The Quality of Life

By the same author:

All for Hecuba: The Dublin Gate Theatre 1928-1978 (1978)
Oscar Wilde (1983/97)
The Dublin Gate Theatre 1928-1978 (1984)
The Dandy and the Herald: Manners, Mind and Morals from Brummell to Durrell (1988)
Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama (1990)
Lawrence Durrell: the Mindscape (1994/2005)
The Thief of Reason: Oscar Wilde and Modern Ireland (1995)
To Talent Alone: the Royal Irish Academy of Music 1848-1998 (1998, with Charles Acton)
The Diviner: the Art of Brian Friel (1999)
2RN and the Origins of Irish Radio (2002)
Music and Broadcasting in Ireland (2005)
Charles: the Life and World of Charles Acton 1914-1999 (2010)
The Disappointed Bridge: Ireland and the Post-Colonial World (2014)
Greece Through Irish Eyes (2015)
Minor Mythologies as Popular Literature: A Student's Guide to Texts and Films (2018)
A Writer in Corfu (2020, with Vera Konidari)
Lawrence Durrell's Woven Web of Guesses (2021)
The Eye of the Xenos, Letters about Greece (2021)

The Quality of Life:

Essays on Cultural Politics, 1978-2018

By

Richard Pine

The Quality of Life: Essays on Cultural Politics, 1978-2018

By Richard Pine

This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

In continuing awe of my children,
Emilie and Vanessa
In loving memory of my granddaughter, Elena
In joyful celebration of my grandson,
Alexander Theo

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND SOURCES

"Micheál mac Liammóir: the Erotic/Exotic and the Dublin Gate Theatre" was the opening lecture of the conference on the Gate Theatre, Dublin, 2015 and published in *The Gate Theatre, Dublin: Inspiration and Craft* edited by David Clare, Desmond Lally and Patrick Lonergan (Carysfort Press/Peter Lang, 2018).

"Brian Friel and Contemporary Irish Drama" was a lecture delivered at the Special Collections University Library, Emory University, Atlanta, sponsored by the Yeats Foundation, 1990, and reprinted in *Colby Quarterly* special issue on Contemporary Irish Drama, guest editor Anthony Roche (volume 27 no. 4, December 1991).

"Friel's Irish Russia" was a chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Brian Friel*, edited by Anthony Roche (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

"Yeats, Friel and the Politics of Failure" was a lecture to the MacGill Summer School in Glenties, County Donegal, Ireland, 1991, in honour of Brian Friel and published in *Yeats: an Annual of Critical and Textual Studies* vol. X, edited by Richard J Finneran with guest editor James W Flannery to mark the Yeats International Theatre Festival (University of Michigan Press, 1992).

The provenance for each programme note for plays by Brian Friel appears in the text in Chapter Nineteen.

Almost all the essays have been edited to some extent: to eliminate references or anachronisms in essays from the 1970s and 1980s which might be obscure to today's readers; to avoid repetition between one essay and another (except where such emphasis is necessary and unavoidable in maintaining the sense of the text); or to reduce over-lengthy texts by deleting detailed lists of names or titles. None has been revised in the sense of re-written or re-conceived. Where relevant, an explanatory note has been added to explain provenance or the particular circumstances at the time of writing.

The more "academic", text-based essays, where necessary, include a "Works Cited"; the more discursive, more anecdotal essays do not.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

"The quality of life" was not the cliché it has become, when I first encountered it in the ground-breaking study *Leisure and the Quality of Life* (1977). It's a term intimately associated in my work with the entire issue of "cultural politics" which, in its turn, refers to both "the politics of culture" and "the culture of politics". The two concepts are organically linked: *all* cultural thinking and cultural activity is political in the sense that any thought or action by a citizen within, or even outside, society has political significance and, possibly, repercussions. And *all* human activity, whatever its nature, is cultural. I will always be indebted to F S L Lyons for his seminal and lapidary phrase, in *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939*: he would study everything "from the furniture of men's kitchens to the furniture of their minds". That correlation of what we think, how we live and how we articulate our lives, demonstrates for me the intimacy of our cultural and our civic lives – the aesthetics of the *polis* and how it affects the quality of life – *all* aspects of life.

