the century. I have consequently had to examine, albeit briefly and schematically at times, the origins of the present debates.

To be hegemonic (in control) of the major institutions in SA - the public galleries and Universities, is to wield power over resources, as well as to be in a position to exert considerable influence over the market. And over the aesthetics governing the production of 'art'. Although aesthetics (simply: what the 'art' looks like) is one result of these struggles, the influence on 'art' is not all of what these struggles are about. Aesthetics is often both the means and the ends of these struggles. Struggles for hegemony are about power, whether they are couched in aesthetic terms or not.

Struggles for hegemony within the artworld invariably involve attempts to undermine the legitimacy of the opposition. Unlike politics, however, legitimacy cannot simply be gauged

by referring to 'objective' principles. Within the political realm, for example, the notion of democracy is universally recognised. The realm of culture, however, contains very few such principles, determined, as it is, by vaguer notions such as 'taste'. The transposition of terms from the realm of the polity to the cultural realm is therefore a problematic one. Similarly, legitimacy cannot be asserted by proving one's dominance in the marketplace, for instance. Subverting the legitimacy of the opposition therefore adopts other forms.

The drive for hegemony invariably involves a legitimisation of one's own position, and a 'de-legitimisation' of the opponent's.

The above process can be seen operating with regard to three main themes:

I) APPEALS TO MODERNITY:

This was a major factor at play in the mid century. See section 1. Part two.

ii) CLAIMS TO REPRESENT THE NATION:

This is a continual theme. It has been used by establishment figures to claim that they are dealing with 'the finest art produced in the country.' The counter charge has been that this is an 'elitist' position, which excludes the cultural product of the majority of the populace.

iii) CLAIMS TO 'AUTHENTICITY':

The charge of inauthenticity is often made in relation to aesthetic value judgements, and has recurred throughout the latter half of C20 South African art.

PREFACE; A DEFINITION OF TERMINOLOGY.

This preface is necessary to define:

i) Concepts that are not widely in use within general art historical writing, but originate from other disciplines , like sociology and politics. ( Legitimacy, Ideology, Institutions.)

ii) Terms familiar to art history, but ones that have specific art-historical connotations - like Academy and Modernism - where I have adapted the sense of the word to my specific subject matter.

iii) Other terms/concepts are themselves subject to extensive debate. It has been necessary to set parameters on them for purposes of brevity. (Ideology, Modernism)

## IDEOLOGY AND LEGITIMATING MYTHS

I have used the term 'legitimizing myth' to refer to the set of ideas and attitudes - which may not necessarily be conscious ones - which provide the basic justification sought by individuals or groups within the artworld.

The term has elements of the political concept of 'ideology' and the anthropological (structuralist) concept of 'myth.'

For my purposes the narrower definition of ideology as "...the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests or, more broadly, from a definite class or group." (Williams 1989;156) is the one I have made use of.

I have borrowed the definition of myth as it is used within structuralist anthropology. According to Burnham, this definition of myth is as follows;

"Myths are not falsehoods; rather they are modes of communication and exchange that reflect a set of social values and institutions." (1973;5)

This definition is used to emphasize the difference between the Marxist perception of Myth, where myth is regarded as falsehood.

Also that:

"Myths represent collective thought, or what a society thinks about itself and its conditions." (ibid)

And further that;

"In situations where any form of social communication becomes sufficiently routinized and sophisticated, mythic explanations of its acts are inevitable."  
(ibid;11)

In the same way that primitive societies used myth to distinguish themselves from nature and to mediate the nature/culture divide, so the 'art myth' mediates relations

between the 'artworld' and the 'non artworld'. Legitimizing myths, then, are more than just public relations: the legitimating myth mediates between the art institution and its social base.

## INSTITUTION AND ARTWORLD

I have used the term 'institution' to signify

"Any organised element of a society." (Williams  
1989;169)

I have thus allowed myself to focus on both 'formal' and 'informal' art institutions, from universities to community art centres, public art galleries and national art competitions, where events surrounding these institutions have pertained to questions of legitimacy.

Teaching institutions, academic publications, commercial galleries, newspaper reviews and art competitions all influence each other, and combine to effect, albeit on a small scale, what has been called an 'art industry' (Hughes 1990;387) (Haacke 1986;60). I have used the term 'artworld' to draw attention to two qualities of these institutions: Their interdependence, and their relative insularity, or autonomy, from the 'non' art world.

## THE ACADEMY

The Academy is traditionally understood to be the system of teaching whereby artists are trained, usually from an early age, in a set of representational conventions. It constitutes a formal discursive system, which represents 'official' or 'establishment' interests.

The first Academy was set up in Florence in 1562, and its aim was to emancipate artists from control by the guilds. It had an intellectual dimension - lectures in geometry and anatomy and discussions of artistic theory were held. The emergence of the Academy confirmed the changed status of the artist in the Renaissance. In Paris, the Academy of Painting and Sculpture was established in 1648. The Academy became an instrument for imposing official standards and principles of taste:

"It arrogated to itself a virtual monopoly of teaching and of exhibition and by applying rigidly its own standards of membership, came to wield an important, if not decisive, economic influence on the profession of artist." (Osborne 1978:5)

By 1790 there were well over 100 such academies in Europe. these academies were also the product of an awareness on the part of the State of the role that art might play in the broader society. The Church and court were no longer the chief patrons of art, and good design was recognised as economically important to the needs of commerce and industry. The copying of casts and life drawing were paramount, and classical subjects were encouraged, as the academies became the purveyors of the Neo- Classical.

The 'academic' skills, of compositional conventions, chiaroscuro, drawing, anatomy, poses, symbolism, and perspective, remained more or less static for three hundred years - from the C16 to the late C19:

"If Jacopo Pontormo (1494 - 1557) had walked into the life class of one of the big teaching ateliers of Paris

Institute of the Arts, in 1990, he might not recognize it as an art school at all; and who could blame him?" (Hughes 1990;11)

Hughes defines the values of the academy as ...meaning, in essence, the transmission of disciplined skills based on drawing from the live model and the natural motif." (ibid)

In France, towards the end of the c18, French Revolutionary sentiment was especially bitter about the exclusive priveleges enjoyed by members of the Academy, and many artists, including David, demanded that it be disbanded. This step was taken in 1793, but the Academy was reinstated as the Academie des Beaux Arts. Opposition to the academies was accentuated by the breach between creative artists and the bourgeois public, after aristocratic patronage had declined.

A hostility to the values of the Academy is generally traced to late C19 French painting, which co- incides with the start of 'modernism'. The conventions of the Academy were seen to be in the service of the 'bourgeoisie' rather than in the service of 'truth'. cf. Manet, in 1867: "The artist does not say today 'Come and see faultless work', but 'Come and see sincere work.'" (Nochlin 1978;36). It is also from around this era that the hostility to the academy was extended to a hostility to formal education (the influence of Rousseau), and a consequent apotheosis of the naive and the primitive. These artists were revolting against what they percieved to be the hypocrisy of their own class: Laforgue proposed that the Academies be shut down; Courbet refused to set himself up as a professor, saying that art could not be taught, and Pissarro even suggested that the Louvre be burnt down. (ibid)

The Academy was thus seen by the 'radicals' as an institution for the propagation of the world-view of the 'bourgeoisie'. Its conventions corresponded to the social experience of that class. As such, to the 'ruling class';

" ... they were not even thought of as conventions but were thought of as the only way of recording and preserving eternal truths. Yet to the other social classes such professional painting appeared to be so remote from their own experience , that they saw it as a mere social convention, a mere accoutrement of the class that ruled over them: which is why in moments of revolt, painting and sculpture were often destroyed." (Berger 1980;65)

Two important strands of thought emerged from this C19 scenario. They have both assumed the status of orthodoxies, and both of them are relevant to South Africa today;

i) The Academy represents the interests of the ruling class; Primarily through its propagation of 'bourgeois ' conventions and forms, which limits the area of what is deemed to be appropriate subject matter (and form) for 'art'. ie. The definition of submissable objects into the arena of 'art' is limited by 'establishment' interests.

ii) The conventions of the Academy are hostile to 'creativity': ie. They are repressive. This perception led to the valorisation of primitive and naive art, as well as child art. More importantly, within art education, it has led to the promotion of 'teaching' over 'training'.

In South Africa, the network of tertiary Fine Art institutions, public collections and their connection to 'the market', via the art competitions, has been equated to a modern - day Academy:

" These 'major' high art competitions ...are beginning to achieve something of an institutional status. Many artists appear to be producing work for a kind of salon acceptance. The new Academy emphasises media purity (and) art as a professional visual product." (Richards

1988;76)

Part of the reason why this network qualifies for this definition is its reliance on 'exclusivist evaluative regimes' - its refusal to enlarge the areas of experience to include, say, popular culture or community art projects.

The new Academy's insistence on the right to make value judgements and to uphold standards of 'quality' was historically anticipated by the C19 French Academy. And the 'left' in South Africa bears the same relationship to the academy as the 'left' painters of that time.

## PART ONE: THE COLONIAL COMPLEX

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM:

One of the most enduring characteristics of South African art has been its dependence on European precursors. The European precedent has often been referred back to when introducing new 'styles' or when making changes in art institutions. The institutionalisation of art, and the way that the artworld is structured, as well as the objects it considers valid for inclusion as 'art', have all tended to follow upon European models. Even in the 1980's, a decade characterised by a search for an 'own' South African identity, constant references to the 'Postmodern' were made, as if to assure the outside world that we were up to date.

The Fine Arts system in this country has developed out of a colonial legacy. Systems and traditions which are more 'African', or at least more appropriate to 'African' tradition and circumstance, have largely been ignored, suppressed or overridden.

A dependence on the culture of the metropolis is to be expected in the early period of art's institutionalisation. But, despite the appearance of the structures of an independent artworld, this dependence has continued to the present day. I have called this pattern the colonial complex, to draw attention to the symptoms of an insecurity and of a lack of confidence in aesthetic values. I have also referred to it as the centre-periphery pattern, where 'culture' - in the C20 meaning a succession of styles - has tended to evolve within the metropolis, and be 'exported' to outlying areas.

Perceptions on how artists stand in relation to the problems posed by the centre-periphery pattern often relate directly to struggles over legitimacy.

Below, I discuss a few descriptions of the centre-periphery syndrome, and some responses to the problem. I also make some comparisons with conditions in other countries, where these

have seemed appropriate.

Kenneth Clark has described this pattern of movement from centre to periphery:

" The history of European art has been, to a large extent, the history of a series of centres, from each of which radiated a style...that style dominated the art of the time, became in fact an international style, which was metropolitan at its centre, and became more and more provincial as it reached the periphery." (1981;50)

The influence of a powerful metropolis has always been a characteristic of art in Europe, from Rome in the C15 to the mid C17, when Paris assumed this role. ( Hughes 1990; 25 ) In the post WW2 years, New York has been widely perceived to be the 'imperial centre'.

