

# Cultural Crisis Management

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BOOK REVIEWED:

Michael S. Joyce, "The National Endowments for the Humanities and the Arts," in Charles L. Heatherly, ed., *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration*. Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1981.

Report of the Commission on the Humanities,  
*The Humanities in American Life*.  
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

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**O**ur current cultural crisis is revealed in the very proposals offered for its resolution. While conservatives defend traditional standards that judge cultural works according to self-contained intellectual criteria, liberals espouse a cultural realism that minimizes the differences between the activities of artists and scholars and those of other citizens. Consequently, debates on government policy on the arts and humanities within mainstream politics give the impression of having moved nowhere since liberals, socialists, and modernists made their original assault on bourgeois gentility almost a century ago. Policy-makers on the right advocate cuts in federal spending for the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities and a "depoliticization" of American culture. Their liberal counterparts respond with the argument that political and social issues are inescapable in serious art and humanistic research, adding that the enlightenment of the general public requires an increase in spending for the two Endowments.

No matter what the rhetorical differences are that separate these two positions, both liberals and conservatives share an undemocratic conception of American cultural life that equates the arts and humanities with the aims and technique of the powerful. Whether garbed in the half-remembered finery of genteel "excellence," or advertised as the latest in fashionable "relevance," the politics of official culture consist of the subjugation of intellect and creativity to the demands of corporate fundraisers, government bureaucrats, and foreign policy advisers.

As recent reports by the Heritage and Rockefeller foundations indicate, the self-appointed managers of the arts and humanities do not consider a return to genteel standards or a democratization of cultural life as serious options. Rather, liberal and conservative participants in such well financed commissions plan a culture compatible with an era of increased corporate consolidation, economic retrenchment for the majority of Americans, and renewed adventurism abroad. The predictable cant of high standards, cultural pluralism, populism, and elitism simply obscures the new ideal of culture as an adjunct to cost-efficient management and social discipline. Those interested in the theoretical foundation for this new official culture should look not to the usual texts by John Dewey or T.S. Eliot but to that brilliant television slogan of daily existence under Reaganism: "Life got tougher. We got stronger."

Calling for a renewed dedication to "excellence, the highest fruit of the pursuit of liberty," Michael S. Joyce and his associates at the Heritage Foundation have detailed a series of proposals for the National Endowments that will "teach the nation the limits of equalitarian impulse." Joyce's report appears as one chapter of the Foundation's mammoth *Mandate for Leadership*, hailed as "very impressive" and "indicative of the vitality of the conservative movement today" by such Reaganite luminaries as Edwin Meese III and Senator Paul Laxalt. Though anything but "impressive" as an outline of policy recommendations—surely no one is surprised to find conservatives proposing budget cuts for the NEH and NEA—the Heritage Foundation's cultural report is important as evidence that the defense of high culture is the last thing conservatives have in mind for the arts and humanities.

An insistence on "excellence" in American culture, and a parallel critique of any NEH or NEA activities that cater to debased popular tastes or focus on political issues, form the main basis for the Heritage report's recommendations. The word "excellence," which receives no more definition than the brief association with the "pursuit of liberty" cited above, appears again and again in the chapter in such phrases as "encouragement to excellence," "criterion of excellence," "insistence on excellence," "discovery of excellence," "scholarly ex-

cellence," "excellence is the measure," "the principle of excellence," "merit, excellence, and achievement," and (of course) "true excellence." Given the frequency with which the word appears, one can only conclude that whatever "excellence" the Heritage people have in mind has not yet been achieved by their editors.<sup>1</sup>

To the detriment of "excellence," the report argues, NEH administrators have shown "a slavish devotion to 'innovation'" and a "fascination with public media and public programs." In order to make their works palatable to "an unsophisticated mass public," artists associated with the NEA have resorted to the "ever greater employment of advertising and marketing techniques which cheapen when they do not actually compromise artistic content." Joyce takes a decisive stand against blurring the line between high and mass culture. "The arts that NEA funds must support belong primarily to the area of high culture; such culture is more than mere entertainment and is concerned with permanent values beyond current tastes and wide appeal."