It was borne in on me again and again in research, interviewing arts administrators in such disparate communities as Vila Real in Portugal, and Koivukylä in Vantaa, Finland. How a Portuguese farmer perceives his village brass band as the centre of his and his society's life, or how a Finnish schoolchild, relocated from the city to a dormitory suburb, reacts to the stories told by elderly locals at the school's *aamunavaus* [morning ceremony]: these are keys to how they arrange, or will arrange, their political life, how they behave in thought, word and deed.

A poem, a sculpture, a painting, a symphony, a novel is a communication – a communication of the artist's thoughts, emotions and aspirations, as much so as a commentary on a football match or a panel discussion on the health service or a report on "Today in Parliament". And as such, it is a political act with potential political repercussions. It is the crucial meeting-point of culture and politics, of expression and the means and methods of mediating that expression, with which this book is concerned.

In some aspects of cultural life, for example in agit-prop theatre – or even less agitly-propelled drama of a nevertheless political nature, such as those of Bertolt Brecht, Arthur Miller or Brian Friel (the latter appears in several places in this book) – politics, the necessary choice and articulation

of standpoints, comes to the fore. Vaclav Havel was a playwright before he became a politician – or was he?

All the essays in this book have a clear political bias, without alignment with any ideology, "left", "right" or "centre". I come from a background that is both "cultural" – an education steeped in literature, music and the visual arts – and "political" in a childhood awareness of my father as a political figure, albeit on the sidelines of party politics for most of his life. Or in my own schooldays, attending a morning concert at London's Royal Festival Hall and in the afternoon marching on the US Embassy in Grosvenor Square to protest the Vietnam war.

The first part, Culture and Communication, combines the political and the cultural in very specific and explicit ways: in the late 1970s I was invited to join a group of researchers in a project (1978-83) administered by the Council of Europe on cultural development at the municipal level; it involved twenty-one villages, towns and cities throughout western Europe (since at that time the Council was restricted to the "democratic" states of western Europe). I was, professionally, deeply involved in the status of Ireland's state-run national symphony orchestra and had formed opinions as to how provision for cultural activity might be integrated into state thinking. The Council of Europe project convinced me of the inextricability of culture – even the most abstract of arts activities – and politics as the means of deciding on, and facilitating, that provision. It brought me to the interface between politicians, at a local level, and the citizens for whose cultural life they were, in part, responsible.

One of our research visits was to the municipal gallery in Eindhoven – a town which virtually owed its modern existence to the electronics industry established there in 1912 by Anton Philips. In the gallery, the director showed us his choice of exhibits: a brass rectangle in the middle of the floor, filled with pieces of coal; and, leaning in the corner of the room, an umbrella. These were, in his professional aesthetic opinion, works which should be displayed for the visitor, as representative of contemporary art. Well and good, but where, we asked, were the artworks of previous ages? Contemptuously he took us to the basement where, on several sliding panels, were stored dozens of works by Picasso, Braque, Matisse and others. These he considered were of no interest. As a cultural administrator with a vital educational function, his decision as to what should, and should not, be displayed was, to us, dismaying; but we had to respect it as a political statement no less than an aesthetic choice, indicative of local cultural politics.

At the same period (the late 1970s and early 1980s) I was also involved in the UK-based Leisure Studies Association where, once again,

culture as a manifestation of leisure activity was being studied in relation to provision, since early studies of leisure concentrated on the facilities available and the means of organising or facilitating access to such facilities, and the quality of their management. *Leisure and the Quality of Life*, a 1977 British government report, and the ground-breaking "DART/IFER" study *Leisure Provision and Human Need* (1976) made it clear how fragile is our understanding of what leisure actually *is* and how vulnerable it is to "ways and means" at national, regional and local levels.[1]