Under the burden of the colonial complex, much South African art has been regarded, by South Africans, as of a lowly standard and being out of step with international developments. These are the chief qualities of what, negatively, has come to be known as 'provinciality'. The experience of being isolated from the 'centre' was shared by pre-war American and Australian artists:

"...for most of the two-hundred-year history of white Australia the colonial experience had bitten deeply into us and caused a reflex known as the Cultural Cringe...(it).... is the assumption that whatever you do in the field of writing , painting... (art) is of unknown value until it is judged by people outside your own society. The essence of cultural colonialism is that you demand of yourself that your work measure up to standards that cannot be shared or debated where you live. " (Hughes;4)

The colonial complex establishes a stranglehold, where the only way out of the stasis of the provinces, for the 'progressive ' artist, is to visit Europe, to frequently make acquaintance with new developments. (2) Whereas a visit to

Rome in the early C17 may have exposed the artist to a cultural repository, to the aura of the antique, a visit to Paris in the early C20 was an exposure to the metropolis and to the values of the city. The atmosphere and ethos of the modern metropolis provided the backdrop against which modernist aesthetics were formed.

#### RESPONSES TO THE PROBLEM:

In South Africa, there have been two main responses to the centre-periphery pattern:

i) The dominant response of the South African art world in the C20 has been to cling to a European identity.

ii) The second, and more recent response has been to assert an 'African' identity.

i) : The basis of this response rests on the recognition that Fine Art is essentially a European practice. Put simplistically, the resultant attitude regards content as something that can be determined by local conditions, but innovations on the formal level would essentially depend on Europe for their lead. Below is an example of this type of attitude:

"The vexed question of Eurocentrism is largely a futile one... most of the art produced in the world today is Eurocentric... White South Africans are brought up in this tradition and black South Africans have to come to terms with it just like Indians or Eskimos, if they want to be part of the modern world. The European vision dominates because... in today's world it works." (Leigh 1992;27)

At times, this attitude has led to a kind of snobbery that perceives the local environment as a culturally sterile one. Accordingly, 'true' culture, culture of quality and novelty, can only originate from the metropolis. Adherents of this response have tended to refer back to the European precedent when needing to legitimise their actions. However, the history of colonial conquest and the subsequent Apartheid system have made them particularly vulnerable to accusations of elitism and cultural imperialism.

ii) : This response manifested as a form of nationalism or patriotism in the middle decades of the C20. Since the late 1970's, artists have turned towards finding an 'African' identity, rather than a 'South African' one. It represents an ongoing search for an 'authentic' indigenous identity, a kind of cultural liberation or independence, where the artist is free from stigmatising ties to the colonial 'centre'. One observer has described the aesthetics of this response as:

"... centered on the problems of coining a formal language that looks to Africa for a relevant syntax...a kind of rough-hewn, even contemptuous, disregard for traditional fine art materials; and, instead, a seeking out of those materials or modalities that will somehow be expressive of a Third World situation. (Dubow 1986;62)

According to the founder of the Johannesburg Art Gallery , Florence Phillips, the expected end result of the establishment of formal art institutions would be a flourishing 'National School'. The expectation of artistic independence was congruent with the eventual aims of early colonists in the political realm. (1)

The appearance of a National School would seem to be a natural outcome of the development of a functioning Fine Arts system. In C17 Holland, for example, the flourishing market for still lifes and genre paintings led, eventually, to the perception of a specific manner, which would subsequently be displayed in museums as 'The Dutch School'. A similar result followed the evolution of a 'modern system of the arts' in C18 England. (Fuller 1981;48). The issues thrown up by the centre-periphery dynamic in SA had already been experienced in England in Hogarth's era (1697 - 1764). Hogarth believed

it was necessary to found a national visual tradition and to oppose 'debased' European imports. ( Fuller 1980;47)

With the ascendancy of 'modernism ' internationally, the values of regionality and of specificity to place were ignored. The salient feature of modernism is the 'progress' model of the fine arts.(3) This model became the dominant one. This development confounded the early expectations of a National School, since the dynamics of modernism perpetuated dependence, rather than alleviating it.(4) The rapid succession of 'movements' emanating from the Continent compounded the sense of isolation and cultural insecurity of those artists working in the geographically remote areas.

London has been the principle 'centre' for South African artists. But English art has always stood in the same relation to European art. Here too, the dynamics of modernism added a further dimension to this pattern, creating tensions between the English 'provincials', the advocates of 'Englishness', and those who saw Paris as the all-important new centre. In 1917, Clive Bell, an advocate of Post Impressionism, called English Vorticism the "...new spirit in this little backwater, ... which already gives signs of being as insipid as any other puddle of provincialism."  
(Hughes;178)

In America, the same dynamics emerged. Although Americans had been politically independent for about 150 years, their writers and artists were still dependent on Europe. A sojourn in Paris was essential to any aspiring 'high' artist in the early C20 and the pre-WW2 years. But, in the 1930's, artists like Stuart Davis (b1894) and Edward Hopper (b1883) began to assert a new and specifically 'American' consciousness, heralding the worthiness of the native American sensibility.

Hopper and Davis demonstrated a 'modern' sensibility that was unashamed of being American, but yet still drew from European influences. In 1927, Hopper stated his belief that "...now or

in the near future, American art should be weaned from its French mother." (Plagens 1992;53) Hopper resented being lumped together with the 'American Scene' painters, like Thomas Benton. The link to Europe was important to him: he visited Paris three times between 1906 and 1910. His subject, however, remained modern American life.

Davis also saw himself as an internationalist, acquiring subject matter and formal solutions from diverse sources. Yet he also experienced the same tension between his American roots and the powerful tug of the metropolis. In a 1920's notebook he complained that the American modern art scene "... worships a foreign god." (Plagens 1992;53) But later, in the 1950's, he proclaimed that he was "...strictly a European (French, that is) man myself, ...although forced ...to live in the American Art Desert as exile. " (ibid) This disclaimer reminds one of the Australian artist Albert Tucker's repudiation of his country: " I am a refugee from Australian culture," he declared upon his departure to Japan in 1947. Tucker visited London and Paris, thereafter settling on the continent. (Hughes 1981;155)

Provincialism is more than a matter of distance from a centre. There is a psychological sense of inferiority - or superiority - that may have to be dealt with. In Georgian England, Hogarth had grappled with the problem of dealing with a dominant international style, that of Raphaelesque Classicism. Hogarth's slogan was " To nature and yourself appeal, nor learn from others what to feel." But Hogarth was himself incapable of transcending the force of the central tradition. A painting which he regarded as one of his best works, titled 'Paul before Felix' is based on Raphael's cartoons. Clark refers to it as

"...one of the most ridiculous travesties of the classical style ever exhibited." (ibid;52)

In spite of the fact that Hogarth had achieved his own lively and anecdotal manner, he could not escape the dominance of what had already become a moribund metropolitan style when he

wished to be taken seriously.

According to Clark, provincial art is surest of success when it is concrete, when it is not concerned with "the abstract achievements of style", but with "what we see, and what interests us in life" (ibid) The characteristics of a positive and independent provincial art are "...its narrative dimension; its pleasure in the facts, its lyricism, and its frequent achievement of a visionary intensity. " (ibid;58)

One of the fears of the provincials' is that the dominant international style will corrupt "the freshness of native responses" (ibid;60). This question is also pertinent to SA where it has applied particularly to how 'black' artists deal with European conventions. Whites of all political persuasions have tended to want to insulate black artists, often whilst applying different criteria to their own work.

Clark sees the issue for the provincial artist as one of "how far does he attempt to master the weapons of an international style?" He believes that a painter who ignores what is vital in contemporary art will become a provincial in the worst sense of the word, and that assimilation of international styles doesn't necessarily hinder the development of the virtues of provincialism. This would seem to apply to American artists like Hopper and Davis, as well as to the Australian artists of the 'Angry Decade', c1937 - 1947.

The question of a 'national identity ', and of 'provincialism' vs 'internationalism' applied to South African art with more urgency from the 1930's onward, where the process of assimilation of 'new' styles began in earnest.

Below are two accounts of South African artists coming to terms with the above problems:

"That small core of thinking artists who constituted what passed for an avante garde, the pioneer generation of the decades between the Thirties and the Forties, was largely engaged in a struggle to come to terms with

of the decades between the Thirties and the forties, was largely engaged in a struggle to come to terms with modernism. The second generation (those of the decades of the Fifties up to the mid-Seventies) extended their efforts to narrow the gap between internationalism and provincialism." (Dubow 1986;60)

The following account is drawn from Professor Alan Crump's inaugural lecture in 1981:

"According to this account the pre-sixties "slavish" belief in the ideal of an "african" identity, mixed with a servitude to "European styles", resulted in superficiality...A fallow period, of almost two decades, followed with local artists striving tirelessly to absorb and emulate international art trends.....Then around the mid-seventies art in South Africa began to change in a highly encouraging way. There was less reliance on European and American art styles. What in fact occurred was a focussing on local source material." (Richards, 1990;37)

However, the relationship between the South African artist and the art of Europe has never simply been a question of the assimilation of styles, as developments since the mid-1970's attest to. The legacy of colonialism (and apartheid) have added a political dimension to aesthetic debates in this country, which have compounded the already complex questions of identity and legitimacy.

These have added to the normal centre-periphery pattern. In South Africa, the dimensions added by the racial legacy have been described as relations of 'dominance-dependence':

"...the cultural relations between South Africa on one hand and European and American art movements on the other, constitute one such cycle of dominance-dependence....In the visual arts we are very familiar with this cycle and its one-way flow of information. Within South Africa, too, the patterns of dominance-dependence are re-activated, placing the rural hinterland and provincial towns at the narrowest end of the cultural funnel; the patterns, however, are not only

spatial, but exist in the relations between social classes and between ethnic groups as well." (Younge 1979;44)

The struggle of local values over international style has surfaced particularly at times when people have had to deliberate about what to reward at art competitions. This situation in SA has been described as "...the dilemma which ordained that critics choose between a relatively-sterile nationalism and a substantially-eclectic internationalism in local art." (Berman 1974;283)

The centre-periphery pattern is a complex one, and is not unique to South Africa, or indeed, the ex-colonies. What is unique, however, is the way that aesthetic decisions have come to be loaded with moral and political dimensions, and this 'loading' has had a significant impact on the present orientation of our public art institutions.

