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Artistic and cultural problems in the current situation

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In the most general sense, the present situation of art is dominated by two tendencies: on the one hand, the development on a vast scale of the objective conditions for a global artistic culture that will illuminate, delight and move masses of human beings, enriching and ultimately altering their lives in an almost unimaginable fashion; on the other, the decayed state of the existing social relations works in the opposite direction, threatening humanity with the prospect of war and dictatorship, endangering existing cultural life and suppressing the emergence of new forms and ideas.

The assault on art, the most complex part of culture, takes place through increasingly brazen attacks on artistic freedom and efforts at censorship in many parts of the world (the US, China, Britain, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, India and elsewhere), including the encouragement of the most reactionary forces, fascistic or religious fundamentalist—Christian, Hindu and Muslim; as well as through the further commercialization and trivialization of art and the corruption of layers of the intelligentsia, both openly right-wing and certain nominally "left" elements.

Any empirical survey of global art and culture is out of the question. Aside from the scientific-historical problems posed by such an enterprise, a few statistical reminders might help put the dimensions of the present global cultural situation in a clearer light.

Capitalism has failed the world's population in terms of culture and education, along with the possibility of making a decent life for itself. Nonetheless, the sheer force of population growth and global economic expansion has produced a leap in the number of literate adults. The figure doubled from 1970 to 1998, from 1.5 billion to 3.3 billion.

The number of books alone is staggering. Some 1,000,000 titles are published each year worldwide. One estimate suggests that the existing world stock of books might be approximately 65 million titles. Amazon.com claims to have 4,000,000 titles. In 2000, there were 158,000 unique periodical titles in the world and the total number of serial publications was over 600,000 around the globe.

About 1.1 billion books were sold in the United States in 1999. The total number of US magazines circulated annually exceeds 500 million.

The process of book and periodical production and consumption is riven by vast inequities, with the US producing some 40 percent of the world's printed material while entire continents starve for information and culture.

This raises the question: has capitalism created, or is it capable of creating, a harmonious global culture?

Trade in cultural goods has grown exponentially over the last two decades. Between 1980 and 1998, annual world trade of printed matter, literature, music, visual arts, cinema, photography, radio, television, games and sporting goods surged from $95.3 billion to nearly $400 billion. However, three countries—the United Kingdom, the United States and China—produced 40 percent of the world's cultural trade products in 2002, while Latin America, the Caribbean region, Oceania and Africa together (nearly one-and-a-half billion people) accounted for less than four percent, according to a report by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Figures from 2001 revealed that five countries—India, China-Hong Kong, the Philippines, the US and Japan—each produced more than 200 feature films. India annually turns out 700 or more films; the Filipino film industry has subsequently collapsed—it has gone from producing 240 feature films a year to 40. The US produces 400 plus films a year; the Japanese produced about 240 films a year during the 1990s. For China, see below.

In 2001, 25 countries, primarily in Europe and Asia, produced between 20 and 199 films. Seventy-two countries produced between one and 19 films, and 88 countries out of a total of 190 had no film industry whatsoever.

In other words, 160 out of 190 countries in 2001 each produced less than 20 films. Sub-Saharan Africa produces an average of only 42 films a year. Vietnam, with 83 million people, has 60 cinema screens. Brazil, with 170 million people, has only 2,000. The US has 36,700.

The Hollywood studios own a worldwide share of 85 percent of cinema screens, with peaks above 90 percent in some European, African and Latin American countries. Hollywood revenues were down 6 percent, $500 million, in 2005. Box office revenues are down in Western Europe too. This is attributable, in part, to higher ticket prices, the general economy, the DVD market, cable television—but also the generally inferior quality of the films. Audiences are responding to the miserable quality of so many films.

Entertainment is one industry in which the US possesses a massive surplus. European films control 1 percent of US market. China (which permits only 20 foreign films a year), Russia, Turkey, India, France, South Korea are some of the countries where local or at least non-American films control a significant portion of the domestic market.