The debate on the "New World Communication Order", occurring during the years when I was working in the Irish national broadcasting service (Raidió Teilifís Éireann), first as an arts administrator and later as editor in the Public Affairs division, was sponsored by UNESCO under the chairmanship of an Irish jurist, Sean MacBride, and resulted in the 1980 report *Many Voices, One World: Communication and Society Today and Tomorrow* (and on which my essay "After MacBride" is based). The realisation, over forty years ago, that the world's media were undergoing a fundamental challenge, in both ownership and technology, had equally fundamental consequences for the way we communicate, the nature of media content and their conception, mediation, delivery and reception. This was particularly and immediately evident in the development of the former national broadcasting monopolies which had been challenged by the eruption of "pirate" radio (on a commercial basis) and "community" radio with a more altruistic ideology. The ambition, on the part of local communities, to establish their own intra-community means of communicating, became a major debating point centring not so much on finance or editorial acumen as on *control*. Harold Lasswell's 1948 formula – who says what, to whom, through what medium, and to what effect – became once more alive and dangerous, as does Sydney Verba's observation, that "political culture regulates who talks to whom and who influences whom".[2]

On one occasion at an international meeting in Sweden, I showed an example of a community radio initiative in a small town in Ireland, only to be told by my audience that what I had shown was "impossible" – they believed it to be "fake news" rather than a documentary of what had actually happened. On another similar occasion, in Finland, I put forward

---

1 DART is the Dartington Amenity Research Trust which co-operated with the Institute of Family and Environmental Research (IFER) to prepare this report for the UK Department of the Environment.
2 S Verba, *Political Culture and Political Development* (1965). Lasswell's definition was published in his "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society" (1948).

the view that the transhumous Sami people of Lapland should be in control of their own radio service – not least because the Sami migrate across the borders of Norway, Sweden and Finland and could not therefore be "controlled" by the broadcasting authority in any one of these three countries. I was told very strictly that this was "out of the question".

When I put these arguments to a meeting in Greece, when Greece was debating this issue, the Irish model – of a national broadcaster facilitating local community radio without exercising any control other than provision of technical support – was vehemently applauded in preference to the highly-regulated model of the UK. Perhaps the Nordic countries are more concerned for control of who says what and to whom than their southern counterparts. It certainly increased my understanding of the ever-present balance between self-expression and self-determination and the arena where they become politically debated, and also of the conceptual barriers between northern and southern ways of seeing and thinking.

A further dimension to the location of culture within politics was the appointment of Michael D Higgins (today the President of Ireland) as minister for culture in a coalition government in 1993. It was the first time an autonomous department of cultural affairs had been established, and at Cabinet level. I had known Higgins since the 1980s, as an academic sociologist who had written persuasively on the issues I have outlined above, in relation both to society in the west of Ireland and to clientelism. His Green Paper on Ireland's communications media brought together a profound appreciation of the national culture and a practical vision of how it might be articulated. His writings have made it clear that it is possible for a politician to appreciate the organic relationship between culture (in the widest, Tylorian sense)[3] and the actions of the state and its citizens. In essays such as "The Tyranny of Images" and the more explicit "Culture, Democracy and Participation" Higgins has demonstrated not only the organic nature of the relationship but also the necessity of accepting it and of accommodating it in all aspects of our lives. In his collected essays *Cause for Concern: Irish politics, culture and society* (2006) and *Reclaiming the European Street* (2021) he has emphasised that "the personal is political and the political is personal" in ways which make it undeniably clear that we cannot think of society in any manifestation without its culture or *vice versa*. Higgins' example demonstrates that a man of culture and a man of politics can inhabit the same mind and

---

3 E B Tylor (1832-1917) defined "culture" as: "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."

perform the same functions simultaneously.

All the essays in this book derive in one way or another from those experiences in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s, from my more theoretical work in cultural democracy and from my involvement in various capacities in the media. However, the *anxiety* which I display in these essays comes from the realisation that, however *organic* the symbiosis between culture and politics, it is the establishment of a *systemic* relationship that bedevils their full maturity. Problems identified in the 1970s, to which I allude in Part One (Culture and Communication) still await their (no doubt impossible) solution.

