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RETRACING THE PAST

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ROCK ME AMADEUS

A lowbrow reading of high culture – or how to deal with high cultured appropriation?

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Imagine what would happen if football was “elevated” to bourgeois “high culture” and shared the ideals, atmosphere and audience behaviour that surround the high mainstream of opera, ballet and national art galleries. What would it be like to experience a match without beer, hot dogs, the boisterous shouting and singing of fans and the physical contact on the pitch.

Football would continue its life in a new form detached from its history as a lively sport. How would fans react when they heard that FC Barcelona, Galatasaray or Boca Juniors were no longer what they used to be for them, whose love for the game, for good or bad, was one of the key elements in bringing colour to their world?

To some extent, Shakespeare in the 19th century was popular urban culture similar to football today. To understand what that means one has to think about a world that has been transmitted to us through the scholarly descriptions and archive work of Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel (Berlin, Paris).¹ Although theoretically speaking their societal interest is holistic, Benjamin and Simmel are too bourgeois to delve into the really shady parts of society. In any event, when looking at the American popular Shakespeare, to get the full picture, you would also have to downgrade it to resonate with the literary work of Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens.

Mid-19th century Shakespearean actors were loved by their audience in the way that modern fans love footballers, singers and film stars. The plays

¹ See e.g. Walter Benjamin *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999) and Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” in Kurt Wolff (Trans.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950), 409–424.

were constantly updated to address local political issues. Some actors had names like “the Hurricane” as if they were professional wrestlers.²

In New York, Shakespeare was *only* popular culture, and so, it was not surprising that in May 1849 the first highbrow British performance was met with boos accompanied by eggs, potatoes, apples, lemons and shoes. This backlash of “cultural development” was frustrating for the cultural elite.

Aesthetically, the polarization was led by the two leading actors of their own Shakespeare genres. Edwin Forrest’s audience consisted of the working class and gangs of New York. He drew followers from the violent immigrant enclave known as Five Points (today’s China Town, and the site of Herbert Asbury’s book *The Gangs of New York* (1927)³, and the location for Martin Scorsese’s 2002 film of the same title). This area was home to a lively cluster of music halls and theatres, and was the birthplace of tap dance. On the other hand, upper class, high cultured Anglophiles supported the freshly imported Briton, William Charles Macready.

The high society of New York was shocked that their new “civilized” low-key version of Shakespeare, which was based on eloquent reciting, was so poorly received. The elite protested and demanded that the police help usher Shakespeare to New York in style, that the act should be given a second chance, and that the city should defend its second coming. Among the people who signed the demand, we find several distinguished person-ages, including Herman Melville.

A few days later, on the evening of May 10, 1849, the demonstration of the lower class Shakespeare fans devolved into an attack on the Astor Opera House. A veritable army consisting of police, the militia, mounted troops, light artillery – 550 men in all, defended this highbrow Shakespeare against the lowbrow crowd.

Up to 31 rioters were killed and 48 were wounded, while 50 to 70 policemen were injured in the battle, with the high version of Shakespeare emerging victorious and driving the popular version away, not to return until the advent of feature films.

² I am here following Lawrence Levine’s description of the case in the book *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

³ Herbert Asbury, *The Gangs of New York. An Informal History of the Underworld* (New York: Random House, 2008 [1927]).

Described in detail in Lawrence Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchies in 19th Century America* (1988), the story is uncanny from the point of view of aesthetics. It can be read as nothing more than the story of a clash between two classes of society or as an example of highbrow appropriation. Shakespeare in its original form touched upon nearly all levels of the society, yet in this story the cultural elite was interested in force-feeding New York with a new interpretation.

Today's debates of appropriation focus mainly on Western or mainstream culture when it appropriates African, Indian or African American culture. Here in Helsinki, the biggest debates on this topic are a result of the use of clothing of the indigenous Sami people of Lapland in contemporary art works and beauty contests.

The high and low problematics of appropriation represent a different story. The original Shakespeare was never modern high culture, but the culture of the people (for a variety of folk groups) in its original English context. Among many other cultural resources, at the advent of the construction of the modern system of arts in the mid-18th century, it was included in the story of art without critical reflection, like all other cultural history that was appreciated by the cultural elite at the time. Appropriation continued and many key works became the "victims" of cultural looting.