The Chinese film industry is now the world's third largest, in terms of revenue, behind Hollywood and India, with 260 films made in 2005—an increase of almost 20 percent (76 were made in 1997). Chinese domestic box office revenue was $248 million in 2005, an increase of 30 percent over the year before, with another $204 million made in overseas markets. The 30 percent increase in domestic box office was substantial, but it pales next to the 58 percent increase in 2004 over 2003. China still suffers from a relatively small number of cinemas and, of course, widespread

poverty. In 2004, its domestic box office revenue was only one quarter of South Korea's.

The entertainment industry underwent an astonishing process of concentration in the 1990s. In 1993, the total turnover of the fifty largest audiovisual companies worldwide was $118 billion. Four years later, *seven* major media conglomerates alone reached the same figure.

In 1993, 36 percent of the companies were based in the US, 36 percent in the European Union, and 26 percent in Japan. By 1997, over 50 percent of the firms were based in the US. What much of the world is permitted to see and hear is largely determined by officials of *seven* media conglomerates.

We face a radically transformed cultural situation: tens of thousands of online periodicals, an enormous growth in computer-associated and digital technologies, creating art media not even conceivable only decades ago. Even if one were to consider the "traditional" art forms—fiction, poetry, painting, music, cinema (at least 'traditional' in the twentieth century), architecture, dance—a worldwide explosion has occurred.

The possibility of an alternative perspective to ours has been raised at our meeting this week—the possibility that we live during the birth pangs of a newly stabilized capitalist world system, in which the fundamental contradictions of social life have been overcome, opening up a vista of eventual economic prosperity and freedom from privation and deadening toil for the world's population. If that were indeed the case, such a remarkable, liberating development ought to be accompanied by the frankest and most honest appraisals of the human condition. If we were perched on the edge of a new epoch, premonitions of that would be discovered in art.

But more specifically, if this society held out the real possibility of ameliorating the conditions of masses of people, then its official art would be engaged in the most self-critical effort, probing what exists, exposing the remaining ills and artistically anticipating their resolution. An extraordinary frankness and openness would dominate, which permitted the widest possible and most democratic discussion of the human situation.

Is this the present situation? Clearly not. What do we continually encounter? A concealment of conditions, the exclusion of vast masses of people and their lives from artistic consideration, all too often the fantasized, trivial treatment of the lives of 'beautiful' people without financial problems, people who don't exist, and the systematic degradation of popular culture, the calculated effort to brutalize and render humanity indifferent to suffering and social ills.

We can say with some justice that the fact that the lives of hundreds of millions of Africans can find reflection in only 42 films (and those are not distributed evenly across the continent) is a disgrace, a shameful state of affairs. But do the hundreds of films produced in India, most of them silly musicals, do justice to the lives of that population, or, for that matter, do the hundreds of Hollywood films made annually, by and large, shed any substantial light on the lives of the American people?

The first sub-Saharan African feature film did not appear until cinema was 70 years old, in 1966. We reviewed it recently. From personal experience I can tell you that no film had been produced entirely in Chad, a sizable African country with a population of 10 million people, until 1999, because I interviewed the director in Toronto in 2000. In a continent where illiteracy is exceptionally high, cinema is one of the principal means by which people might see something about their lives and the world.

A commentator wrote several years ago: "Hopes and projections of political and economic renewal and transformation under the aegis of World Bank-mandated adjustment programs, and other liberalization measures, and the positive fall-out that these were expected to have, especially on the cultural sector, actually turned out to be disastrous. African filmmakers began to experience the painful effects of budget cuts and the gradual loss of both external and internal funding for production. At the same time, the slow but orchestrated disappearance of movie houses, one of the sad occurrences of the 1990s, began as privatization made purchase possible by local entrepreneurs who, in time, converted these into warehouses for sugar, rice, cement, and other commodities."

When film production statisticians consider the "world," they generally leave Africa out of the picture. The population of Africa and the Middle East *combined* accounted for 1.2 percent of "total world cinema spending" in 1998.

A vast social gap exists between those who control the cultural means of production and wide layers of the world's population. Moreover, the very depth of the crisis, the human urgency of the present situation, renders it too explosive to be treated seriously by the official culture.

Trotsky writes that the "decline of bourgeois society means an intolerable exacerbation of social contradictions, which are transformed inevitably into personal contradictions, calling forth an ever more burning need for a liberating art." I find that a compelling insight into the present world situation.