Not only have the Endowments degraded cultural activity by dissolving the distinction between quality and kitsch, they have also created a self-perpetuating bureaucratic class that is the audience for its own cultural programs. In the name of cultural democracy, the NEA has simply passed on funds to professional fellowship-mongers, "trained in all too many cases for the jobs and roles which cannot exist without the establishment of new programs funded by still larger subsidies," but who speak in behalf of a nonexistent mass constituency of

<sup>1</sup> The Heritage report's monotonous references to a meaningless standard of "excellence" resemble nothing more than Barbara Tuchman's evocation of "quality" in her celebrated essay, "The Decline of Quality." There Tuchman vaguely defines "quality" as "achieving or reaching for the highest standard as against being satisfied with the sloppy or fraudulent." She then goes on to rate the "Q" or "non-Q" ("quality" or "non-quality") quotient of an array of cultural leaders and artifacts: Fred Astaire ("Q") against Johnny Carson ("non-Q"), the Colosseum ("Q") against TV dinners ("non-Q"), etc. Typically, the decline of "Q" is attributed to the student left of the 1960s and the contemporary feminist movement, which play a role in this article analogous to that of the Communist party in the early mass culture critiques of the late 1940s.

At first, Tuchman's essay reads as simply a rehash of these older critiques by Greenberg, Rahv, Macdonald, and others, now gilded with the unabashed elitism of the neoconservative professional class. However, a closer reading shows it to be symptomatic of a "decline of quality" among mass-culture critics themselves. Whereas once such critics condemned mass culture in the name of democratic socialism and the artistic avant-garde, Tuchman's nouveau mass-culture critique serves only to furnish the fashionable with a handy high-"Q" shopping list. As a result, Tuchman's essay becomes indistinguishable from the advertisements for luxury goods that surround it in the *New York Times Magazine*.

See Barbara Tuchman, "The Decline of Quality," *New York Times Magazine*, November 2, 1980, pp. 38-41.

art lovers. Thus artists and art administrators have used government funds to support programs that have less to do with raising public tastes than with self-aggrandizement.

This critique of the cult of innovation and bureaucratization in government cultural policy has much to recommend it. The dissemination of cultural products by sophisticated media and the establishment of a cultural welfare state that educates its citizens in prevailing professional pastimes have nothing to do with the democratization of culture. Still, the democratic implications of the Heritage report's comments on the administration of culture are quickly forgotten as it turns to attack the Endowments' "tendency to emphasize politically inspired social policies at the expense of the independence of the arts and the humanities." For beneath this rejection of "politicized" culture lies the heart of the Heritage Foundation's program: not the banishment of politics from the realm of culture but the adjustment of cultural life to the dictates of an undemocratic politics.

**T**he call for an apolitical culture has a long pedigree among conservative thinkers. What is new about the Heritage report's proposals is the suggestion that certain kinds of politics are actually beneficial for scholars and artists. In fact, a good deal of Joyce's chapter is devoted to distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable politics in cultural production. The following passage on the role of the chairperson of the NEH suggests what is at stake in such a distinction.

The chairman of each Endowment has primary responsibility for preserving the agency's apolitical purpose. Here we would propose a distinction. The chairman must promote and defend the "apolitical" nature of the agency's operations. But he must also be "political" in terms of dealing with Congress.

While the NEH must abandon political tasks and "begin to extricate itself and the humanities from the buffeting of popular forces," it must also equip itself with the political skills of a congressional lobbyist.

This differentiation of a politics that concerns itself with broad issues of power from one that concentrates on the best techniques for buttering up the elite has important implications for the Heritage Foundation's plan to depoliticize culture. "Sociological crusades, political action, or political education as demanded by narrowly partisan interests" have no place in an Endowment committed to "excellence." However, the Foundation urges that a number of arts and humanities programs be directly politicized by their transfer to governmental agencies that have nothing to do with the safeguarding of cultural traditions, let alone "excellence."

Examples of acceptable politicization include allowing the State Department and the International Communications Agency to administer NEH programs in intercultural research. Apparently the continued separation of such research from the watchful eyes of government diplomats would "complicate coordination of national security policy" by allowing humanists to have a say in matters of state. Ironically, the Foundation's proposal for handing over full authority for international cultural programs to foreign policy experts implicitly acknowledges what critics of such programs have said for some time, namely that their purpose has more to do with American military and defense interests than with the communication of cultural "excellence" between nations. The report's recommendations for the NEA involve a similar transfer of authority for art projects for the disadvantaged, handicapped, and imprisoned to social service agencies. Now part of a pared-down welfare apparatus, a "safety net" that entangles and restrains its clients more than it aids them, the politically-inclined artist may adopt the role of prison guard or social worker in his relationship to his audience.