Picasso's "radical" use of African popular art and the Orientalism of the early 20th century in dance and visual arts represented the theft and appropriation of another culture that was interesting but not necessarily considered to be on the same level as the European.

In "Appropriating like Krazy" (1986),⁴ Jim Collins talks about how contemporary popular artists have created more mature and reflective versions of popular culture, while doing everything possible to prevent their work from being labelled as Art with a capital A. Collins cites 1980s cult classics like Frank Miller's existentially realistic Batman comics and Kinky Friedman's campy detective novels to show that there are mass culture artists who consciously and appropriately cultivate classical forms of popular culture while not in any way knocking on the door of art.

The degree of appropriation of popular culture in the history of high culture is amazingly extensive if you think about it. Classical composers

⁴ Jim Collins, "Appropriating like Krazy: From Pop Art to Meta-Pop," in Patrick Brantmore and James Naremore (eds), *Modernity and Mass Culture* (Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 203–223).

have “artified” popular/folk (often Roma) music (Bartok, Dvorak, Glinka). Toulouse-Lautrec, an excellent advertiser, was high-washed so that his visually witty adverts could become “modern art”; unfortunately, as a result, the history of visual popular culture lost one of its true masters (the same thing happened to another advertising professional moonlighting in the underground scene, Andy Warhol). The operetta, which was originally a lowbrow form of opera, was elevated to the level of opera in the 20th century. The work of early cinematic masters like Meliés and Eisenstein (whose *Potemkin* was originally meant to be an educational film for a museum) went through the same process. As did jazz when it became academic.

From a literary point of view, books like the national epic of my country (Finland), the *Kalevala* (where the oral tradition of poor Eastern Finnish people was collected and edited in post-Greek epic fashion by a Swedish university scholar who was enchanted by the exotic locals)⁵ stand for the same type of structural appropriation.

In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970)⁶ Theodor Adorno considers Mozart to be the last composer to create fun and easy (art) music. He goes on to say that the false reconciliation of capitalist culture started to push all cultural activity towards pleasure in a way that made it impossible for artists to be light and fun if they wanted to make a difference (and Adorno thought they did) in relation to the entertainment industry – or in his own words, in relation to the negative whole of capitalist society

Adorno is famous for having created the concept of the culture industry, and he wrote as critically about mass culture as about high culture. Mass culture might have been the *primus motor* of the culture industry, but

⁵ We Finns who have a Swedish background have often appropriated Finnish culture in various ways.

⁶ For Adorno’s thoughts on Mozart, see e.g. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedeman (eds.), *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Continuum, 1997), 141, 162, 177, 200. Sabine Wilke has criticized Adorno for making too much of a problem out of laughter, which needs according to her no excuse. Sabine Wilke, “Torn Halves of an Integral Freedom: Adorno’s and Benjamin’s readings of mass culture,” in Ronald Roblin (ed.), *The Aesthetics of the Critical Theorists: Studies on Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas* (Lewinston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 124–151. The ideological seriousness of Adorno’s work forces him to explain why Mozart’s light-hearted work is acceptable.

the concept is as much about compromising a Sunday afternoon concert series with a couple of safe Mozart (and local national) pieces and then a modern composition. Aside from Mozart, Adorno found Beethoven to be the first clearly negative, non-consumable composer; he was to be followed by modernists, represented by Schoenberg at the height of such movement, and on the literary side by Kafka and Beckett, who were able to reflect the true (negative) nature of late capitalist society.

Adorno was extra critical about how the Central European (for him, universal; for us Northern people, ethnic) tradition of the music of the elite was packaged into the consumable.

The whole concept "classical music" stood for a certain kind of interpretation of the tradition. Adorno's non-reflective Eurocentric education did not lead him to think that this was an appropriation of an ethnic tradition labelled to be classically high, but that the edge of the tradition where music (universally) had been developed to its peak was taken away through compromising attitudes.

Although Adorno did not have the concept of appropriation in his use, (he thought of tradition itself only through classical art research terms, e.g., compositions), one can surely say that even the work of the artists he discussed, such as Mozart, represented something that would be more appropriately referred to as popular culture in their world.