## NOTES

1. "The English began to see their rule as essentially a transitional phase, in which they were to act as trustees rather than freeholders. Burke saw the Empire as one of ideas rather than military occupation: "As long as you...keep this country as the sanctuary of Liberty, wherever men worship freedom they will turn their faces towards you." The English taught in many ways , notably through religion and commerce, but no one doubted that the pupils would eventually emerge from tutelage, and that the bonds of mutual interest would be stronger, because voluntary." (Johnson 1985;320).

This is Johnson's perception of the English colonist's sensibility in the late Georgian era. (circa 1780) He sees the renewed, 'true' age of Imperialism developing as a response to the economic crisis of 1878 - 80. Ruskin's influence and emphasis on racial superiority was part of this 'second wave' of Imperialism. cf Rhodes'1877 statement: "I contend that we are the first race in the world, and that the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race." (ibid,343) The humanitarian strain of English imperialism continued, and combined with the strident 'Ruskinian' one. Mathew Arnold was an admirer of the German philosopher Herder, who in the 1780's had attacked the assumption that 'civilisation' or 'culture' was a unilinear process, leading to the high point of C18 European culture: "The very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature." (Williams,1989;89) This account of English imperialism refers also to the next section.

2. It is interesting to note the changing applications of the word 'progressive' in South African culture. In the 1930's, Battiss used it to refer to those artists who were in touch with the latest developments in Europe, signifying the perpetuation of the bond with Europe. During the 1980's, 'progressive' became synonymous with the culture of political liberation, part of which was a liberation from 'neo-

colonialism'. (See also 'Mid - Century'.)

3. The notion of 'progress' in the Fine Arts is a contentious one, but it is a central tenet of Modernist thought. This model was attendant on the installation of Fine Arts institutions in the Mid Century. This is one writer's summary of this model:

" As movement is the central concept in Greenberg's legitimation of Modernism it is worth considering it at some greater length. A familiar model of movement is used; the dominant version of historical motion, it is the one we might call the problem/solution model: any given 'generation' of artists attempts to solve the problems they inherited from the previous generation; the solutions they provide are only partial ones; so, in turn, their failures provide 'problems' for the succeeding generation. An early version of this model was provided by Vasari: Giotto was more successful at rendering three-dimensional space than had been Cimabue; Masaccio represented an improvement over Giotto...and so on, the whole effort culminating in Michaelangelo and Raphael. This Renaissance model has been taken over into the Modern period. The basic components the historian has to deal with are 'movements' in art (produced by 'generations' of artists) and the relationship between these movements is causal. This version lends the illusion of purposive movement to what might equally well be described as a contingent succession of collapses, bringing conservation and continuity out of impermanence and waste, providing the basis for... 'a proud art which is no-one's servant, posing all its problems from within.' (Burgin 1986;13)

4. Younge has described the response of artists to the Modern Movement:

"Never mind its colonial past, South Africa's geographical isolation from the well-spring of the Modern Movement has gnawed at the soul of those artists, both black and white, who see in parochialism as much slackness as they see worth." (1991;25)

## PART TWO. SECTION ONE : FOUNDERS.

### INTRODUCTION.

This section focusses on the founders , or patrons, of our early public institutions. They were from the upper echelons of colonial society, and maintained strong links to Britain. The confidence in their 'mission' - to impart a measure of 'taste' to the colonies - allowed them to ignore what would later become central issues - notions of community consultation and accountability. Their perception of culture was that it was an evolutionary process, leading to the high point of European civilisation. This ideology allowed them to believe that cultural initiatives taken by them would eventually benefit the whole community.

### SECTION ONE : 'FOUNDERS'

The Western practice of 'art' was introduced to the colonies in the form of topographical works, documentation of plants and animal rarities, and depictions of the indigenous people. This colonial experience was duplicated in the fledgling Australian settlement, where artists, trained in the European C18 conventions, struggled to accomodate the alien features of the antipodean landscape. (Hughes 1981;31)

It took two hundred years for the Cape Colony to reach the point where social life was sufficiently organised and secure to allow for the leisure activity of 'Art';

"Although South Africa was settled from the West more than three centuries ago, for the first 250 years the community was primarily engaged in the effort of drawing a living from the soil." (Berman 1974;1)

Artistic activity at the Cape coalesced in the form of the S.A. Fine Art Society. (SAFAS), founded in 1850. The prevailing sensibility amongst the gentlemen of SAFAS was defined by the notion that 'art' was chiefly a matter of the

exercise of 'taste'. (Steyn 1985;29) Whilst the public exhibition of art was seen as a way of uplifting the local inhabitants, it was also a message from the periphery to the metropolis that a certain level of 'culture' had been achieved. This was important to the benign souls in London, who saw 'culture' as a benefit of their interventions, and a duty of the colonist. And it may have alleviated feelings of cultural insecurity and backwardness amongst refined society in Cape Town.

The introduction of 'culture' to the colonies was considered important, since it was seen as part of an unfolding destiny where the indigenous people were part of an evolutionary process, which would eventually reach the level of the European mother country. The C18's perception of culture was  
"...what we would now call a unilinear process, leading to the high and dominant point of C18 European culture."  
(Williams 1983;89)

This widely held belief was part of the ideology of colonialism, and helped to justify the subjugation of the indigenous people.

From the beginning of its institutionalisation, art was part of the cultural affect of colonialism. It seemed that a degree of coercion and suppression of the indigenous culture was a necessary precondition for the imposition of colonial culture. 'Art' was an indispensable part of the makeup of the 'cultured' colonial. It offered respite from the harshness of colonial life and allowed for the development of the 'sensibilities'.

Our popularly held perception of Victorian cultural life tends to be that of a genteel and repressed one. Yet the proponents of that culture were informed by an aggressively expansionist spirit of immense ambition. This is exemplified in Oxford University's first Fine Arts Professor, John Ruskin. This account of his inaugural lecture, in 1870, indicates the extent to which the idea of 'culture' had

become indistinct from the aims of Imperialism:

"The theatre of the Oxford museum, where he was due to lecture, was filled to capacity, with hundreds outside clamouring to get in....Through the icy streets of Oxford, the bizarre and spiky figure of Ruskin, like the Pied Piper, led the eager and academic mob...Ruskin seemed chiefly concerned not with art in an academic guise... but with a call to racial heriosm:

"We are undegenerate in race... We have the firmness to govern and the grace to obey...Will you youths of England make your country again a royal throne of kings, ... a mistress of learning and of the Arts? This is what England must do or perish; she must found colonies as fast and far as she is able...; seizing every fruitful piece of waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching these her colonists that.. their first aim is to advance the power of England by land and sea."  
(Johnson 1985;318)

Darwin's 'Origin of the Species' had been published in 1859, and the concept of the survival of the fittest seemed to describe the facts of English history so well, that it seemed that the laws of science endorsed England's global policy. Ruskin was not a 'Darwinist'. He was more prone to an 'organicist' view of the ideal society, and disapproved of the crude competitiveness of Victorian industrialism. (Fuller 1983;282) He was, however, highly authoritarian:

"My continual aim has been to show the eternal superiority of some men to others.. and to show also the advisibility of appointing such persons or person to guide, lead, or on occasion even to compel and subdue, their inferiors, according to their better knowledge and wiser will." (Ibid;280)

Ruskin had many enthusiastic followers, and, convinced that the moulding of the chosen race required physical as well as intellectual discipline, he set his students to work digging roads. Weak health prevented Cecil Rhodes from taking part,

but another disciple, Alfred Milner, was amongst those who toiled away. Milner was later to become the Governor of the Transvaal (1901), and was an ardent believer in the innate supremacy of the English imperialists.

Attending to the reconstruction of South Africa after the Anglo-Boer War in 1902, Milner had intended to withhold political power from the whites of the new colonies until British ascendancy was assured. (Davenport 1978;151) Milner, anxious to avoid a post-war spread of poor quality housing, had requested Herbert Baker's services in the Transvaal, where he arrived in 1902. (Joyce 1981; 64) He was commissioned to design homes for, amongst others, the mining magnate Lionel Philips - whose wife, Florence, founded the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Baker, too, identified with the spirit of 'nation building' and its ideals. Discussing his choice of site for the Union Buildings in Pretoria:

"I was shown the block of land which the government had bought in the centre of the city... but with the high ideals we all had at the time I thought this site unworthy of the capital site of a United South Africa."  
(Ibid;37)

The other important cultural figure whose writings were to influence the way Victorians thought about culture was Matthew Arnold. His ideas, although primarily directed at improving conditions in England, provided the philanthropic dimension to Imperialist ambitions. His 'Culture and Anarchy', published in 1869, contains the essence of ideas that were later commonly reflected in the views of upper class English patrons of the arts.

Arnold insisted that 'culture' was not the preserve of a few, but that " the raw and unkindled masses of humanity " should be touched by "sweetness" (beauty) and "light" (intelligence) Arnold's thinking declared that it was no longer simply enough to BE cultured, since

"It (culture) is not satisfied till we all come to a perfect man. It knows that the sweetness and light of

the few must be imperfect until the raw and unkindled masses of humanity are touched with sweetness and light." (Wilson 1963;69)

It was consequently a duty of the cultured to be the benefactors of those unfortunates who were of lesser class or race.

These ideas and attitudes were prevalent in Britain, and surfaced wherever art institutions were founded throughout the Empire. Public art collections in Europe had tended to originate from the great private collections of the C18 and C19. The educative function of museums has always been stressed by their founders. Sir Henry Tate bequeathed his collection to the English nation "For the encouragement and development of British Art." (Smith 1976;49) And, at the opening of the National Gallery of New South Wales, a certain Lord Loftus urged the guests to continue "... the endeavour to advance taste in Art among the community." (ibid)

This model of patronage, of the bringing of 'taste' to the people, is quite evident in the attitudes surrounding the foundation of the Johannesburg Art gallery. The original Deed of Donatio Inter Vivos, of 21 January 1913, states that the Art Gallery and Museum of Industrial Art was "... for the behoof and public benefit of the inhabitants of the said town and the neighbourhood thereof and of others resorting thereto..." (Carmen 1988;25). The principle of the museum serving its community was thus firmly entrenched by its founders. This principle would receive fluctuating attention over the forthcoming century, as would the notions of who constituted 'the community'.

Although in principle the gallery was committed to serving 'the community', this function was performed according to what the founders considered to be beneficial to the cultural life of that community.

However, serving the community and serving the Empire,

according to Victorian ideology, were the same thing. An article in The Civil and Military Gazette, May 26 1910, called "Art and Empire", quite blatantly advocated the establishment of such institutions as the Johannesburg Art Gallery in order to extend the same ideals of enlightenment and, as far as possible, the same standards of taste, as the imperial originators. (Carmen;28) The community, in effect; "... was offered what Florence Phillips and her associates considered it should have: An intelligent recreation for the large working population on the Rand. The Art Gallery founders' ideals were of the noblest." (ibid;28)

The founders aimed to expose the local population to excellence in art, and, since Old Masters were too scarce and expensive, contemporary British art would serve this end. Thus, out of a total of 90 paintings in the nucleus of the collection in 1910, 55 were by British painters.