Nowhere could this be more true than in the two societies where I have spent all my adult life: Greece and Ireland, where the contrasts – sometimes peaceful, sometimes confrontational – between myth and reality, between tradition and modernisation, are intimately bound to cultural life. As I have suggested in *Greece Through Irish Eyes* (2015), there are very strong similarities in the characters of the Greeks and the Irish (this is summarised in Chapter Eleven). This is due partly to the postmemory experience which they share, of centuries of subjection to a powerful neighbour followed by independence, and partly to the innate imaginative qualities of both peoples, evident for example in the short stories of, respectively, Alexandros Papadiamandis and Liam O'Flaherty.[4]

Music is not immune from this sense of anxiety: Thomas Moore, the "Bard of Erin",[5] was a political animal at the same time as he was a London lounge lizard, providing coded messages of Irish nationalism which were adopted by freedom-seekers elsewhere, such as Poland. In Ireland, the deeply divisive issue of tradition versus modernity is manifested in that between traditional (that is, indigenous) music and the European symphonic mainstream which was brought to Ireland by its occupiers. This, too, has its counterpart in Greece, where the debate over the establishment of a national conservatoire in the early 1900s exactly reflects that in Ireland at the same date: should it prioritise ethnic, indigenous music – the expression of *who we are* – or the music of a culture which is alien, but to which the country was being induced as part of its emergence into the modern world? The decision is political.

In non-aligned music, the political "message" may be difficult to discern but is somewhere to be found, even in a chaconne by J S Bach. I am thinking of works as diverse as Vaughan Williams's "Lark Ascending" or Delius' "Brigg Fair", where the social connotations of the music may

---

4 See the chapter "Island to Island: Ireland and Greece" in my *The Disappointed Bridge: Ireland and the Post-Colonial World* (2014).
5 See *Bard of Erin: the Life of Thomas Moore* (2008) by Ronan Kelly.

have an effect in the *polis* which bears on the lives of citizens. In "aligned" music – by which I mean works explicitly political in nature such as Shostakovich's "Stalingrad Symphony" or Sallinen's opera *The King Goes Forth to France* – the composer's intention, to make a musical message from a political idea, is obvious. So too is it in music such as Wagner's *Das Ring des Nibelungen* or the operas of Richard Strauss – and not merely because they were espoused by Nazism.

In the visual arts, too. Are Claude Lorrain's landscapes immune from interpretation? What do they tell us, that we can also find in the works of Leonardo or Picasso, in which the practical plays always with the ethereal, the gauche with the adroit? Read E H Gombrich's "Art and Illusion" (1959), Edgar Wind's "Art and Anarchy" or his "Aesthetic Participation" (1963) to realise how close are the political and the aesthetic, especially in the fields of likeness and representation.

A further major preoccupation of these essays, which made itself manifest later than perhaps it should have, but which is profoundly related to the other concerns in these essays, is that of "Self" and "Other".

The entire literature of imperialism and post-imperialism, colonialism and post-colonialism, is based on the history of exploration which is also the history of fear. The classic literature of "the double", with its fascination with "Self" and "Other",[6] the entire sciences of schizophrenia and autism,[7] and the sociological studies of post-colonialism,[8] all have both aesthetic and political dimensions which are inter-related.

The dangers of abusing the relationship between "Self" and "Other" are clear from our attitude to "right" versus "left" and the concomitant "right" versus "wrong". Our way of depicting the gulf between them can be illustrated thus:

Right	Left
Cor*rect*	Incorrect
A*droit*	Gauche
*Dexter*ous	Sinister

---

6 For example James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), R L Stevenson's "Jekyll and Hyde" (1886), Oscar Wilde's "Dorian Gray" (1889), Vladimir Nabokov's *Despair* (1934) and Daphne du Maurier's *The Scapegoat* (1957).
7 As discussed in works such as R D Laing's *The Divided Self* (1960), Bruno Bettelheim's *The Empty Fortress* (1967), Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) and Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another* (1992).
8 See, among many other texts, Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957) and *Dependence* (1979), André Brink's *Map-Makers* (1992) and Homi K Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994).

The punishment meted out at school to the left-handed in an attempt to re-adjust them to social norms is simply another version of "right-thinking people" making the world in their image, *right*eously.

The fear of the "Other", which leads to exclusion is, to use a Sicilian expression, "singing only half of the Mass" (so that we excommunicate rather than *in*communicate), yet it dominates our everyday discourse. It is disturbingly present in the poetry and drama of Brendan Kennelly, in the plays of John B Keane, and the poetry of Eavan Boland, in their exploration of stereotypes, labels and the "other" half of the Mass.