Worsening social contradictions, transformed into personal contradictions, producing an ever-greater need for liberating art. This ever-greater need is answered at present by the official culture by ever greater levels of dishonesty and insensitivity.

We could look at Russia and Eastern Europe, where society has experienced birth pangs of a sort, but is this new social organism a progression or a horrifying regression? The notion that capitalism offers a way forward can be disputed simply by looking at the dismal and demoralizing cultural-artistic conditions in most of those countries. Russian cinema turns out for the most part hysterical, pessimistic, misanthropic works, or commercial works that imitate the worst of Hollywood's vulgarity and brutality.

The theater was once the jewel of Poland's cultural life, the site of experiment in the 1960s and 1970s, including Grotowski's legendary "Poor Theatre." A recent commentator notes that Warsaw is "hurtling these days less 'towards a poor theatre' than towards a bland, international, slightly impoverished one, indistinguishable from that of any provincial capital."

These conditions or worse dominate Eastern Europe, where budgets for the arts have been devastated and market principles restored. Insofar as artistic life revives, it will have to adopt a position of hostility to the mafia-capitalist elite.

If capitalism is flourishing and offers an unlimited potential, then how it is possible that its culture has failed abysmally to treat artistically the present human situation, and to the extent that this reality is treated, and one sees a shift in mood in this direction, it is done from an oppositional, increasingly anti-capitalist point of view?

Erich Auerbach, in his work *Mimesis*, a study of the representation of reality in Western literature since antiquity, describes the foundations of modern realism in the early nineteenth century, when society was experiencing genuine birth pangs, in these terms: "The serious treatment of everyday reality, the rise of more extensive and socially inferior social groups [the working class, in other words] to the position of subject matter for problematic-existential representation, on the one hand; on the other, the embedding of random persons and events in the general course of contemporary history, the fluid historical background ..."

What do we encounter today? Almost the precise opposite of this approach.

We're entitled to ask: what is the moral state, so to speak, of the global culture? Here statistics will not suffice.

Trotsky insisted, rightly, that any penetrating look at life would inevitably contain an element of protest. How could it not, given the conditions in which the vast majority live? The traumatic political experiences of the middle and late twentieth century, one might say, had

several related temporary (but enduring) consequences: they damaged the confidence of the artist in an alternative to capitalism, they discouraged him or her from taking a penetrating look at life, and they rendered such efforts, when they did occur, far more diffuse and confused, far less associated with the historical and political perspective of socialism.

Advanced art from the late nineteenth century through the first two decades or more of the twentieth could feel relatively confident that a broad-based opposition to the present order existed, from which it could draw intellectual and moral sustenance and encouragement as to the possibility of a radical change in social relations. It would be entirely implausible to explain the extraordinary richness of creative efforts in those decades entirely apart from the relationship between culture and revolutionary political ideas and organization.

Economic factors have compounded the present ideological difficulties. The enrichment of a considerable layer of the intelligentsia has taken place, all the more willingly acceded to, given the political and moral confusion that prevails. In that sense, the conditions are perhaps more similar to those described by Plekhanov in the pre-1914 period: A turn to the right, to political indifferentism, after 1905 on the part of many Russian intellectuals.

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We have described the evolution of elements of the generation of 1968 on numerous occasions. A new crowd of Bush fellow travelers in the US—Christopher Hitchens, Paul Berman, Todd Gitlin (the former SDS leader who declared after 9/11 that "lived patriotism entails sacrifice") and various others, participants in Socialist Scholars Conferences of old—has made its noxious presence felt. Renunciation of principle, renunciation of one's past, renunciation of one's integrity—this continues to be a booming business. Opportunism and cowardice take their place in the process alongside disorientation and historical-political ignorance.

This is a worldwide phenomenon. An Egyptian journalist for an establishment weekly there, inspired, in fact, by Harold Pinter's Nobel Prize speech, recently denounced "a cultural apparatus that deals with [culture] only as an ornament of the Establishment." She referred to a book, *Intellectuals for Sale*, which has apparently created an uproar in Egypt. The author was a close advisor to the minister of culture for the past 18 years before falling out of favor.