This process of institutionalisation followed similar patterns of intention and physical form in Australia:

"There is no reason to doubt the honesty of Victorian philanthropists and well-meaning governments who saw in the creation of official institutions the salvation of a degenerating public taste... The C19 art museum, although originating from some of the best intentions in the world, became a peculiar species of civic or national monument. A pretentious pseudo-classical exterior was erected as a symbol of civic or national maturity..." (Smith 1976;50)

The Johannesburg Art Gallery opened in 1915. Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens it, too, is in a Neoclassical style. The Neoclassical architect sought effects of solidity and permanence, of a solemnity which evoked the realm of 'eternal truths' from which his architectural principles were drawn. (Honour 1968;20) From the mid C18 onwards, Neoclassicism served "... as both a symbol and an instrument for the propagation of universal civilisation." (Frampton 1985;18)

In keeping with Matthew Arnold's insistence that culture should become integral to national life, the aims of the founders were long-term and on a large scale. Certainly, the idea of a South African National School originates in the early 1900's, and was seen as one of the end results of English patronage. Florence Phillips, writing in 1910, hoped that

"... a South African School of Art will grow up, and the study of masterpieces... should be a help as well as an incentive to local artists. And when our South African School of Art begins to produce work worthy to appear side by side with the best examples of other countries... (the gallery should...form...) a great South African collection. (Carmen;27)

Similarly, in 1925, the organiser of the Natal Society of Arts' exhibitions, Leo Francis, stated that:

"In order to create the proper understanding, the public must be made acquainted with all the different styles and outlooks which are characteristic of South African artists who are striving for a distinct nationalism in art." (King 1988;54)

The founder's cultural paradigm had been set in the mid C19, a combination of Ruskin's imperialism and Arnold's philanthropy. Their importing of culture to the mining town which had been "... to materialistically- orientated to provide a fertile setting for the flowering of the plastic arts" (Berman 1974;94) was justified in terms of philanthropy. The desire for a gallery had not appeared as a spontaneous expression of the community, but as a requirement of its upper echelons, to whom it may have given a measure of prestige, whilst alleviating cultural insecurities.

Certainly, the imposition of British artworks and British culture had a part to play within the whole post Anglo-Boer

War programme of colonial domination. Yet it is somehow censorious to ignore philanthropy as a prime motivating factor, emphasising the exploitative motives of colonialism instead. The founders had internalised the philanthropic dimension of Victorian cultural ideology. Their explanations of their motives in terms of the general good appear to be heartfelt, and not just expedient smokescreens for actions taken essentially in their own interests. I emphasise this point, since the subsequent accounts of artwriters of the Left when dealing with colonialism - which I discuss in Section Two - have tended to parody the colonial process as exclusively concerned with domination and exploitation.

The philanthropism of the Founders was accompanied by a deep conviction in their own aesthetic values, which was evidenced in their choice of British artworks, as well as in their reluctance to admit too hastily works of local artists, which, they felt, had not yet reached the required standard.  
(1)

This self-conscious philanthropism was the dominant legitimating myth operating within the institutionalisation of art in the late C19 and early C20. This myth is reinforced by subsequent artwriters' accounts of this period:

"Any serious earlier efforts to promote artistic interests had been interrupted by the Anglo-Boer War; but as life began to return to normal, so, slowly, had the missionaries of art again taken up their difficult crusade." (Berman, 95)

## NOTES

1. The propagation of English culture and the neglect of 'other' culture was resented by the emerging Afrikaner nationalists, who pushed for inclusion in the Johannesburg Art Gallery of Dutch C17 painting, which they regarded as representing their heritage. Acquisition policy was subsequently adapted to fit their needs, in much the same way that the 'Neglected Tradition' of Black artists' work would be accommodated as a result of social re-structuring in the 1980's.

PART TWO SECTION TWO: 'MID - CENTURY'

INTRODUCTION.

This section focusses on the artists and their organisations. With the expansion and maturation of the South African artworld, significant factions - and accompanying struggles for hegemony - appeared for the first time. The prevailing legitimating myth underwent a substantial alteration, as the focus of the 'mission' shifted from being 'the introduction of art and taste' to the introduction of MODERN art. The success of this project was eventually secured by the institutionalisation of modern (ie important) art within the universities, thereby releasing 'important' art production from a dependency on the market. The title of 'professional' artist was reinforced. (1)

Struggles for hegemony within the artworld were confined within the aesthetic realm - and factions were demarcated according to where artists stood in relation to 'progressive' art.

## 'MID CENTURY'

The decades 1930 to 1950 saw the expansion and consolidation of the institutions of the South African artworld. With the founding of the SA National Gallery in Cape Town in 1930, the SAFAS had finally achieved one of its long term goals. By 1945, the year of its transformation into the South African Association of Arts, SAFAS was primarily an arbiter on matters of SA art, acting as a liason between government and art societies. (Berman 1974;259)

There were enough practicing artists for the South African Academy to hold yearly exhibitions, from 1920 to 1950, of art selected from all the regions. The larger cities, Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, all had municipal art galleries, and by 1956, Port Elizabeth, East London and Kimberley had followed suite. By 1950, too, the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town had installed Fine Art departments. For the first time, factions developed within the artworld, with artists divided into opposing camps over the issue of 'modern' art. A closer look at the New Group (1938 - 1954) sheds light on the dynamics of these years. It is during this time that a decisive shift occurred in the relations between the institutions and their social base.

The first National Arts Convention was held in 1932, in Cape Town. This was an attempt to launch an all-embracing art society in South Africa, and was potentially to be a kind of South African Royal Academy. Virtually all art societies, art schools and art galleries were represented. It was to be called the National Academy of the Arts, with headquarters at the National Gallery and Edward Roworth installed as the first President. However, "... the idea of a Royal Academy with titles did not catch on in this country and the whole matter became a cause of ridicule and eventually petered out." (in Schoonraad 1988;41)

Although fledgling art societies had been established by the 1930's, (Tvl Art Society:1937, National Academy of Arts:1932)

which offered younger artists opportunities to show their work, the societies tended to be under the control of older, more conservative artists like Roworth and Gwelo Goodman (b1871). Their differing aesthetics led them at times into open clashes with the younger generation of artists, whose ideas were represented by the New Group.

Roworth (1880 - 1964) was a controversial and influential figure, who dominated the art establishment for nearly 50 years. A product of Henry Tonk's Slade School, he was later to hold the Fine Arts chair at UCT, and directed the South African National Gallery between 1941 and 1948. For most of his long public life, he was supported by 'the public', who felt that their conservatism was endorsed by his condemnation of 'modernism'. Roworth was popular because he reacted to modernism in a way that the public could relate to, describing the contemporary art scene of the 1930's and 1940's as a "... welter of mutually destructive theories and a standard of drawing and painting which can easily be reached by children of tender years." (Berman;254)

With the introduction of modern art via the New Group, the direct link between artist and public - that of "mutually shared canons of taste" (Roworth's phrase) - which had been established by the older generation, was broken. This development had, of course, already taken place on the Continent, and was a belated imitation of the rift between 'avante garde' and 'academy', which had become an entrenched feature of European cultural life.

Although the artists of the New Group found Roworth's attitudes reactionary and authoritarian, they were not, even by the standards of the time, particularly revolutionary or avante garde. Their aims were mainly of a practical nature, as is set out in their constitution:

1. To bring together artists and craftsmen in an effort to raise standards.
2. To help artists in financial difficulties.
3. To form Artist's Co-operatives to import and

retail materials at cost.

4. To hold exhibitions all over the country, the standard of which would be controlled by the method of selection. ie. secret ballot."(Schoonraad;44)

The founders of the group in Cape Town, Gregoire Boonzaier and Terence McCaw, were outspoken in their dislike for the provinciality and backwardness of South African art, and stated that they would "kick against junk" and that their slogan was "No schoolgirl art." (Berman ;209) They did not however, have the backing and guidance of a powerful intellectual figure, which was a characteristic of most groups of modernist artists in the C20.

The New Group was always an organisation of practicing artists whose members were largely dependent on the marketing of their paintings. They saw the solution to their 'moribund provinciality' to be the use of contemporary art forms. As artists operating within the constraints of the market system, however, their art would have eventually to be accepted by 'the public' in order for their project to be successful. The New Group's initial struggles with the 'establishment' were over aesthetic issues. But they were also, in effect, a struggle for dominance within the market. The 'modernism' of the new Group - which was a combination of Post Impressionism and Bloomsbury - did gain a certain measure of enthusiasm and acceptance within art-viewing circles, and the New Group was able to establish a national profile, with the issue of formal innovation assuming top priority.

The limits of formal innovation were eventually defined and constrained by what the market could accept. Within this structure, formal advances would happen slowly, and, once a 'style' had been accepted, artists tended to produce within those 'safe' confines. More radical experimentation - the usual domain of an Avante Garde - was at this stage almost non-existent, and would only eventually follow once the tertiary art departments were firmly established. In Europe,

by 1937, Picasso had painted 'Geurnica' and German Expressionism had already recieved the attentions of the Nazis. By comparison, the innovations of the New Group were far from radical, and the startled responses which greeted their shows was more a reflection of the public's lack of exposure to modern art, than to qualities of the work itself.

One newspaper reviewer, writing about the first exhibition of the Group in Cape Town in May 1938, said that "...there is nothing startlingly inventive or revolutionary among the exhibits." (Schoonraad;44) The same observations were made by Walter Battiss after his first trip to Europe, in the same year. On his return he held discussions with Cape members about their attitudes to developments in Europe. He wrote:

"I then realised that these people were not really progressive and this was a very great shock to me, but I kept it to myself because I felt that it would ruin the whole New Group Movement in South Africa if I pulled out up in the Transvaal." (ibid;44) (1)

The British influence remained strong throughout this period, reflected by the adoption of styles, and in the number of artists who trained in Britain. Of 31 artists exhibited at the 1988 New Group retrospective at the National Gallery, 22 had recieved some formal training in England, and 7 in Europe. Only two had been trained locally, of which Battiss was one.

Developments within the field of sculpture paralled those of the painters. The simplification and abstraction of form in the work of Mary Stainbank, Lipschitz (b1903), and Kottler (b1896), is derived from British sculpture, particularly the work of Henry Moore, whose emphasis on traditional subject matter and the natural beauty of his material went against the more avante garde trends of C20 European art. Moore's work "... had strong appeal in the relatively conservative art world of South Africa."