Researching the decentralisation of cultural initiatives – how such initiatives are disseminated from the national or regional centres to the so-called "periphery" – I was once admonished when I naively asked a Connemara hill-farmer "What is it like to be remote?" (I meant, from decision-making centres like Dublin or Brussels.) To which he replied, coolly, "Remote? Remote from where? I am *here* – *this* is the centre." For him, Dublin and Brussels were only singing half the Mass. Decentralisation, as a mantra of contemporary social policy, becomes meaningless in the face of the closure of local post offices and police stations, the concentration of commercial and banking facilities in regional towns, which have profound politico-cultural effects on rural society and thus on the quality of life which sustains that society and which continues to power human culture and its manifestation.

On a personal note, my lives as an arts administrator, which immersed me in the world of music-making and its politics; as an editor in the policy-making area of a national broadcaster; as a broadcaster myself, on music and literature; and as a convenor of international symposia, have made me exceptionally aware of the nexus between the arts and the politics which both reflect and are governed by our cultures – a *corpus collosum* of response and responsibility.

In particular, I have been privileged to have enjoyed the friendships and confidences of two of the twentieth century's most fascinating writers: the novelist and poet Lawrence Durrell and the playwright Brian Friel. The writer who said to me "Perhaps I'm twins" (Friel) and the writer whose exploration of the "other" pervades and permeates his work (Durrell) were sure to command my critical attention. Each, in his different circumstances, was deeply conscious of the public and political role of his most intimate and private writing. Their work has compelled me to undertake my most significant (to me) critical interventions: *Lawrence Durrell: the Mindscape* and *The Diviner: the art of Brian Friel*. The present volume contains little about Durrell (with the exception of Chapter Ten, "Nostos") as I have written extensively about

him elsewhere,[9] but it includes three major essays on Friel and programme notes on eight of his plays which would otherwise be lost as ephemera.

From the most basic rural community to the opera houses of the world, the problem of understanding our cultural experiences and aspirations in terms of our political life is the same: we display both the "furniture" of our aesthetics and the "furniture" of our parliaments in every aspect of thought, word and deed which depend for their validity on our capacity for ethical thinking. These essays, ostensibly on topics as different as literature and music, drama and war, Greece and Ireland, are held together by the glue of our shared or unshared ideas of good and evil, which can find us at peace or at war, in discord or in love. Or both.

<div align="right">

Corfu
New Year's Day, 2021

</div>

---

9 *Lawrence Durrell's Woven Web of Guesses* (2021) and a new (third) edition of *Lawrence Durrell: the Mindscape* (to be published in 2022).

PART ONE

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

As I have suggested in my General Introduction, the late 1970s and early 1980s were a crucial period in the debate on Ireland's thinking about cultural affairs, especially on the part of intellectuals exploring the topics of censorship, identity, church-state relations, and Ireland's role in the emergent Europe (in social, political and philosophical thought). Their ideas were published largely in The Crane Bag *(edited by Richard Kearney and Mark Patrick Hederman 1977-1985), where two of the essays in this Part appeared originally.*

I have edited the essays to remove references to specific aspects of Irish society and administration which have been long superseded and which will mean nothing to a non-Irish readership forty years later. The perennial (and still unresolved) discussions of cultural policy in relation to decision-making remain the crucial issues – in particular the first essay identifying the concept of "cultural democracy" in contrast to that of "democratisation of culture" which remain topics potentially divisive, as I indicate in Chapters Two and Three.

Irish society has developed in many crucial ways since the 1980s: the introduction of divorce (in 1995), the decriminalisation of homosexual practices (1993), and a conceptual change regarding attitudes to Britain and to refugees, and to differences between cultures and religions. In 1980 it would have been inconceivable that Ireland should have a Taoiseach [prime minister] who was half-Indian and gay; or that Dublin should have a Lord Mayor who was ethnically Chinese. Yet the increase in globalisation, ironically affecting a deep conservatism, remains the principal obstacle to the extension of local democracy and democratic action envisaged in these essays.