The journalist noted that "the stories of corruption, and perhaps more importantly, the stories about the mechanisms employed by the ministry to co-opt intellectuals, are still hair-raising." She spoke about "the destruction of culture that has taken place in Egypt over the past three decades [that] would not have been possible without the intellectuals for sale."

A certain section of intellectuals has gone on sale everywhere.

Skepticism and demoralization have both a right-wing and a "left" face. Two figures with whom we need to engage much more seriously—and today is not that engagement, but a brief consideration—are Terry Eagleton, the British critic, and Fredric Jameson, the American academic, each perennially described as a "leading Marxist critic." These are the leading 'Marxist' critics in the English-speaking world and perhaps beyond, I believe. Both were associated with revisionist politics.

Eagleton, after leaving the state capitalist International Socialists group in the mid-1970s, was a member of Alan Thornett's Workers Socialist League while at Oxford, a not insignificant fact. Jameson explicitly associates his analysis of postmodern culture with Ernest Mandel's theory of 'late capitalism.'

One of Eagleton's most recent works, *After Theory*, identifies the "theory" in the title with the "golden age of cultural theory" associated with the work of Jacques Lacan, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, as well as Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Jurgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson and Edward Said. One doesn't want to tar this group of thinkers with one reductive brush, but, on the whole, this is a bloc of anti-Marxists, not without insights, but a bloc of conscious anti-Marxists—the cream of late twentieth century hostility to dialectical and historical materialism.

Eagleton declares in the opening of his book that the "golden age" of cultural studies has passed. He goes on: "There can be no going back to an age when it was enough to pronounce Keats delectable or Milton a doughty spirit. It is not as though the whole project [of critical theory] was a ghastly mistake on which some merciful soul has now blown the whistle.... If theory means a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever."

The idea that "theory" means a reflection "on our guiding assumptions," not the examination and cognition of the external world and its laws of motion, speaks volumes. (And, in fact, produces volumes, which you will see if you visit any bookstore in a major metropolitan center or one located near a significant university.)

Aside from the fact that his description of pre-postmodernist criticism is a caricature, that serious twentieth century bourgeois cultural criticism did far more than declare Keats to be "delectable," we have to remind ourselves that this is a self-described Marxist. He appears to be arguing, if one takes him at face value, that before Althusser and Lévi-Strauss and Derrida and Habermas, no serious critical, cultural theory existed, there was merely bourgeois academia. What of the Marxist tradition? This body of work does not even merit being raised in this context, so thoroughly does Eagleton identify himself with those trends identified loosely as structuralist, post-structuralist or postmodernist. Eagleton presents himself as a critic of these tendencies, but he begins on his knees.

Eagleton's book has a value of another sort. He does provide insight into the present situation in "cultural theory," and here, although his tone is complacent, he no doubt speaks from first-hand knowledge. "Structuralism, Marxism, post-structuralism and the like are no longer the sexy topics they were. What is sexy instead is sex. On the wilder shores of academia, an interest in French philosophy has given way to a fascination with French kissing. In some cultural circles, the politics of masturbation exert far more fascination than the politics of the Middle East. Socialism has lost out to sado-masochism. Among students of culture, the body is an immensely fashionable topic, but it is usually the erotic body, not the famished one. There is a keen interest in coupling bodies, but not in labouring ones. Quietly spoken middle-class students huddle diligently in libraries, at work on sensationalist subjects like vampirism and eye-gouging, cyborgs and porno movies.

"Nothing could be more understandable. To work on the literature of latex or the political implications of navel-piercing is to take literally the wise old adage that study should be fun. It is rather like writing your Master's thesis on the comparative flavour of malt whiskies, or on the phenomenology of lying in bed all day. It creates a seamless continuity between the intellect and everyday life. There are advantages in being able to write your Ph.D. thesis without stirring from in front of the TV set." An attractive picture.

Fredric Jameson, as we discussed briefly last summer, views contemporary global capitalism as a thoroughly nightmarish and overwhelming phenomenon, in which the population is dominated by a web of bureaucratic control and media manipulation on a massive scale. The possibility of social convulsion, much less "the ultimate senescence, breakdown and death of the system as such," is largely excluded.