(Rankin 1988;39) And the work of these sculptors gradually changed in the eyes of the public "... from a threateningly modern style to one that was familiar and pleasing." (ibid)

The cautious modernism of the New Group, which was publicly endorsed through market expansion, ensured their influence nationwide. Their aesthetic project - the installation of 'modernism' - was consequently hegemonic and came to be widely perceived as the chief 'mission' amongst the leading figures and institutions of the South African artworld. By 1950, the New Group was showing signs of disparity. The more innovative artists, like Battiss, Preller and Jean Welz, did not exhibit with the group in 1949. Several prominent members were no longer innovative and remained entrenched in their pre-WW2 styles, dictated to an extent by the exigencies of survival under the market system. The locus of their project would now shift to the universities, where 'modernism' could be pursued without market constraints. Here, links to 'the public' were generally ignored. 'Serious' art was now to be sited in the universities, whilst the 'schoolgirl art' found a place in the watercolour societies, or at venues like Artists Under the Sun, or at other platforms that regarded art as a recreational (rather than professional) vocation.

Sited within university faculties, 'serious' artists were now released from the earlier dependence on the market. They were also released from any sense of direct accountability - the process of public scrutiny being somewhat more removed in the University than in the market, where artists were dependent on the public.

This was the process during the 1960's and 1970's - the 'fallow period'. After the late 1970's, however, the freedom that artists had achieved for themselves was criticised from a different quarter - that of the political left. In the next section, I want to look closely at the nature of this criticism, as well as the motives of the left. It is my contention that this period, partly due to pressure brought to bear by the left, saw another major shift in 'legitimizing myth.'

## NOTES

1. Since the mid-1950's, this 'professional' artist , paradoxically, did not earn his keep from selling his work, but as a paid employee of the State, in a tertiary art teaching post. This irony is obfuscated to an extent by the insignificance accorded to 'the public' by the 'modern' artists. The ideology of Modernism had released artists from any earlier sense of public accountability.

1. An interesting parallel between this period and our own emphasises the difficulties of interpretation and value judgement during periods of change. In 1937, Battiss organised a major exhibition in Pretoria. It comprised 132 works by 49 artists. Under the pseudonym of Gregi Nola, he submitted four abstract paintings, two of which were selected by the selection panel. The acceptance of these two avante garde paintings led Battiss to the conclusion that "...no-one knew at the time what abstract art was." (Schoonraad;42) In 1990, the Johannesburg artist Wayne Barker submitted to the selection panel of the Standard Bank Drawing Competition, along with his 'own' work, two drawings done in a naive 'township' style, under the pseudonym Andrew Moletsi. These were accepted, whilst his own work, clearly the result of a 'white' sensibility, was not. Barker concluded that the judges seemed to have an agenda of 'affirmative action'. Whatever the case, the choices in both instances seem to indicate a lack of confidence in aesthetic criteria, where work is accomodated, not on aesthetic principles, but on other criteria. (The need for modernity in the 1930's, and the need for 'community' representation in the 1980's.)

PART THREE  
SECTION ONE  
INTRODUCTION

The first significant manifestations of widespread disaffection with the legitimating myth of the 1970's surfaced publicly at the 'State of the Arts' conference, held in Cape Town during July 1979. The 'holding pattern' of the Fine Arts in the 1960's and 1970's had resulted in a situation where artists "strove tirelessly to absorb and emulate international trends" (Crump 1981). To an increasing number of individuals in the artworld, this pattern had become unsatisfactory, since it was incapable of fulfilling the need for both an 'African' identity and 'political relevance'.

Although South African artists had grappled with the notion of what being 'African' meant in visual terms, political ideals had not previously received much attention. Now, however, a new generation of artists and artwriters was to politicise the field of the arts, looking critically at both the context that the arts operated in, and the subject matter of painting itself. In the following section, I discuss some of the motives, biases and assumptions of the left at this conference, by looking closely at the input of Gavin Younge ("Dead in one's own lifetime - the contours of Art under Apartheid) and Joyce Ozynski (South African painting and its quest for an Identity"). I then link their writing to that of later artwriters of the left, Colin Richards and Ivor Powell, in terms of certain persistent themes displayed by these writers. These are:

- 1 The portrayal of the liberal art establishment as being complicit in the oppression of black people and black culture
2. The portrayal of the art market and corporate patronage of the arts as having a 'corruptive' influence on the arts.

I maintain that these analyses, although they may have been influential in getting the art institutions to expand their social base in the Eighties, were nevertheless limited to the realm of critique, and tended to stop short of making concrete proposals. Leftwing analysis aims to demystify, (to find the 'essence' over the 'appearance'), but a further result of these analyses is that they have created certain oppositional myths of their own. This is one consequence of the process of 'de-legitimising' the opposition: existing orthodoxies are replaced by counter mythologies. In trying to 'de-legitimise' the 'elitist' position of the modernists, the left tended to emphasise the destructiveness of 'white' culture, placing a counter emphasis on the 'innocence' of pre-colonial 'black' culture.

### PART THREE

#### Section 1

Politicisation of the whole field of culture in South Africa intensified in the 1970's. A major factor in this politicisation was the 1976 Soweto riots. (Richards 1991;36) The influence of Black consciousness, which emphasised Black culture as a political strategy, was also felt by the artworld. Politicised white intellectuals within the artworld began to apply Marxist methodologies to their analyses of South African cultural history and production (1)

The analytical method of Marxism is to draw attention away from the autonomy of the artist, the art object, and art history, and concentrate instead on contextualising them, as specific sets of practices, in their relation to the class structures of capitalism. Traditional Marxism regards the Liberal ideology of 'bourgeois humanism' as 'mystification'.

This analysis consequently views visual representation as contested ideological terrain. All cultural production takes place within the framework of the antagonism between the 'ruling' and 'working' classes. Visual representation in both

'high' and 'popular' culture is seen as a reflection of the interests of the ruling class. Because of the conflation of 'race' and 'class' in South Africa, the oppositional terms of 'ruling' vs. 'working' class have often been substituted for the terms 'dominant' vs 'dominated'.

Within the realm of 'high' culture, the practical results of this approach have manifested themselves in attacks on the 'elitism' of the academy. Within that of 'popular' culture, attempts have been made to establish an oppositional, working class culture. The practical effects of the Marxist approach within 'popular' culture have been more successful, resulting in the establishment of Community Arts Projects and other working class - aligned projects. This is to be expected, since Marxism traditionally insists on gearing art towards specific ends, and these are easily achieved when the purposes of art are aligned to that of the working class in general. However, within the realm of 'high' culture the application of Marxism has been more problematic. Whilst it has proved to be a fruitful area for Marxist analysis per se, the critique aimed at the field of Fine Arts is notable for its lack of practical suggestion.

I now look at how the liberal art establishment was portrayed by the left. (Theme 1, as shown in the introduction):

Traditional Marxists have always viewed Modernism with suspicion, since one of the aims of the modernist movement was to release art from worldly concerns, thereby freeing it from any obligation to undertake moral responsibilities. By contrast, Marxism has always insisted on the moral duties of the artist. The following quote illustrates these traditional Marxist concerns, in the South African context of the early 1980's. Here, artists are called upon to realise their moral obligations:

"In the post June 1976 uprising era, to refrain from mentioning the freedom of the black press, dismemberment of the homeland into Transkei , Venda, Kwazulu and other

reserves, malnutrition and forced removals, is in itself a political act...to refrain from this artistic duty becomes...an act of self-censorship and cowardice.  
(Martins 1981;15)

In both Younge and Ozyński's 1979 papers, the attempt was made to 'contextualise' South African art as part of the 'superstructure' of colonialism. As such, contrary to the high ideals of the Colonial elite such as the Philips', art had served not to uplift the community, but as an instrument of their downfall. Younge's stated aim in his paper was to "...take a look at the high degree of congruence between race and class in South Africa, and show how art production reflects at one and the same time, both white, neo-colonial and middle class values. The adoption of these values will be shown to have an impoverishing effect on all art production, and, inevitably, a fatal effect on the culture of the oppressed people of South Africa." (1979;36)

I do not intend to discuss the veracity of these claims, but to focus instead on the longer term effects of the left's characterisation of Blacks as innocent victims, and the consequent guilt and complicity laid at the door of the white art establishment. The impact - and in many quarters the acceptance - of this account of history was to greatly affect the operative sense of legitimacy within the artworld during the 1980's.

The South African 'avante garde' of the 1970's - which was largely composed of liberal middle class academics - had tended to portray itself as a thorn in the side of officialdom. To the left, this was a symptom of 'false consciousness', and was regarded as a myth to be debunked. The values of the avante garde were attacked as undemocratic, and the liberal art establishment who perpetuated this myth were arraigned alongside the oppressors against the proletariat. Younge declared that:

"Almost all members of our society see reality through the ideological spectacles of the ruling class. But ...what of the white liberal avante garde? While they certainly do reject aspects of the dominant culture...(it) is only infrequently that the avante garde artist rejects the STATUS of the ruling ideology. The avante garde is like the old aristocracy: fiercely anti - bourgeois, and fiercely anti-proletarian...The avante garde espouses the aesthetic of indifference, the belief that art is ten feet off the ground and has no historical connection to its social base."(ibid;42)

Ozynski's paper, 'South African painting and its quest for an identity', follows a similar pattern to Younge's. Having located 'art' alongside the forces of colonial domination and oppression, she then went on to attack the avante garde notion of the 'autonomy' of art, and then criticise the distorting effect of the market on black culture. To Ozynski:

"The pre-occupations of white art were, and still are, conditioned by the problems attendant on the maintainance of white dominance."(p31)

Ozynski maintained that the 'white art' of the past had been established within the framework of British Colonialism. Landscape painting had evolved from topographical painting "...as a significant means of asserting and celebrating the whites' conquest of the land."(p32)

Similarly, portrayals of the black and coloured people had tended to reinforce and reflect the position of the white as colonist and master.

Her analysis also saw the avante garde belief of 'art for arts' sake' as failing to challenge the dominant values. Whilst stylistic innovations may have been effected, these were without the 'iconoclastic spirit' that had accompanied early C20 European art. To her: "The function of art in South Africa is not to challenge but to reinforce dominant values. At the very least, it must not contradict these." The

"dominant values" were reflected by the liberal arts administrators within the tertiary art institutions, who, by upholding the concept of 'autonomy' of the arts, were complicit in the moral outrage of Apartheid:

"While 'art for art's sake' may appear to be the disinterested cry of the intelligentsia, it works in the interests of the ruling class, and complements the powerfully repressive forces of state morality."  
(Ozynski;33)

The linking of the practitioners of the liberal model of the Fine Arts to the crimes of the regime - whether they were directly linked or simply by the fact that they failed to directly address political circumstances, was continued into the 1980's and finds representatives in writers like Ivor Powell and Colin Richards, who had found a platform for their views in the 'alternative' press.