Today, with the ideology and the practice of public service broadcasting even more at risk than previously, the concern in Chapter Three for the fragility of communication in both the cultural and the political dimensions would be even more pronounced. The very concept of public service broadcasting, as a norm of social communication, is questionable in the light of globalisation of the media, declining educational standards worldwide, and the consequent dumbing-down of journalism, news-gathering and -dissemination. The "right to communicate" (which so excited us when

it was articulated in the 1970s and 1980s) can indeed be seen in the same frame of reference as the "right to be communicated". (My specific comments in Chapter Three on Raidió Teilifís Éireann as a role model for community development must be read now in the light of its current financial difficulties and the question of its role in Irish society, which in turn are influenced by the national debate on the value of communication.)

While the principal issue of sovereignty today might be regarded as the economic ("A nation without monetary sovereignty is a dependent nation", says David McWilliams in 2021)[1] the "right to communicate" of a sovereign state – that is, the capacity to be a fully-formed, self-determined, cultural entity, telling its own story, expressing its identity and possessing the means to articulate it – is also fundamental, and fundamentally challenged by globalisation not only of the media but also of ideology itself. Economic dependence, which is common to almost all nation-states, leads to quasi-sovereignty (as we see in today's European Union); dependence in the field of communication leads to a quasi-right and a quasi-expression of aspirations, perspectives and intentions: we are, both individually and collectively, quasi-people.

Much of the early work is aspirational and – inevitably – replete with youthful energies. The fact that so many of the questions I was asking in the 1970s remain unanswered – and my aspirations unfulfilled – points to a utopian perspective inspired by a misplaced faith in human nature which subsequent experience has taught me to discount. If thinking is wishful, it does not necessarily mean that it can be disregarded or put aside.

---

1 D McWilliams, "No one seems to have noticed there's a monetary revolution under way", *Irish Times* 20 March 2021.

CHAPTER ONE[1]

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY, CULTURAL POLICY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: A WOVEN WEB OF GUESSES[2] [1983]

In this essay I ask: does Ireland need an explicit cultural development policy consonant with current European thought, and could it be introduced and implemented in the present "cultural climate"?

In the cultural context Ireland, in reaching "crisis-point" on a number of issues, is confronted with dilemmas for which the solutions seem to have disappeared, or not yet to have been discovered. Jennifer Todd, discussing Lukács and Benjamin, said: "Aesthetic experience seems to have become a phenomenon out of phase with social development, for the abilities it requires and the needs it fosters are incompatible with the habits and needs engendered in mainstream social or political activity."[3] There is little advantage to be gained by intellectualising about "culture" although, in order to have a cultural policy, some form of rationale has to be reached. Culture is an *ethos*, which can be observed objectively only when we put the whole world under a microscope. There is no such thing as an Irish cultural identity, and those who insist on it probably run the greatest risk of ending up in their own cultural gas chamber. Culture is imaginative life, directed by a selective will, and any process which leads to passivity, to lack of creativity or spontaneity, to reification, diminishes

---

1 *The Crane Bag* volume 7 no. 2, 1983.
2 My title ("A woven web of guesses") comes from the pre-Socratic philosopher Zenophanes (translated by Karl Popper): "The gods did not reveal from the beginning all things to us, but in the course of time, through seeking we may learn and know things better. But as for certain truth, no man has known it ... Even if by chance he were to utter the final truth, he would himself not know it, for all is but a woven web of guesses."
3 "Aesthetic Experience and Contemporary Capitalism: Notes on Georg Lukács and Walter Benjamin", *The Crane Bag* (vol. 7 no. 1, 1983).

the cultural stock of society. What concerns us here, to use F.S.L. Lyons's phrase, is everything from the furniture of men's kitchens to the furniture of their minds. What we seem to lack is unity of heart and mind, of tenderness and science.

Before considering "cultural democracy" and cultural policies it is important to emphasise that, generally, Western peoples are sensing some loss of identity, and that this has profound cultural significance. Two "liberal revolutions", in 1848 and 1968, have failed to resolve this crisis, which appears to be directly affected by the changing relationship of work and leisure. William Morris realised this in the 1880s, foreseeing the "dead blank of the arts". The current emphasis on the value of the crafts revival has been seen (for example by Peter Fuller in *Aesthetics After Modernism*, 1983) as an attempt to solve the dilemma that "full aesthetic expression and mechanical production are incompatible". Acutely aware of this in the vortex of Dadaism, Aragon wrote in 1924

> Man no longer worships the gods on their heights . . . Man has delegated his activity to the machines . . . The sensation that grips man ... is terror … There is an essentially modern tragic symbol: it is a sort of large wheel which is spinning and which is no longer being steered by a hand.