Joyce is quick to point out that this new politicization of culture in no way entails an opening up of the political decision-making process to new ideas in the arts and humanities. The integration of cultural administrators into the defense and welfare establishments will not resemble those interdisciplinary experiments so much in vogue on college campuses. Though less explicit in the case of artists, the Heritage report decries the "unfortunate employment of humanists in settings where they are asked to speak of things about which they know nothing."

A terrible disservice has been done to the humanities by the expectation, and sometimes the insistence and demand, that they be integrated into public policy. While the humanities are an extraordinary resource for the enlightenment of citizens on public issues, humanists are not uniquely qualified—in fact, they are often unqualified—to speak of the facts and details of specific cases and problems that citizens may confront, such as: the expenditure and distribution of taxes, the wisdom of land development schemes, or the uses of retirement.

In other words, those artists and humanists who are kept on as their programs are absorbed by national security agencies and prison administrations would do well to leave "the facts and details" to the experts. When the depoliticization of culture is defined in terms of its obedience to the exigencies of power, it logically follows that cultural autonomy for the artist or intellectual means submission to his "qualified" superiors. In the name of "excellence" and "independence," NEH and NEA employees and fellows are given the opportunity to put up or shut up.

For the Reagan right, the depoliticization of culture goes hand-in-hand with the depoliticization of politics. The assertion that humanists, Ph.D.'s in hand, are unqualified for political life is simply a variant of the notion that politics are too complicated for anyone but a trained managerial elite. As in so many other areas, David Stockman clarifies the Reagan Administration's position on this point in his famous *Atlantic Monthly* interview when he sneeringly refers to democratic politics as "constituency-based choice-making."<sup>2</sup> While Stockman and company set themselves to the destruction of whatever remnants of decentralized "choice-making" still exist, the Heritage Foundation embarks on a search-and-destroy mission for its cultural equivalent. Unacceptable cultural politics—the belief that the work of humanists and artists inherently deals with political issues and thus has much to offer to other citizens in making political decisions—are replaced by the undemocratic assumptions of our political culture.<sup>3</sup> Since those assumptions uphold bureaucratic and technical standards of authority, the stock conservative defense of traditional cultural standards repeated in the Heritage report becomes a sham.

That conservatives' faith in cultural conservatism has collapsed becomes even more evident once one realizes that Joyce's attacks on mass culture and bureaucracy are not meant seriously. Despite all the tough talk about the need to take the high road and avoid the allurements of the media, Joyce explicitly calls for "the commercial media," and particularly the television networks, "to present art under commercial sponsorship rather than be allowed . . . to abdicate their cultural responsibilities to the public communications empire." So much for the stated goal of funding art "for its own sake, rather than for any presumed economic or propaganda benefits."

As for the critique of cultural bureaucracies, the Heritage report reverses itself by encouraging the development of more and more educational programs and cultural planning committees—so long as these are primarily funded by corporations. Joyce laments that the nation's tax laws, born of "popular suspicions of private wealth," have made it difficult for the philanthropic to promote such

<sup>2</sup> William Grieder, "The Education of David Stockman," *Atlantic Monthly* 248, no. 6 (December 1981): 30.

<sup>3</sup> The criteria for fitness for policy-making in government have been neatly transferred to the cultural arena. Last August, June Noble of the Presidential Task Force on the Arts and Humanities insisted to a reporter that its membership "is a cross section" of the American public since it included "corporate executives, an actress, recipients." Noble went on to mention that Alvin Ailey was a member of the Task Force, presumably to demonstrate the Reagan Administration's responsiveness to black artists and scholars. However, the sole black member of the presidential panel was not Ailey at all but Arthur Miller of the Dance Theatre of Harlem.

See Arlene Goldbard and Don Adams, "Task Force's Real Work is Now Done," *In These Times* 5, no. 38 (September 30–October 6, 1981): 17.

projects. However, new tax laws will presumably stimulate a revival in private philanthropy, thereby rescuing the arts and humanities from the dangers of public bureaucracies. Those familiar with working conditions in the "private sector," however, might well wonder what such a shift in the source of cultural funding has to do with freedom for artists and scholars from bureaucratic "empires." Indeed, the Heritage plan deliberately subjects cultural production to control by corporate entities that are even less responsive to artists, humanists, and other citizens than are the equivalent agencies in Washington. As with the proposals for autonomy from politics and mass culture, the creative freedom from bureaucracy advocated here legitimizes the creation of an ever more centralized and hierarchical cultural apparatus.