Both Powell and Richards, like Younge and Ozynski, saw the market as having a largely detrimental effect on art production, particularly on the production of Black art.

In a paper of 1988, (Decieving History: Some thoughtful and thoughtless practices in South African art history now), Richards seemed particularly concerned to draw attention to the way that the art 'authorities' manipulate the market, via the medium of the art competition. (p;76) This approach follows the earlier pattern of locating art within the terrain of specific interest groups.

In a 1990 paper (Desperately seeking 'Africa') which was largely devoted to a discussion of the 'transitional', Richards argued that the emergence of this art form to national prominence was a result of the 'appropriation' of culture by the 'dominant visual art world' (p 35)

Whilst the phenomenon of the 'transitional' may have been the result of 'contact and exchange' between cultures in South

Africa, Richards asked whether this description does not misrepresent history, and suggested 'conflict and dispossession are perhaps rather more accurate terms.' (p35)

Contextualising the realm of culture in South Africa, Richards explicitly linked the tradition of State repression to that of the 'dominant' culture over the 'dominated':

"Censorship, the destruction of cultural material, the mutilation of cultural traditions, the imprisonment, banishing and murder of cultural workers/artists are not the only forms of oppression. While all of these stain South African history, they have become less acceptable than they used to be. In 'reformed' South Africa, subtler persuasions are called for; these employ the mechanics of 'co-option' and 'appropriation'" (35)

Richards questioned the right of the artists and institutions of the 'dominant visual arts world' to appropriate material, arguing that this is particularly insensitive when that material comes from currently disenfranchised cultures. Richards claimed that the use of the 'transitional' and its opportune emergence, was an attempt by the "hegemonic but minority visual art world" to expand its social base whilst retaining 'fine art' parameters. To many figures within the liberal art establishment, the emergence of an indigenous expression, independently of white patronage, that was 'transcultural' (and from which white artists were borrowing), was taken as an encouraging sign of a resurgent local art, and as a step in the direction of a 'national' art. Richards argued that discussion about a 'national art' without "enabling transformations in the socio-cultural base ...seemed strained and premature." (ibid;40)

The minority visual art world was therefore "... aspiring to an identity and scope it does not have ." The conclusion here, in terms of the analysis of the left, is that the lack of proportional representation within the artworld is the cause of its ongoing crisis of legitimacy. The notion of

democracy, as it is applied by the left (and by liberals) to the polity, is here explicitly transposed to the cultural realm. The validity of such a transposition is itself the subject of extensive debate, where many writers have held that the Fine Arts are innately 'elitist'. However, this type of analysis has certainly impacted upon the artworld, and has added to the pressure on organisers and administrators to 'democratise' the Fine Arts institutions.

Richards concluded bleakly that the artworld is wilfully ignorant of needs and realities outside of its own, and that it is capable of giving little back to black communities, whose cultural expressions it had been 'desperate to latch onto'. (40) He asked whether the transitional is not, in fact, an expression of "that tragic need to co-opt difference into one's own dream of order, in which one reigns supreme?" (ibid)

After outlining the inadequacy of the Fine Art paradigm, he bemoaned the artworld's lack of awareness of its own historical and social context, and its consequent tendency not to address moral and ethical questions arising from its social acts;

"Seldom are the complex questions of creative rights, creative possibilities, in the face of deprivation and exploitation, addressed with the same zeal as is the collecting of art." (ibid;40)

In this paper, Richards leaves us with little suggestion as to how to address these imbalances, but hints that a programme of affirmative action would be the least that would be required of the 'stained' South African art establishment. To Richards, the end results of the emergence of the 'transitional' are unsatisfactory:

"Almost wholly absorbed (or appropriated), the transitional wrought little in the way of structural or ideological adjustments in its institutional consumers. While it fattened and diversified institutional holdings

and promised ideological replenishment, it did not require that the art world should address the cultural conditions in the urban or rural black communities."

Whilst Richards stopped short of making this demand himself, the issue had certainly been placed on the agenda and added weight to the accusation of 'elitism' that the establishment would have to deal with.

I would now like to look briefly at the creation of the 'counter mythology' which was an effect of the debunking of the liberal model of the fine arts. A version of history was put forward that portrayed pre-colonial culture as being in state of innocence before the onslaught of 'dominant' culture. This version of history did not necessarily have to be spelt out: the mere portrayal of 'white' culture as destructive was often enough for the assumption to be made that 'black' culture was 'non-destructive'.

In his discussion of the 'transitional', Richards indicates that the emergence of 'transitional' objects substantially precedes the recognition of such objects by art historians. (ibid;36) He says that the 'representation' of objects by art historians clears the way for their usage in galleries, etc. This 'representation' "appears to have played a significant role in 'liberating' aspects of black visual cultural production for use by the cultural and economic institutions of the dominant art world" In claiming the above, he subconsciously establishes the assumption that there is a 'non dominant art world', which is presumably where we may find other aspects of 'black visual cultural production' In this particular paper, however, Richards gave us no examples of such culture, or where they may be found. This critique of the modus operandi of the artworld, like its precedents, falls short of offering practical solutions to the perceived dilemmas which it outlines.

The impact of 'white' culture on 'black' culture is seen as

destructive. Black visual culture is one component in this destruction. Black visual culture is subsequently 're-privileged' as one term in this binary opposition. Accordingly, black visual culture that is 'untainted' by 'white' culture is held to represent the 'authentic' visual product of black people.

Younge declared that:

"...imperialism itself has never been benign - there has always been some degree of imposition. It is this imposition of foreign values, coupled with a keen commercial interest which has progressively undermined the capacity of authentic expression." (1979;44)

accordingly;

"The most virile and potent forms of black artistic production, I feel, are those which have arisen outside of the formal art education system, since they have not been polluted by the ideology of black inferiority, nor have they been eroded by cultural imperialism." (ibid;42)

Ivor Powell also holds to this view. In discussing transitional art, he compares it to the 'township' art of the 60s and 70's. He observes that Western notions of the visual arts have only been sustained in the townships due to the "cloying interventions" of groups like the Urban Foundation. (1985;13) The phenomenon of 'township' art is generally regarded as a product of 'white' patronage, both in the inception stage and in terms of the limitations it would reach. (De Jager 1972;21) (Verstreat 1989;154) Township art is somewhat discredited in the eighties, regarded as an 'inauthentic' expression by black artists who were pandering to the needs of a white market.

Transitional art was initially hailed as the long-awaited for 'unpolluted' black visual art. Whilst Richards has subsequently focussed his attentions on the 'appropriation'

of this expression by the white artworld, it was initially also welcomed by the left. To Powell, the process of absorption of township art by the white artworld;

"...points to the demand and suppression of the culture of black people by the dominant white culture. At the same time it is possible to trace a process of co-option, through the fabrication of township art, of black artistic impulses into the institutions that regulate the values specific to Western culture."  
(ibid)?

In contrast, Powell greeted the advent of transitional art enthusiastically, calling it

"... an indigenous, independent and vital art...that has been flourishing for years, unheeded by and regardless of the machinations of the art world in general...these artists work inside and for the communities to which they belong. It is precisely because they have preserved this relation between art and experience, because they have avoided any identification with an abstract and alien art world, that they are in fact such powerful artists." (ibid)

Below, I look at how this creation of a 'noble' black culture intersects with the second theme mentioned in the introductory paragraph: That of the corruptive influence of the art market.

To a large degree, the responses of the South African left to the market system are derived from traditional Marxist thinking. The principle feature of this school of thought is a refusal to accept the commodity status of the art object within capitalism.(2)

Whilst the machinations of the market may have been particularly insidious with regard to Black painting, it has, according to these writers, had a negative impact upon white artistic output, too. This applied to the art of the 1960's

and 1970's, and is particularly true of the art of the 1980's, which saw a substantial increase of corporate funding for the visual arts, mainly in the form of funding for art competitions.

The earlier papers had drawn attention to the way that artistic production is defined and limited by market acceptability. (Ozynski;34-35) (Younge;43-5) The papers of the late 80's question the influence of corporate sponsorship on South African painting. Richards sees the influence of the competition process resulting in a narrowing of the range of institutional cultural practices. The 'very narrow' definition of allowable products within art schools is reinforced by what gets rewarded at art competitions:

"Clearly only certain kinds of skills (and these very narrowly conceived) are being rewarded. Which ones are clear when we look at the order of objects which have drawn increased injections of funds into high visual culture, especially via the various national art competitions. Our artworld custodians have dutifully made this small but elevated cultural enclave more attractive to investors by inflating it to mean all of significant culture on a national scale. All the time furnishing sponsors with appropriate products and commercially serviceable values....There appears little eagerness to engage problems of justification for such exclusive evaluative regimes...Rampant 'professionalism' masks a petrified market besotted conservatism."  
(1988;76)

Similarly, Powell, in reporting on the 1985 Cape Town Triennial notes that "...sponsorship can hardly fail to set up a cycle resulting in a significant element of control." (ibid) He notes that the judges are answerable to the sponsors, and have to make selections of work bearing in mind that the competition is a public relations exercise, and an oblique form of advertising for the sponsors. Art competitions influence the whole economy of the arts;

acquisitions of public collections tend to show remarkable co-incidence with the lists of prize - winners in major art competitions. This has led to the emergence of the 'competition piece' - big work that seems more to want to impress than to communicate. According to Powell, the art competition has its own rules and its own intentional goals, and these goals;

"...only partially co-incide with those of art in general and where they diverge, it (the competition) is in favour of those of the goals of sponsorship, of public acceptability and public relations.(ibid)

Powell feels that the arts and big business start to fuse in the forum of the competition to create "...new and quintessentially American life forms. " (ibid) In 1991, after discussing the probability that sponsors Rembrandt would pull out of the Triennial, and that funding would increasingly diminish during the 1990's, Powell concluded that:

"The fragmentation and inertia we are looking at now is then something closer than we have experienced to normality. It may not be the stuff of legend; it may not be megabuck cultural currency. But at least its not cultural monopoly money either." (1991;22)

The message of these writers is that 'art' tends to be corrupted when it implicates itself in the art market. And the influence of corporate patronage has a similarly 'polluting' effect. The commodity status of the art object has an alienating effect on the artist, potentially undermining 'authentic' intentions. This situation is intensified in the case of Black artists, to whom the market system is culturally alien.