Jameson, in 1995, argued that global capitalism had never had such room for maneuver, writing that "all the threatening forces it generated against itself in the past ... seem today in full disarray when not in one

way or another effectively neutralized." A new proletariat would perhaps emerge at some future date, but meantime "we ourselves are still in the trough, however, and no one can say how long we will stay there."

In his newest book, we are still apparently in the trough, perhaps deeper than ever. Jameson has written a work extolling the virtues of utopianism, a tendency about which we have written and spoken.

"Utopia seems to have recovered its vitality as a political slogan and a politically energizing perspective. Indeed, a whole new generation of the post-globalization Left ... has more and more frequently been willing to adopt this slogan, in a situation in which the discrediting of communist and socialist parties alike, and the skepticism about traditional conceptions of revolution, have cleared the discursive field....

"What is crippling is not the presence of an enemy but rather the universal belief, not only that this tendency is irreversible, but that the historic alternatives to capitalism have been proven unviable and impossible, and that no other socio-economic system is conceivable, let alone practically available. The Utopians not only offer to conceive of such alternate systems; Utopian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality, to the point where one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet."

This is Jameson par excellence, a pretentious accommodation with existing reality, a worship of the accomplished fact. Incapable of imagining a struggle against the present difficulties, he is a product of 1970s radicalism, who long ago gave up, if he ever possessed it to begin with, a confidence in the revolutionary capacity of the working class, the American working class, above all.

Many have undergone an even more pronounced moral and intellectual disintegration.

French artistic and intellectual life reveals some of these tendencies in the sharpest form—a temporary but serious eclipse of French cinema and fiction. One novelist/editor says categorically, "French literature has become a desert." In that desert we find, as one of the most prominent French authors, Michel Houellebecq. We wrote about him on the WSWS a few years ago (http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2003/05/nov-m02.html).

In his novels, Houellebecq alternates descriptions of cold, deliberately tawdry sexual activities with long passages describing the ridiculous antics of sections of the French middle class to stay afloat spiritually, passages written without historical context or human sympathy. These are tedious works which skim the surface of French life. His characters or narrator may hint at anti-Arab racism; the author says this is not his voice, but the works so lack a critical framework or distance that it is impossible to tell.

The degrading activities are not criticized, but wallowed in. This is a relatively unmediated response to the general decay of French capitalism and the specific decomposition of the 1968 generation—all this somehow blamed on the population itself and its capacity for self-delusion. Houellebecq has been compared to Louis-Ferdinand Céline, author of *Journey to the End of the Night*. Trotsky, in a famous essay, called Céline a deeply wounded moralist, who had to choose between the light or the dark. In the event, he chose fascism and anti-Semitism. This ought to be warning enough, but Houellebecq is no Céline. There is no urgency, or seriousness, no bite to his satire, except against the relatively defenseless.

A few words on American fiction and cinema. There has been in recent years in the US a certain revival of the social novel—Don DeLillo, Jonathan Franzen, Richard Powers and others. Their books demonstrate an awareness of certain social processes—the existence of globalized, computer-driven economic life; the criminality of big business and government; the spiritual disenfranchisement of the American people; the growing disaffection of the population, its alienation, its moral isolation and often wretchedness.

In DeLillo's latest work, *Cosmopolis*, a kind of black comedy, a 28-year-old billionaire asset manager, who lives in an apartment worth $104 million, inches his way across Manhattan in his white limousine in the midst of a mid-day traffic jam. He conducts his business, which at the moment consists in betting against the yen (he loses hundreds of millions in the course of the 200-page novel), from his limousine, on a series of screens and handheld devices in its back seat. He meets en route with his various advisors—financial, security, medical—and his "chief of theory." He encounters his wife of 22 days, who seems a total stranger, he has sex with various people, although not his wife, and ends up getting assassinated, all in the course of this one trip across town. It's a perceptive, occasionally amusing, but quite chilly work.