As should be clear by now, the Heritage recommendations for American cultural policy do not constitute a defense of autonomous standards in the arts and humanities. Harold Rosenberg once had the good sense to point out that "only conservatives believe that subversion is still being carried out in the arts and that society is being shaken by it."<sup>4</sup> He might have added that only liberals believe that conservatives wish to revive a genteel tradition in cultural life. Conservatives themselves have long since given up the ideal of a quasi-aristocratic cultural guild, which sets its own criteria for competence in art, literature, history, and philosophy.<sup>5</sup> Exhortations to "excellence," "quality," and "standards" are empty gestures that pretend to legitimize the real work at hand: the subordination of culture to the ends of corporations, the military, and an increasingly coercive welfare state. Just as with religion, localism, the "free market," and the family, conservatives invoke traditions of cultural autonomy while destroying them.

**A**t first glance, the report of the Rockefeller Foundation-sponsored Commission on the Humanities, *The Humanities in American Life*, appears to provide a welcome alternative to the blatantly anti-democratic program of the

<sup>4</sup> Harold Rosenberg, *Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture, and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), p. ix.

<sup>5</sup> Aram Bakshian, Jr., President Reagan's special assistant for the arts and humanities, inadvertently confirmed this point when he answered critics of the Administration's cultural policies by reminding them that "the President and his wife are performing artists, and they feel very strongly about the arts." That Charlton Heston, another "performing artist" in the public eye, was selected to chair the President's special Task Force on the Arts and Humanities should also dispel any illusions that readers might have about conservatives' interest in restoring high cultural standards. Unfortunately, the Task Force report was unavailable for review at the time of this writing.

See Irvin Molotsky, "The President, the Congress, and the Arts—Can They Live Together in Happiness?" *New York Times*, August 9, 1981, sec. 2, pp. 1, 14.

Heritage Foundation. Motivated by "a profound disquiet about the state of the humanities in our culture," the thirty-two Rockefeller commissioners have produced a book-length statement on the present cultural crisis and have offered remedies that claim to be in the spirit of liberal education and participatory politics.

The most promising aspect of the Commission's findings is a willingness early on in the text to acknowledge that assumptions about "the infallibility of specialists, the necessity of regulating human activity, and the virtues of material consumption" have undermined Americans' faith in the humanities and their ability to govern themselves as informed citizens. The evaporation of humanistic education in our schools and universities, and the resulting increase in illiteracy and narrow professionalism, threaten to accelerate the degeneration of a civic life already fragile and jaded after years of deceit and corruption in high places. At the same time, "larger social problems" sap the will of Americans who might otherwise be concerned with the reform of their cultural and educational institutions, thereby creating a vicious circle that endangers civilized life in general. "Faith in the power of education to open doors to opportunity has been shaken by inflation and unemployment, and by evidence that class, race, and sex may be the chief determinants of economic success."

Having made these astute observations about the political and social roots of the crisis in the humanities, the Rockefeller Commission quickly abandons overtly political issues altogether. Instead of following their introductory remarks to their logical conclusion, that real issues of power and social conflict are at stake in the collapse of our cultural institutions and values, the authors confidently assert that more effective coordination of the state's cultural agencies will resolve these difficult issues. What "excellence" is to the Heritage report, "collaboration," "integration," "interdependence," and "cooperation"—of humanists and scientists, ethics and technics, professors and media experts, the federal government and corporations, the NEH and other agencies, etc.—are to the Rockefeller statement. After an obligatory nod to the political dimensions of cultural issues, the commissioners turn to their real task: cultural crisis management.

**T**he Rockefeller Commission's administrative approach to the crisis of the humanities is evident in the writing of its report. As the authors admit in passing, "the humanities are difficult to define and classify." The proof of this remark is found on the second and third pages of the text, where the commissioners strain to define the humanities only to leave matters no clearer than when they began. Two excerpts will suffice:

The humanities presume particular methods of expression and inquiry—language, dialogue, reflection, imagination, and metaphor. In the humanities the aims of these activities of mind are not geometric proof and quantitative measure, but rather insight, perspective, critical understanding, discrimination and creativity.

And:

The essence of the humanities is a spirit or an attitude toward humanity. They show how the individual is autonomous and at the same time bound, in the ligatures of language and history, to humankind across time and throughout the world. The humanities are an important measure of the values and aspirations of any society.