## NOTES

1 The 'traditional' Marxist methodology is summarised below; "Many of Marxism's decisive formulations deal with various aspects of the veils which conceal economic and material reality from consciousness; the fetishism of commodities, reification, alienation, false consciousness, ideology, - all of these are aspects of the illusory consciousness which constitute the negative reality of class society... The Marxist critique of capitalism aims to pierce the disguise, to make known this negativity, to liberate consciousness and thereby to move closer to the abolition of the prevailing mode of production and beyond it toward the self-realisation of humanity. This gives rise to a basic Marxist methodological approach - that of demystification, the rending of the veil of appearance which, as Marx repeatedly insists, does not coincide with the essence of things...Demystification shatters false consciousness, exposes the human relations which underly the commodity relationship, reveals the true motivations of historical movement...Reasoning from the above, many Marxists have utilised the demystification strategy as proper to the analysis of art. Instead of liberating consciousness this tends to deaden both the force and grace of imagination and to deprive art of its transcending force, converting Marxist aesthetics into sociogenetic reductionism (Solomon 1979;20) See also Fuller,1979,238 - 250.

2.The approach is echoed in earlier Marxist texts.Take for example Ernst Fischer's classic 1959 text:

"With a hitherto unimaginable increase in production and productivity...capitalism dissolved the old world order into a cloud of whirling molecules, destroyed all direct relationships between producer and consumer, and flung all products onto an anonymous market to be bought or sold...In such a world, too, art became a commodity and the artist a commodity producer. Personal patronage was superseded by a free market whose workings were



difficult or impossible to comprehend, a conglomerate of nameless consumers, the so - called 'public'. The work of art was subjected more and more to the laws of competition....For the first time in the history of mankind the artist became a 'free' artist, a 'free' personality, free to the point of absurdity, of icy loneliness. (p49)

PART THREE.

SECTION TWO: 'ACCOUNTABILITY'

Introduction.

During the 1970's and 1980's, the legitimating myth of the mid century came under a variety of pressures - a number of forces had combined to effect change in the art establishment's view of its social role. The liberal political principles of the establishment had combined with the moral neutrality of modernist aesthetics to define the realm of Fine Arts as a distinct and autonomous one. The critique of the left had, in conjunction with other forces, played a powerful role in re-defining the public orientation of the art institutions. Factional struggles within the artworld were no longer defined in terms of their aesthetics, but in terms of their attention to social responsibilities. This was the chief effect of the leftwing critique.

The left had won the struggle for the moral high ground, helped along by the oppression of anti-apartheid activists and declarations of states of emergency, which highlighted the evils of the regime internationally. The left was able to use this high ground as a means of justifying its attempted control of cultural traffic through the cultural boycott, a position which the liberals abhorred, and one which had echoes of Zhdanovism. (2)

As a response to these insistent pressures, a decisive shift in legitimating myth now occurred. The artworld now became preoccupied with including previously ignored ('neglected') sectors of the broader society. Questions of aesthetic judgement and taste were subsequently demoted in favour of the imperative of inclusiveness and broader representation. Seemingly, the agenda of those who had prioritised 'democracy' in the Fine Arts had won out.

In this section, I focus on the response of the academy to

the criticisms of the left. The liberals tried to keep open the 'neutral' space that had been carved out for modernism. The artworld now became pre-occupied with re-defining its relationship to the social base. This re-structuring centered around the inclusion - or expansion into - 'black' communities. The notion of 'the public' was now enlarged and transformed to include the disenfranchised majority. The 'public' - which in the 1970's had meant the 'philistine white public' was replaced in the 1980's by the notion of 'the community'. (3)

The attitude of a liberal and 'cultured' artistic elite embattled against a conservative, ignorant public through dealings with their elected government departments, is very clear in the writings of Raymund van Niekerk, the director of the SANG from 1977 to 1988. Van Niekerk's paper given at the same 1979 conference, is chiefly concerned with bemoaning the government's lack of arts administration and funding for the visual arts. He compares the situation to that of Australia, Canada and Holland, and concludes that the South African government comes woefully short.

In 1987, he described the relationship between officialdom and the visual arts as one of "hostility and indifference." This was partly due to the tendency of beaurocratised institutions to become sluggish and unresponsive. Quoting NP van Wyk Louw, he said:

"Cultural organisations can never shed their rigidity - and that is why they will always clash with growing and developing cultural life. The creative individuals, their nimbler opponents, will always find them a little ridiculous." (1987;105)

To van Niekerk, this lack of interest in the visual arts is also the result of the "...resentment and fear that the innovative can still inspire in the conservative official mind." (105), and expresses itself in officialdom's preference for realism over abstraction. This lethargy extends beyond the ranks of the Nationalist Government officials, who merely represent the culturally blighted interests of the South African voters:

"No official would move to support an art that meant so little to the voting masses. If a South African politician failed in his entire career to do anything for the arts, he could rest assured he would never lose a single vote." (ibid;106)

Echoes of this attitude, of a forlorn coterie of intellectuals wallowing in the backwaters of the periphery,

are to be found in other writings of the time:

"In this country, however, the only interest taken by the government and the public at large is when the work is 'undesirable'. There is a total disinterest in the quality of the visual arts, as can be seen by the miniscule funds allotted to art museums as opposed to the performing arts...the multinationals have decided that the funding of sports events pays far better dividends than art events." (Crump;1979;102)

And, from another leading figure in the liberal arts establishment; "Generally, the visual artist is either tolerated or ignored." (Dubow;1983;119)

The process of absorbing new styles which had formed the basis of legitimation for the artists of the mid century period, had reached exhaustion by the late 70's. Part of the reason for this was the 'wasteland of late modernism' itself.

I gratuitously include the two samples below, to illustrate conditions in art schools that had pursued the values of the 'avante garde'. The abandonment of traditional Fine Art teaching methods resulted in the spirit of a relentless quest for novelty. This description, by the figurative painter Eric Fischl, of a 'life class' at the California Institute for the arts, is from the early 1970's:

"Half the people were covered with paint...the two models were sitting in the corner absolutely still, bored to tears. Everyone else was throwing stuff around and had climbed up in the roof and jumped into buckets of paint. It was an absolute zoo...They didn't teach technique at Cal Arts." (Hughes 1990;346)

This spirit was felt in SA too. In Cape Town, traditionally the first port of call for the latest international art trend, similar experimentation took place, reminiscent of the influence of Beuys. Feelings of existential despair about the artist's marginalisation and consequent inability to effect

change were being literally acted out :

"I can think of at least two occasions in recent years where the metaphor 'blood bath' has been transposed into a studio situation. One such event involved the ritual immersion of the student protagonist in blood. Another presented an actual blood filled bath accompanied by soap and sponge as tokens of futility."

(Dubow;1979;117)

The 'self-referential' and 'autonomous' space that Fry, Bell and later Greenberg had defined for Modernism had come to be part of the 'common sense' of art practice in the West in the post WW2 years . In South Africa, it had been internalised by the liberal arts establishment. The rift between artist and public had come to be held as almost natural, and was defended by appeals to the 'professionalism' of the arts sector, or brushed aside as the fault of a philistine, disinterested public.

This legitimating myth - of the introduction of modernism and therefore sophistication - that had formed the basis of the Academy's relationship to the public would now be forced to change, and during the 1980's was to be abandoned as the principle justification for artistic activity.

These two quotes below indicate the extent to which, by the late 1980's, the artworld had become preoccupied with the mission of extending itself outward to 'the community', and to which the notion of accountability had become all important:

"An important role of the Gallery in a multi-cultural and diverse society is to document and present the artistic endeavours of all South African artists, thereby making art accessible to a community audience."

(Till 1988;3)

And also:

"Almost every selector on the 1991 Triennial was either trained in a tertiary institution, or teaches in one, or both. While it is clearly necessary for judges to have had some visual training, we would urge that those chosen have also participated in grassroots art activities in the wider community. An attempt should be made to guard against the predominantly Eurocentric view of art." (Cat. 1991;10)

These attitudes towards the social base of the art institutions differ significantly to those of the 1970's, where the justification for artistic activity remained the introduction of new trends.

These changes in attitude were not simply the result of the pressures coming from within the leftwing of the artworld. They also reflect quite simply a growing concern with the reality of population growth in South Africa, and an uncomfortableness with the white minority profile of the artworld.

Why had it taken the artworld so long to notice the black communities? Aside from stringent government laws which forbade access to the 'townships', the philosophy of Black Consciousness had contributed to making black culture inaccessible to whites. The 'non racial' politics of the 'progressive movement' in the 1980's had made access to black communities easier. Black consciousness had not been accessible to whites of any political persuasion. But the political flavour of the 80's was far more non racial. The widespread mobilisation and organisation of communities also impacted on universities and was more pervasive and effective than in the 70's.

Institutions which were subject to a certain amount of public scrutiny could no longer ignore the grassroots calls for 'democracy'. Art galleries and most other artworld institutions had been run by white administrators and had

white constituencies. One commentator has described the universities as having to come to terms with the idea - and consequent re-orientation that it implies - that South Africa is "...essentially a third world country with some complicated pockets of first world privilege." (Moulder 1989;1)

The Western Fine Art tradition, which in the West no longer occupies the position of centrality that it had in the C19, is even more vulnerable in a country that does not share that tradition. The Fine Art tradition is a European imposition and, historically, is alien to African culture. Furthermore, the exigencies of supplying basic services like education and housing, are likely to making funding for 'the arts' even less of a priority than they have been for the Nationalist government.

These previously ignored or suppressed realities started to be noticed in the late 80's, and a certain amount of insecurity has been expressed:

"...all the judges, admittedly chosen by as democratic a process as was possible under given procedures, were whites. One wonders whether in say twenty year's time the relevance of such a panel as truly reflecting the opinion of the artistic community will be questioned, and by extension, the relevance of the Triennial itself." (Matthews 1991;12)

Another selector on a contemporary art show reports:

"I felt that our region was dominated by white institutionally trained artists, wedded to academicism. To seriously exert a long term influence this project must address a broader constituency. The ambition must be to generate art and not to simply provide CV entries nor to simply offer smart career moves for the manoeuvring professional." (Burnett 1992;20)

## NOTES

1. Zhdanov was the advocate of Socialist Realism, which became the dominant 'official' Soviet art form from the mid 30's to the late 1950's. Socialist Realism demands of art that it serve utilitarian ends, and that it create exemplary models. Three general trends in the arts in post revolutionary periods have been traced:

- i) Revolutionarily movements have insisted that exemplary myths be created.
- ii) Complex and advanced styles of art have been rejected.
- iii) Arts have been censored and subjected to repressive modes of patronage. (Solomon 1979;235)

During the late 70's and 80's, the liberals had positioned themselves between the totalitarianisms of both Socialism and Fascism. In a 1983 article, Dubow compared the Fascist art of Nazi Germany to the officially sanctioned art of the Nationalist Government - notably Pretoria's Strydom Square. At that stage, he did not have a local parallel for Soviet art. (Leftwing totalitarianism). By 1987, however, Van Niekerk was able to warn against the threat to artistic autonomy, which now emerged from the local Left:

"Surely, with all the warnings that have been issued over the past 100 years, we will not passively accept the dictates of a new breed of aspiring officials? ... Are we now silently to pause while the new official masters and theorists, as they wait in the wings, decide what will be acceptable art?" (1987;108)

2. In the 1980's, the concept of the public was increasingly substituted for that of 'the community'. It is interesting to note the inferences of this substitution. Raymond Williams notes that the idea of 'community politics', unlike that of 'national' or even 'local' politics has the implications of working directly with people: "Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships." (1983;76) In the 70's and 80's, anti -

apartheid activists substituted 'township' - with its Verwoedian connotations of "temporary sojourners", for 'community'. This sense of the word has moved into widespread use, and denotes more than just a set of mutually shared interests. (eg; the business or theatre communities). And, "...unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation, society etc.) it seems never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term." (ibid.) The ascendancy of the term within the artworld indicates the successful implementation of the agenda of the left.