In my opinion, the artistic spearhead of the story of Mozart does not lie in his compositions, which Adorno's cultural system had stripped of some their original context. It is the masses drinking cocktails of hot chocolate and spirits, dancing, shouting and having fun in (some) of his (less courtly) concerts, and the resonance of this audience culture and his music, their way of belonging together, which has escaped our critical eye. Perhaps one could say (I am paraphrasing Brecht here⁷): that Mozart's audience was the last to be able to enjoy that tradition of music as if they were attending a boxing match?

Abhinavagupta, the 10th century Kashmiri philosopher, was possibly the first to work on the resonance of the work and the audience culture in his rasa-theory. Abhinavagupta's work relates to a broader cosmogony, but on a very basic level he discusses the importance of having the audience

⁷ Brecht dreamed about a "smokers theatre" where the audience would smoke cigars as if watching a boxing match, and where they would develop a more detached and critical outlook.

and the performance tuned in to the same *rasa* (which could be roughly translated as atmosphere).⁸ He talks about resonance, the way dynamic experiences are shared by the artist and the audience, as one of the key issues of art, and I think his perspective on art is illuminating.

In both of our main artistic examples, Shakespeare and Mozart, a life work changed categories, and through that change it encountered new requirements from a new audience. Talking through *rasas*, which is something Abhinavagupta borrowed from 6th century philosopher Bharata Muni (*Natyashastra*), one could say that in Mozart's case the *Comic* also became the *Pathetic* (the list of *rasas* is the Erotic, the Comic, the Pathetic, the Furious, the Heroic, the Terrible, the Odious, the Marvellous and the later addition, the Peaceful), as anyone who comes from another cultural territory can easily detect when entering a bourgeois cultural joint anywhere in the Western world where Mozart is being played (i.e., stiff and "contemplative" attitude).

Of course, we have plenty of opera and classical music that strives to establish these lost traditional ways of playing and enjoying music, and in some areas the tradition has survived better than in others (In some Italian towns, popular outdoor opera performances where people come to eat and listen to music can still be found). It is just that we have to note this high cultured matrix in which appropriated works and practices have to bump into and which puts pressure on them to change.

The Greeks often arrived late at spectacles and drank and made noise. Loose audience culture was also quintessential for the golden age of film. The auteur enthusiasts, in the French film circles of the 1950s and then later all over the world, who brought Hitchcock to film clubs, changed the setting radically – so much so that I agree with Ted Cohen, who in his article "High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences", takes Hitchcock to be an example of art which is actually bilingual, or as Cohen says it, bilateral, as people in film clubs and the people who watch it as entertainment provide quite different cultural contexts, ways of use and enjoyment.⁹

⁸ Raniero Gnoli (ed.), *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta* (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1956).

⁹ Ted Cohen, "High and Low Art, and High and Low Audiences," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol 57;2, 137–143,

Film clubs, classical music audiences and museum audiences share the same focused, silent and nearly religiously laden atmosphere. Maybe these are some of the echoes Benjamin interpreted as an “auratic” object gained from magical practices, i.e., could it be that audience culture took some of it, not only the objects which’ aura Benjamin was so keen to write about? This atmosphere stresses, of course, certain aspects of the works of art and their performances, and makes others less well functioning. As in our first speculative example of football, it is easy to guess what was or is going to happen if a work or practice enters the world of “high culture”. There is a shared order, pattern of behaviour, auditive side (silence of the audience) and interest in freezing classics in appropriate and inappropriate versions, which marks the move from lowbrow to high.

Without a doubt, popular culture is also full of orders, from performing to be “relaxed” (a rock culture cliché) to always doing the same dance moves in a disco, but there is something in the high end which brings to mind Foucault’s description in *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (1975)¹⁰ of the controlling systems of early modernity, which, near if not even exactly at the same time as the Shakespeare riot, did not just end public torture as entertainment, but brought the need to show your hands on the pulpit at schools, and took the order of army culture to a new level, without forgetting Foucault’s famous descriptions of prisons and their surveillance systems.

Is classical high culture one of the branches in the process which Foucault saw developing in prisons, schools, the army and in many others territories of culture, a system of order, self-subordination and surveillance, which was to become one of the keys for understanding Western modernity? Just think about people’s faces when you raise your voice in an art museum or how the freaks in the film club look at you if you open a bag of peanuts during the film.