The reader who is not yet bound in the ligatures of slumber after reading these pages might hope to find a more satisfactory elaboration of these points elsewhere in a book entitled *The Humanities in American Life*. He will be disappointed. Nowhere else do the commissioners come even remotely close to an analysis of the ethical, political, and historical issues inherent in any definition of humanistic study. Similarly, the authors resolve the debate about “populism” and “elitism” in American culture with a convenient formula—“society must be the subject of scholarship, not its master”—that avoids discussion of the fundamental terms of that debate.

When the authors pass from their general remarks about the degeneration of humanistic thought to the consideration of specific topics, their analysis eliminates the very elements of human choice and conflict that need to be examined. Thus the report attributes the triumph of the specialized multiversity over the traditional clerically-oriented college, with its “faith in the coherence of knowledge, in a single cultural tradition, and in the community of the learned,” to nothing more precise than “the growth of knowledge and the multiplication of educational missions over the past century.”

In this particular case, the Rockefeller humanists would have benefited from some historical research. The redirection of American higher education in the years between the Civil War and the First World War was the result of conscious effort by a generation of corporate leaders, Progressive reformers, and professional policy-makers who had very clear ends in mind. Their work culminated in the denigration of classical education in history, religion, philosophy, and literature, and in the emergence of the social and technical sciences as the educational prerequisites for positions of power in business and government. In this regard, an old-fashioned idealist philosopher like R. M. Wenley had better sense than his tough-minded successors on the Rockefeller panel. Wenley observed accurately of this transformation in 1907 that “the universities tend to become the prey of the bourgeoisie,” churning out “an immense number of identical spools, all

fitted to find places in a huge, undifferentiated bourgeois stratum."<sup>6</sup>

By ignoring the political roots of the late nineteenth-century instrumentalization of knowledge, and by attributing its effects to impersonal, ahistorical forces, the Rockefeller commissioners allow themselves to offer suggestions for cultural reform that simply compound the problem. The main body of *The Humanities in American Life* is not a careful consideration of the ethico-political crisis of the humanities but rather a detailed list of new technical devices, committees, subcommittees, and coordinating agencies that are meant to parcel out and administer humanistic culture to the public as a whole. As a result, the authors endorse the very cult of technical and bureaucratic expertise that led to the demise of humanistic knowledge in the first place.

**T**he Rockefeller report's index provides a simple illustration of where the authors' interests lie. While "Western cultural tradition," "Values," and "Politics" receives a total of fourteen references, references to "Administrators," "Television," "Science and technology," and "Technology" appear on fifty-one pages. The sections urging greater cooperation between media experts and humanists and the education of humanities professors and students in the use of advanced communications technology provide the only exciting reading in the entire text, since the commissioners come alive at the thought of satellite communications, video discs, computer filing systems, and electronic printouts. The report warns that "the revolution in communications should not be allowed to overshadow the human values to be served," but since the humanities experts on the Rockefeller Commission never explain what these "human values" are, such incantations are obviously not meant to be taken seriously.

As might be expected from a report that assimilates humanistic scholarship and education to bureaucracy and technique, *The Humanities in American Life* conceives of most Americans as the passive consumers of goods prepared and packaged for them by committees of cultural coordinators. The report proudly points to records that indicate that more Americans annually attend art exhibitions than attend spectator sports as proof of "a phenomenal growth of public interest in the arts" that "betokens a deepening American appreciation for creative expressions of the human spirit." The idea that the "creative expressions of

6 Cited in Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 191. For a superb study of the integration of the university into the military-industrial complex emerging in the 1900s and 1910s, see David F. Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979).

the human spirit" would be better served by increased participation in the *making* of cultural works and by the integration, not of one agency panel with another, but of conscious artistic and intellectual activity with work and play never occurs to the commissioners, who prefer to keep their eyes on ticket sales.

The authors' example of "an interpretive exhibit of Cézanne's paintings accessible to people across the country" as a positive means of transcending "populism" and "elitism" indicates what kind of reawakening of "the human spirit" they have in mind. The Rockefeller Commission imagines an American cultural renaissance organized along the lines of the spectacular 1979-1980 Picasso retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, which spawned *Time* cover stories, Picasso T-shirts, book club catalogs, Ticketron marketing methods, and a battery of critical works that codified the modernist movement and presented it to the public in a domesticated, easily-digested form. This brand of spectator sports in the arts has as much to do with the creation of a democratic culture as the Commission's proposal for an official Department of Education endorsement of "critical thinking" as an educational goal does with the stimulation of critical consciousness in everyday life.