In desperation he concluded: "Force to the farthest limits the idea of the destruction of persons and go beyond that limit." At almost the same time J.C. Powys was claiming "Culture is the bed-rock, the final wall, upon which one leans one's back in a god-forsaken chaos."

Whereas the Gothic cathedral represented a "shared symbolic order", a sense of community, the new "cathedrals" – the Barbican Centre, the Sydney Opera House, the National Concert Hall – do not succeed in establishing or representing such identities. Denis Donoghue argues that "loss of confidence has occurred not in the decisiveness with which these buildings are built, but in knowing what should be produced in them."[4] And George Steiner, writing in 1971, emphasised the harsh facts of the 1968 revolts which he characterised as "the job of demolition … The violent illiteracies of the graffiti, the clenched silence of the adolescent, the nonsense-cries from the stage-happening, are resolutely strategic. The insurgent and the freak-out have broken off discourse with a cultural system which they despise as a cruel, antiquated fraud."[5] For the world, not just for Ireland, but definitely for Ireland, the twentieth century has been, in Anthony Cronin's words, "a battleground of fear".

---

4 In his 1982 Reith Lectures (BBC), "The Arts Without Mystery".
5 *In Bluebeard's Castle: notes towards the redefinition of culture*, p. 3.

(ii)

European reconstruction after 1945 included an attempt to reinstate dignity into the human form: first this was manifested in a concept of the State as responsible for "patronage" of culture and cultural provision. Both Keynes and Malraux attempted to make their peoples' cultural heritage more accessible. This policy of "democratisation of culture" was, however, unsuccessful because, in insisting on standards of excellence, on "high" or "elite" art, it did little to solve the pressing everyday cultural needs of people still subjected to the Bauhaus "Trend towards anonymity".

A definite Ruskinian sense of security permeated this idea of State patronage – a return to the Gothic decencies. Today, however, there is a stronger emphasis on the concept of "cultural democracy" which was the single achievement of the almost entirely bloodless coup of 1968.

Mainly within the forum of the Council of Europe some key European intellectuals began to examine this concept, which embraces new methods of improving conditions for the expression of creativity, self-determination in matters concerning the quality of life, continuing education, community development, the ability to communicate and to participate in societal decision-making.

This is best expressed in James Simpson's seminal work *Towards Cultural Democracy* (1976) in which the point is made very clearly that for this concept to succeed – i.e. to become part of society's official policy and incorporated into its laws – some degree of social change is necessary. "The society towards which I try to work is one in which there is a multiplicity of free dialogue on the basis of a genuine equality of esteem transcending differences of income, profession, intelligence, personality, manners and tastes" he wrote. One of the most moving passages in recent literature is, to me, his assertion:

> The road towards this type of society will, if not interrupted by catastrophe, be long and arduous. It will involve everybody in some sacrifice, and it may be that among these sacrifices will be some part of what is called 'the cultural heritage'. Such a sacrifice would be extremely painful to me, but I would, if necessary, have no hesitation in making it.[6]

I do not know what my own sacrifices will be, but I prefer to live and work among those prepared to subscribe unreservedly to Simpson's creed.

---

6 J Simpson, *Towards Cultural Democracy*, p. 8.

(iii)

How to enshrine the goals of cultural democracy in a cultural policy is, however, a universal puzzle. Augustin Girard refers to "the vast incertitude which bedevils the creation of an effective cultural policy." This is not the incertitude of the citizen but the sense of helplessness experienced by governments when they consider the specific problems of disadvantaged minorities, urban-rural imbalance, and disciplinary crises in planning, communications and sociology. Rationalising the individual areas of concern into a coherent set of guidelines is often beyond the scope of governments.