There is something dissatisfying ultimately about these new American novels. Brilliant, but somewhat inhuman, distant from the reality of everyday life, sometimes facetious, exaggerated. The book reviewer of the *New Republic*, James Wood, attempted to use the weaknesses of these works against them in an article following the September 11 attacks. Wood, who is one of the more serious fiction critics in the US, argued for American novelists to abandon efforts to uncover social reality; he hoped that 9/11 would "allow a space for the aesthetic, for the contemplative, for novels that tell us *not* 'how the world works' but 'how somebody felt about something'—indeed, how a lot of different people felt about a lot of different things (these are commonly called novels about human beings)."

Wood argued that following the terrorist attacks "novelists will be leery of setting themselves up as analysts of society, while society bucks and charges so helplessly. Surely they will tread carefully over their generalisations. It is now very easy to look very dated very fast." He asked: "For who would dare to be knowledgeable about politics and society now?"

A more reasonable question, given the dimensions of the 9/11 atrocity, bound up as it was with international politics and history, might have been: "Who would dare *not* to be knowledgeable about politics and society now?"

Wood's counterposing of "human" versus "social" novels is deeply false. He wants novels about "individual consciousness," he says. We too want serious books about human beings, not templates or tracts.

But what is individuality? The particular manner, Trotsky notes, in which "tribal, national, class, temporary and institutional elements" are welded together. Individuality resides in the unique manner in which these elements are combined.

The reader contains the same essential elements as the artist, although perhaps in a different combination; this is why the reader can understand the artist—what serves as a bridge from one human being to another is not the unique, but the common. Only through the common is the unique known.

If the particular were not reduced to the general, there would be no communication and no art. And this common element is made up of the deepest and most persistent conditions of life, education, work and so forth. This social condition is, first of all, the condition of class affiliation. Serious attention to the human soul therefore requires serious attention to social class and to history. Lyricism and social analysis are not opposed to one another as the bourgeois philistine supposes.

Wood is wrong about the big questions, but he makes valid criticisms of this school of American social novels, and this has a bearing on cinema too, in my opinion. "Nowadays anyone in possession of a laptop is thought to be a brilliance on the move, filling his or her novel with essaylets and great displays of knowledge. Indeed, 'knowing about things' has become one of the qualifications of the contemporary novelist.... The result—in America at least—is novels of immense self-consciousness with no selves in them at all, curiously arrested and very 'brilliant' books that know a thousand things but do not know a single

human being."

He describes what he calls "hysterical realism:" "This kind of realism is a perpetual motion machine that appears to have been embarrassed into velocity. Stories and sub-stories sprout on every page. There is a pursuit of vitality at all costs." These are valid criticisms of a kind of left art work, bound up, I think, with various postmodernist conceptions (fairly explicitly, I think, in Don DeLillo's case) and demoralized political moods.

In art cinema, we see the "tour de force" film, brilliant displays of historical recreation, for example, with a relatively empty content. Anything can be done ... but almost nothing is done. Related to that is the prevalence of exaggeration, over-the-top performances, comic or absurd moments that exceed the norms of tolerance, that lack a sense of proportion.

A sense of artistic proportion is missing when the artist or artists are more or less distant from the real driving forces in life and society, when the true array of social and psychological forces is unclear and lacking concreteness. Skepticism about human capacities and more than a morsel of misanthropy are also often present.

Clearly, there are objective historical problems contained in these difficulties. Art cannot save itself or entirely clarify itself. The social movement of masses of human beings plays a decisive role. Trotsky writes about "the struggle for freedom of the oppressed classes and peoples [that] scatters the clouds of skepticism and of pessimism which cover the horizon of mankind."

We have to maintain a sense of proportion and a certain patience. There is no point in simply hammering individuals, when the problem lies in the general conditions. Nonetheless, we have to insist on the need for a change, struggle for it and, in that manner, help lay the basis for it.

I think what Auerbach says about Balzac, the great French novelist, is *à propos*: "In practice his people and his atmospheres, contemporary as they may be, are always represented as phenomena sprung from historical events and forces ... the source of his invention is not free imagination but real life, as it presents itself everywhere. Now, in respect to this manifold life, steeped in history, mercilessly represented with all its everyday triviality, practical preoccupations, ugliness and vulgarity, Balzac has an attitude such as Stendhal had had before him: in the form determined by its actuality, its triviality, its inner historical laws, he takes it seriously and even tragically... The newness of this attitude [exhibited by Stendhal and Balzac], and the new type of subjects which were seriously, problematically, tragically treated, caused the gradual development of an entirely new kind of serious or, if one prefers, elevated style."