The members of the Rockefeller Commission have so enjoyed their work that they wish to continue. If implemented, their proposals would certainly guarantee them employment as directors of cultural policy-making boards and committees aimed at "integrating" the work of humanists, artists, and scientists. Impatient with the humanistic values they claim to be defending, and eager to suspend their scholarly careers for corporate-funded sabbaticals in cultural planning, the authors of the Rockefeller report exemplify the new cultural technicians in action. In this way, they resemble those tenured faculty members who have joined university administrators in managing the economic crises of their institutions, leaving the sundries of teaching and research to junior professors, graduate students, and other lumpen-academic "guest-workers." As yet another endorsement of the assimilation of culture to administration, the Rockefeller Commission's liberal alternative to conservative cultural management is no alternative at all.

**T**he elaboration of a democratic solution to the crisis in the arts and humanities requires the revision of many long-held beliefs among activists on the left. In particular, the demand made by political and cultural radicals at the beginning of this century for the dissolution of any distinction between culture and "the facts" of American life needs considerable rethinking. That demand may be found in architect Louis Sullivan's manifesto, *Democracy*, which argued that "the great and superbest quality of imagination is its power not so

much to make pictures, as to illuminate facts.”<sup>7</sup>

Jack London made a similar point in his proletarian novel, *The Iron Heel*, when he depicted his socialist hero Ernest Everhard in ferocious intellectual debate with a group of Protestant theologians.

Battle royal raged, and the ministers grew red-faced and excited, especially at the moments when Ernest called them romantic philosophers, shadow-projectors, and similar things. And always he checked them back to facts. “The fact, man, the irrefragable fact!” he would proclaim triumphantly, when he had brought one of them a cropper. He bristled them with facts. He tripped them up with facts, ambuscaded them with the facts, bombarded them with broadsides of facts.<sup>8</sup>

This tradition of cultural criticism culminated in the 1934 publication of John Dewey’s *Art as Experience*, which served as the bible for many of Franklin Roosevelt’s public arts program administrators. Dewey provided artists, intellectuals, and cultural administrators in the 1930s with a philosophy that demonstrated “the continuity of aesthetic experience with normal processes of living.”<sup>9</sup> The equation of art with experience led Dewey and his followers to conclude that “the values that lead to production and intelligent enjoyment of art have to be incorporated into the system of social relationships.”<sup>10</sup>

The critique of genteel culture in the name of conformity to “the facts” did much to demolish the intellectual rationalizations for depriving the majority of Americans of opportunities for education and cultural literacy. Yet at the same time, the idea of “art as experience” opened the door to a more sinister development than old-fashioned snobbery by preparing the way for the organization and domestication of artistic and intellectual creation according to the methods already perfected for the manipulation of other areas of social life. As the reports of the Heritage and Rockefeller Foundations demonstrate, elite cultural policy-makers enthusiastically agree that the same attitudes and practices should be adopted for the production and appreciation of culture as for any other activity. And they plan to do exactly that by extending the principles of political administration and social control to encompass the arts and humanities.

Paradoxically, the ideal of a democratic culture that inspired Sullivan,

<sup>7</sup> Louis Sullivan, *Democracy: A Man-Search* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1961), p. 349.

<sup>8</sup> Jack London, *The Iron Heel* (New York: Bantam, 1971), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Paragon, 1934), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

London, and Dewey may best be served today by recapturing and renewing the tradition of autonomous cultural standards that is piously invoked by the Heritage conservatives only to be discarded in practice. Democratic organizations like the recently formed American Writers' Congress, neighborhood arts cooperatives, and other associations of radical scholars, artists, and writers must take the responsibility for formulating new cultural ideals and values that has been abdicated by the cultural crisis managers. Such groups can combine the best elements of the guild or craft union tradition of self-defense and producers' control with the potential for making serious contributions to broader efforts for social reconstruction and democracy. In the process, they may formulate standards of cultural competence and value free of the undemocratic "facts" of the present order.

The emancipation of the public's imaginative faculties from the tyranny of "the facts" requires democrats to create the local institutional framework for a truly autonomous cultural realm. A commitment to deepening our cultural life and renewing the meaning of humanistic knowledge need not imply a return to elitist pretensions and an indifference to political concerns. On the contrary, the starting point for a democratic culture and politics is the fulfillment of the promises of cultural "independence" and "excellence" that have been repeatedly broken by their most vocal promoters.