Many popular culture enthusiasts would probably say yes. Jazz and “world music” musicians are angry when their gigs are booked in high culture joints where the audience cannot stand up and dance (the janitor comes and says: “dancing is forbidden”) – and the audience might protest when faced with the situation. And one must remember that not all art fits neatly into the culture of high culture. Alternative and grass roots galleries

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

work hard to keep the atmosphere light, a bit unorganized, and free for noise and chatting, in order to not fall into the web of constraints typical for the main institutions, which the people running them often actually mock as being “high culture”. There has always been a difference between avant-garde, underground and alternative art scenes and then the high culture system. Picasso (and his generation) rebelled against the institutional power of Louvre by stealing art works and throwing them in the river.¹¹ The historical avant-garde groups also made clear that they were against high culture and its fetishes.¹²

Idea art historians, and here I’m mainly thinking about Paul Oskar Kristeller in his “The Modern System of the Arts” I and II (1951–1952) and Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz in his “History of Six Ideas” (1980), have written about the formation of the concept, the institution and the system which made it possible to gain autonomy for the arts and to protect their development.¹³

We are still waiting for the first scholarly work on the history of the aforementioned audience culture and this aesthetic matrix of high culture that we have bumped into here – and we lack a history of how the appropriated works were reinterpreted and changed to fit into their new context. We might of course guess that the social rules and atmospheres portrayed above have their roots in court culture, high society events and then the (performative) modern culture of rational order. From this perspective, it easy to understand why emotions should still run through a sordino in a high cultured context and why the cult of neutrality (where a distorted version of Kant’s idea of contemplation has been given a central position) is so central.

¹¹ See e.g. Noah Charney’s *The Thefts of the Mona Lisa: On Stealing the World’s Most Famous Painting* (Arca Publications: 2011).

¹² Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Post-modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) describes well in detail the rebellious and more mass culture friendly history of the historical avant-garde movements. High cultured appropriation brought in of course the myth of the genius to the practices it endorsed. See e.g. Christine Battersby’s witty analysis of the role of the genius in high culture in *Gender and Genius. Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London: The Women’s Press, 1989).

¹³ Paul Oskar Kristeller, “The Modern System of Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics” I & II, in Peter Kivy (ed.), *Essays on the History of Aesthetics* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 1994), 3-64. Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, “Art”, in *History of Six Ideas* (Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1980).

Why would anyone be against the fact that the upper class or the guardians of high culture would accept a form of art? If it were only that, it would mean better access to economic and political resources. But, many graffiti artists don't want to be seen as artists because they fear the world of art, and this is not because of the grassroots galleries or the experimental music joints (where they are often well connected), but because of the bourgeois high culture tradition and its matrix that can affect works of art and their use. Frank Zappa for sure stayed on the pop-side consciously,¹⁴ to keep his work anchored to a certain type of interpretation, experience and audience culture.

John Dewey's famous museum critique partly addresses this issue. He claims that the works of art which "now" (1930s) hang in the Louvre, packed on the walls to be "contemplated" upon, had a living role in another time and in another place. Dewey turns to popular culture following his interest in lively experiences, and describes everything and all high culture as a stiff and not very effective context, at least for most works of art.¹⁵ He did not have the now very illuminating discussion about appropriation, and he was not into the lively, less-bourgeois margins of art – most aestheticians have contact only with the public service art sphere (museums, concert halls) – but what he writes about critically is easy for us to recognize as being the high matrix discussed above.

When something becomes appropriated as high culture, not just in the classical sense, but often also today, it seems hard to return to the source. Bosch painted his feverish works on heaven and hell without a system of art and without a cold museum contemplation as context, but still, having his work on the cover of a Deep Purple record seems for many to be just a loan from high culture – even if it was high culture that originally "borrowed" it without any intention of returning it. I cannot come up with an opposite example, where a work leaves the higher ground and becomes entertainment. When classical pianists choose parts from romantic concertos and play them to a mass audience or when tourist masses go to museums to use art in an entertainment fashion the label high culture stays on these works. High culture (which at its core is a way of

¹⁴ I have myself touched upon this "unwanted label of art" in my article "Now-brow", *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 2005:1, 86–98.