So then: The serious or elevated, problematic and even tragic treatment of real life, in its historical and social concreteness and movement. We have no templates or prescriptions. We attempt to critically illuminate the path, as Trotsky said, but we would encourage this mixture of artistic seriousness and everyday life ... how that will take place today will not be determined by what French novelists did 150 or 200 years ago, but this sort of growth of seriousness and elevated style in treating our contemporary existence is one of the keys to the development of a new art.

In their debate during the 1930s, the German playwright Brecht accused the critic and pro-Stalinist Lukacs of wanting "Balzac, only modern." This is not our conception. Our reality, the reality of contemporary mass society, is extremely complex. A great deal of water has flowed under the bridge.

To treat life requires a high degree of artistic objectivity and deep feeling for humanity. We are not seeking to repeat any particular phase of artistic history. Such things are not possible, in any case. But I think it would be light-minded under the present circumstances, when a genuine regression has taken place, when a great deal has been lost, to ignore the origins and evolution of modern realism.

So what might be some of the personal contradictions called into being by the present worsening of social contradictions? Of course, brutal economic and social realities, conditions of work today, all the psychological dilemmas associated with vast changes and new pressures—the binds that people find themselves in, torn by different demands—the impact on love and friendship and personal relations, the moral contradictions created by shocking changes and circumstances. The relations between all social layers. A story of a businessman might reveal things about life that are otherwise hidden. There is no shortage of drama in our world.

How will this be represented?

It's impossible to predict precisely. It may begin without great formal flourish or innovation. That may not be the immediate challenge for artists. It may begin with rather conservative or conventional forms suddenly treating explosive problems, with some of the old baggage towed along.

We campaign for a far greater attentiveness to the problems of everyday life, insisting, however, against the populists, Stalinists and various radicals, that the truth about this reality can emerge only when it is treated in the most sophisticated, sublime artistic, "world-historical" fashion, without templates and prettification.

"Artistic creation has its laws—even when it consciously serves a social movement.... Art can become a strong ally of revolution only in so far as it remains faithful to itself" (Trotsky, *Art and Politics In Our Epoch*). And here's where the limits of even the best postwar schools, Italian Neo-realism, Iranian cinema and others emerge, in my view. That they censored themselves, tied their own hands behind their backs, according to populist criteria, which precluded a classical grandeur and seriousness, by and large. Naïve, simple or simplified works will not suffice.

A shift in mood is unquestionably under way—we see it even in popular films in the US, films at the recent Toronto film festival; we have the recent example of Pinter—a moral distancing from capitalism and its official culture, a hint of upheavals to come.

In his Nobel Prize speech Pinter offered a blistering attack on US policy, calling its crimes "systematic, constant, vicious, remorseless." He described the invasion of Iraq as "a bandit act, an act of blatant state terrorism, demonstrating absolute contempt for the concept of international law."

He concluded: "I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching, unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the *real* truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory."

Such a comment is not simply an aberration, a voice in the wilderness. It reflects a growing sentiment among the most sensitive observers of the human condition and it expects to find a hearing, which it has.

We've referred to the significance of *Munich*, not a milestone in the history of cinema, but a work that opposes the brutality and callousness built into so much of recent popular culture, including the stupid arsonists like Tarantino.

What do we ourselves need? A more concerted and broader international effort to follow artistic and intellectual developments—a more systematic and theoretical approach. We cannot simply jump from one work to the next. We must have a theory of contemporary artistic culture and its evolution, working over Eagleton, Jameson and other figures, following the major bourgeois literary critics. We must have greater international cooperation and participation—in the US, more attention to fiction, in particular, and the debates surrounding it; in Britain and Germany, the theater, in particular; in Asia, cinema and novels too; in Australia, fiction writing, in particular. We must pay more attention to the visual arts, in general.

What we do has an objective weight and significance, a weight and significance that will only deepen and broaden. What we do and say is

followed widely. We have every right to feel confident in the success of our efforts.