3. The attitude, of a "seige condition for modern culture", reflects that described by Clement Greenberg in his 1939 essay 'Avante Garde and Kitsch'. Burgin summarises Greenberg's argument as follows:

"Western culture is in crisis; before the modern period such crises of established values led to artistic academicism, a petrification of culture. In this present crisis, however, the unprecedented phenomenon of the avante garde promises to 'keep culture moving' by raising art 'to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or besides the point'. This it will accomplish by eschewing the world of 'ideological confusion and violence'." (p2)

The statements quoted here tend to indicate that these spokesmen of the art establishment hold attitudes consistent with the above.

For a precis and debate on Greenberg's position, see Victor Burgin's essay 'The absence of Presence' in *The End of Art Theory*, 1990. According to Burgin, Greenberg :

"...defined modernism as the historical tendency of an art practice towards complete self-referential autonomy to be achieved by scrupulous attention to all that is SPECIFIC to that practice; its own traditions and materials, its own DIFFERENCE from other art practices." (p30)

Furthermore:

"Greenberg's account of art history is innocent of any reference to political, economic, sociological, or technological determinants contemporary with, and possibly operative within, the 'purely aesthetic' decisions he describes. (ibid,p15)

Burgin, like Raymond Williams, claims it was the impact of industry and democracy in the C19 that gave rise to a conception of culture as something 'separate' from and 'above' society:

"By degrees, however, the notion of culture as a repository of ideal values became a means not of criticising the world, but evading it." (ibid;3)

By subscribing to the model of progress in the arts, and to the modernist myth of autonomy, the liberal arts establishment may well have been the target of Burgin's words above.

3. Roger Fry was intent on showing the independence of aesthetic experience from that of 'life'. He did this by 'proving' that changes in the aesthetic realm were not synonymous with social changes. If the one did not lead to the other, were they not then disjunct realms?:

"...the usual assumption of a direct and decisive connexion between life and art is by no means correct ...if we consider this special spiritual activity of art we find it no doubt open at times to influences from life, but in the main self-contained - we find the rhythmic sequence of change determined much more by its own internal forces - and by the readjustment within it, of its own elements - than by external forces." (Fry 1920;17)

Fry regards Impressionism as the critical point, in the evolution of art, where the assumption that art should represent reality was no longer valid. Fry regarded the principle characteristic of modern art as the " ..re-

establishment of purely aesthetic criteria in place of the criterion of conformity to appearance - the rediscovery of the principles of structural design and harmony."(ibid) This puts him in a sharp break from Ruskin, since this autonomy of the aesthetic realm allows for art to be free of the moral dimension. This is another reason why the left has railed against 'autonomy': It negates moral questions and therefore exempts artists from their perceived historical obligations to achieve freedom. For Fry:

"Art, then, is an expression of and a stimulus of this imaginative life, which is separated from actual life by the absence of responsive action. now this responsive action implies in actual life a moral responsibility. In art we have no such moral responsibility - it presents a life freed from the binding necessities of our actual existence." (p26)

The liberal notion of committing oneself to principles rather than causes, tends to feed into the perception that culture should remain politically neutral. The modernist definition of art's field as an autonomous one sustains and supports the politically liberal ideal. This is what is at the root of the debate between the left and the academy as represented by van Niekerk and Powell.

CONCLUSION

"No one can say what will become of our civilisation when it has really met different civilisations by means other than the shock of conquest and domination. But we have to admit that this encounter has not yet taken place at the level of an authentic dialogue. That is why we are in a kind of lull or interregnum in which we can no longer practice the dogmatism of a single truth and in which we are not yet capable of conquering the skepticism into which we have stepped." (Ricoeur;1961;283)

.....

"Cultural Imperialism has always been a bitter experience throughout history. When people take what belongs to us and make it their possession, when they try turn our culture into a commodity and market it without us knowing or permission, this is cultural imperialism...History teaches us that imperialists over the years have tried systematically to destroy our true cultural values, heritage, history and gains. " (Mbuhli;1989;17)

.....

"It should be observed, further, that the view which substitutes consensus of opinion for an objective standard has certain consequences that few would accept." (Russell;1946;134)

.....

## CONCLUSION

As I have indicated in the introduction, legitimacy within the artworld has tended to be contested with regard to three main themes; those of modernity, authenticity, and the issue of a 'national art'. In this conclusion, I would like to briefly consider to what extent these themes will continue to be determinants in the contest for legitimacy.

The centre-periphery pattern and the issue of 'modernity' still continues into the 1990's. Recent debates in the pages of Die Vrye Weekblad, between Ivor Powell and representatives of the 'neo-conceptual' or 'postmodern' group of artists in Johannesburg are reminiscent of earlier debates concerning the issues of modernity and an 'authentic' South African identity. (See Vrye Weekblad 28.8.1992,p10)

In a sense, these debates reflect Clark's observations concerning artists "attempting to master the weapons of an international style".

The collapse of Apartheid has opened up the possibility for an 'authentic dialogue'. It opens up possibilities for both the 'totalisers' who see the direction of any future art as an amalgam of black and white art, creating a new and quintessentially South African aesthetic.

But the 'pluralists'- those who advocate regionalism , and indeed 'ethnic' identity, are also faced with new possibilities. The demise of modernism has further strengthened their position.

The egalitarian vision offered by the left was rendered a fatal blow by the collapse of the socialist countries. In a recent paper, Younge cautioned against the national aspirations of 'working class' culture, and asked whether "... the future well-being of South African art (is) really assured by the dictum that there is to be one national art forum?" (1991 p25) This puts the 'old' left closer to the

liberal position, which acknowledges the separation of cultural and political realms.

Political liberation is no guarantee that 'authentic' indigenous creation will necessarily flourish. Neo-colonialisms of a commercial or ideological nature tend to replace overt exploitation and oppression. In Zimbabwe, the new regime commissioned Korean sculptors who specialised in didactic art to commemorate the national liberation struggle at Heroes' Acre, outside Harare. (Arnold 1989;183) Zimbabwe has long had a flourishing indigenous sculptural tradition, but the potential for local artists to portray their responses to their history on a public scale was overlooked.

Is cultural imposition acceptable when it is imposed upon the populace by a democratically elected government? Inversely, are all attempts at cultural dialogue on the part of 'elites' to be scorned, dismissed as 'appropriation', until a democratically elected government is installed in this country?

What pressures will the liberal model of art education have to deal with in the future SA? Will it still be able to function under the premise that its primary goal is to provide students with 'disinterested encounters with the best that has been thought and known? (O'Hear 1989;78) Or will 'the best that has been thought and known' be regarded as 'too Eurocentric', the propagation of which is a form of neo-colonialism? Or will 'disinterestedness' give way to the imperatives of community upliftment and development? To what extent will the description of the 'natural' elitism of the Fine Arts - a description that reinforces the values necessary to maintain Art's marketability - be regarded as an acceptable one?

But what of the art of the 'dominated' culture? Traditional black visual expression stands fragmented. Its visual impact is in fact strengthened by its poignancy as a relic of a culture that predates the onslaught of 'world civilisation'.

The myth, propagated so successfully by the left, of a pre-colonial wholeness, is strengthened by the clear destructiveness of the Apartheid system.

These respective art traditions are held to represent the (high) culture of conflicting 'Europeans' and 'Africans' in South Africa. But neither of these traditions is a living, extant, one. The traditions that both black and white claim origin to as their respective heritages are both inventions; a kind of defense to buffet the confrontation with the cultural other, a reflection of the need to maintain the vision of one's own centrality as a defense against the realisation that one is just another 'other'.

It is opportune to question the assumption that 'Eurocentric' art traditions, as the traditions of whites, are race-specific and therefore of questionable value in a 'democratic' South Africa.

The traditional skills of the Academy are usable no matter whose hands they are in. The 'pioneer' generation of black artists, Pemba, Sekoto and Mohl, all accepted Western pictorial conventions, and a significant number of black artists have rebutted the white assumptions that the transference of these conventions would somehow 'pollute' them.

In discussing the history of the Polly Street art centre, David Koloane notes :

"It is evident that Grossert was in a position of sufficient authority to convince Skotness that tuition of any kind was detrimental to the artist's natural ability to paint, which he felt was proof of their identity as black artists.....Skotness became an adherent of this theory. This unfortunate trend of thought failed to take into account the conditions under which the artists lived and worked." (Koloane 1989;219)

He concludes, furthermore that

"...this concept of the untutored black artist has been indiscriminately exploited by dealers and entrepreneurs."  
(ibid)

One observer notes of Zambian art:

"Overshadowed for a quarter of a century by its southern neighbour Zimbabwe, both better provided for and better exploited in the field of art, Zambia has been ignored and scorned. The art of Zambia has become invisible because it is not believed in and therefore not seen. Art critics look at Zambian art through lenses shaped by the image of Shona sculpture and Nigerian spirit paintings and fail to get into focus the birth of this new creativity...Most Zambian artists claim an interest in painting and drawing that goes back to their childhood. Those with schooling managed to train as art teachers at the local college. The rest could at best hope for some training by a 'Zairean Master' or struggle on teaching themselves.

What one sees in this first group is an application and an intellectual determination to get to grips with all that academic traditions can offer." (Bush;1990;72)

The present period of interregnum in South Africa is expressed in the artworld as a major shift in perception of the role and function of the art institutions. Two possible future scenarios emerge as responses to the present crisis of legitimacy. If they are viewed as complementary, rather than opposing terms in a binary opposition, both of them have a contribution to make to an 'authentic dialogue'.

The first is a conservative 'recovery' position; one that incorporates an understanding of what Roger Scruton has termed "a welcome admission that art is furniture". The demise of the aesthetic project of Modernism has introduced the possibility of a serious reconsideration of the adoption of traditional teaching methods and 'academic' conventions. Such a position would regard the traditional 'elitism' of the

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