¹⁵ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1980). The museum conception of art is mainly introduced in chapter 6.

nurturing cultural heritage) slowly sucks all appreciated artistic works into its black hole.

As museums nowadays work so hard to make art accessible, to show that entering an art museum is no big deal, why couldn't they actually start working on giving back, at least provisionally, the original context and audience culture for the works? This is why we need mass culture museums. They could have Mozart concerts where the musicians played like entertainers and the audience could drink hot chocolate with spirits. And they could present classical paintings in the original context, e.g., build a Venetian room for a work of Tintoretto, with a window looking out on green water (the same green which in many shades surrounds Tintoretto's Jesus).¹⁶

I also believe that opera would be more satisfactory for most people, if they could see and listen to it as entertainment, which it always was in Venice, where Gondoliers could sing the tunes at La Fenice even before the premieres of the productions. For many, the high cultured matrix, bourgeois culture and hierarchical structures imbedded in these systems are the problem, and a sign that they are being consumed by the elite – not the fact that they are highly appreciated by artists and art researchers.

It is not just that the upper and middle classes use the arts to oppress the poor, the “uneducated” and the “ethnic” others (as Pierre Bourdieu has taught us), but that the high culture matrix overshadows the wide aesthetic potential of many artistic traditions and works of art. Aesthetics does not have to be an advocate for the “original” use of works of art (this would be a typically high culture attitude), but it could help people to see that the same piece could have two (or more) lives.

Like Jeff Koons' glass art works from the early 1990s which are also works by the glass master Pino Signoretto (in glass art circles) – this might be Koons' most interesting artistic achievement¹⁷ – we could foster a popular Rigoletto alongside the high bourgeois version.

¹⁶ Another interesting, although not that successful strategy used by Socialist countries, especially the Soviet Union in the 1970s and the 1980s, was the conscious creation of official high culture by developing new versions of popular culture traditions, e.g. art circus and art disco dancing.

¹⁷ Max Rynänen, “The Double Life of Jeff Koons' Made in Heaven Glass Artworks”, *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 2004 (29–30), 99–111.

The true nature of so many works of art and artistic traditions oscillates between high and low, and I believe that we have to come out from the dominance of the modern high and can start working on taking back some of the less-thought out and embraced features and sides of our cultural heritage.¹⁸ Aesthetics scholars need to study a new the history of the modern system of arts and to acknowledge that similar to the late 20th century scandals of Eurocentrism and male-dominance, we have again found a new perspective for rewriting history. The history of high culture is essentially the history of folk art and mass culture and their appropriation.

¹⁸ There are scholars who have analyzed “low culture” and popular culture as cultural heritage which aims at satisfying different needs than the high. See e.g. Sung-Bong Park, *An Aesthetics of Popular Art* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993).

THE RENEWAL OF THE PAST TOWARDS THE FUTURE

The case of Jean Nouvel's architecture

Jale N. Erzen

I. Introduction

Culture as the accumulation of values extended in time and space, is always related to traditions, whether old or modern. All cultures have their traditions such as the "Modern Tradition", or traditions of democratic practices, and others. The past is never totally dead, its memories and occurrences visit the present in varied forms. Yet, traditions do not necessarily have to belong to the past, although all contemporary practices contain residues of the past. In fact, humanity is only possible through the handing down of values and ways of knowing and doing from one generation to the next, preserving certain ways and gradual mutations of these. Adorno describes tradition as "the pre-given, unreflected and binding existence of social forms".¹ All ways of doing and producing, all creative acts display a certain belief in a technique or practice, a conviction which stems from a former application which has proven successful or an insight about a future act which is believed to prove successful. Traditions do not necessarily have to belong to a common and largely accepted practice. There can be family traditions, personal traditions, and traditions belonging to groups.

It would be wrong to assume that traditions are fixed and unchanging. We know about traditions usually through works that have been preserved and which point to a common practice at a certain time. But at any given point in history we can also find practices that seem to defy a certain largely accepted practice. Such considerations suggest that traditions are evolving, fluid and flexible practices which can only be understood through their products and not through any recorded discourse.

¹ Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time. Modernity and the Avant-Garde* (London & New York: Verso, 1995), 127. Originally published in Theodor W. Adorno, "On Tradition" [1966], *Telos* 94 (Winter 1992-3): 75.