However, a cultural policy for Ireland based on the principles of cultural democracy, which have been accepted by the European Ministers responsible for cultural affairs, would contain the following elements:

- safeguarding the cultural heritage.
- increasing infrastructure for, and access to, all forms to cultural activity.
- protecting the creativity of the artist.
- ensuring the rights and welfare of cultural minorities.
- establishing a framework for regional development of cultural initiative.
- guaranteeing the right of the citizen to participate in decision-making in cultural affairs.
- relating a cultural policy to policies concerning education, communications, economic and social development.
- integrating the cultural dimension of planning and development with other planning areas.
- creating a dynamic of cultural change related to the general momentum of social change.
- facilitating the review of strategies based on this policy by means of continuing research and feedback processes.

Implicit in the adoption of any such policy is the recognition of change. Not only does it imply sacrifices in the sense outlined by James Simpson, but it would eventually necessitate political change, as the authority to decide and implement strategies was relocated, and relationships between various levels of government and citizen groups were re-established.

Another implication is that such relocation would produce new patterns of association, new tensions and new value-systems. The system proposed is based on the thesis that it is the role of the State to intervene in an otherwise unregulated society in order to secure an improvement in the

quality of life which might not otherwise be achieved; its strategies are encouragement, facilitation, support and, it must be recognised, a certain degree of regulation; its techniques are training, *animation*, management, planning, research and, again, it must be admitted, in censorship conforming to whatever moral guidelines, explicit or implicit, are assumed *a priori*.

It will be argued here that such a system, identifying and at the same time restricting certain rights or types of freedom, is consonant with the expressed Constitution of the Irish people, but that it would be difficult to operate given the current ambiguities and equivocation which mystify the ethos, or culture, of the Constitution.

What is quite clear, however, taking an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary standpoint, is that we urgently need to develop *a sociology of the public service*, in order to rationalise the inconsistencies in the current situation.

(iv)

In recent issues of *The Crane Bag*, Ciaran Benson (vol. 6 no. 1, 1982) and Laurence Cassidy (vol. 7 no. 1. 1983) have drawn attention to the lack of a theoretical rationale and of an agreed cultural policy. Cassidy believes that "principles can be elaborated which can generate creative and humanising roles . . . programmes of humanising and socialising activity ... embraced by a contemporary cultural policy." If we look at the Irish government's only major statement on cultural development dating from 1976, which alleged that it was a "national report on cultural policy", we are informed that by analysing cultural activity and the pattern of State provision the anonymous authors would "endeavour to convey in broad terms the aims and objectives of a national cultural policy".

In fact the text cited the organisation and financing of the arts, with additional reference to libraries, conservation and crafts and discussing the question of education and the arts, but no cultural *policy* can be discerned in this document, beyond the standard reference to the reasons for establishing the Arts Council (i.e. "to stimulate public interest in and to promote the knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts") and no reference was made to any other cultural activity.

Furthermore, it must also be noted that when requested in 1980 to answer a detailed questionnaire for a UNESCO "Eurocult" meeting (on cultural development policies) no reply was sent, and in fact Irish statements or statistics are often absent from documents which are helping to build up a European consensus on this and allied subjects. This, I believe, is due to the influence of Irish neutrality, which encourages the adoption of a stand-off position, thus decreasing Ireland's participation in

European cultural development programmes, greatly to our disadvantage. There is no room, in cultural affairs, for this mentality, the timid virgin hovering uncertainly on the edge of the dance floor or, in MacNeice's words,

> The neutral island facing the Atlantic,
> The neutral island in the heart of man.

Another aspect of the conceptual obstacle to change is exemplified by the Supreme Court's majority rejection of David Norris's constitutional argument for the right to personal privacy.[7] The Chief Justice's declaration that "the deliberate practice of homosexuality is morally wrong. . . damaging to the health both of individuals and the public. . .potentially harmful to the institution of marriage" has been described as "like something out of the 1950s" – a decade, we should recall, which saw the banning of Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, Samuel Beckett's *Watt* and *Molloy*, André Gide's *Fruits of the Earth,* Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Aldous Huxley's *The Devils of Loudun*, Nikos Kazantzakis's *Zorba the Greek*, and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Iron in the Soul*.

The constitutional debate has direct relevance to the question of a cultural policy: the Chief Justice sees the State as being "entitled, where it is practicable to do so, to discourage conduct which is morally wrong and harmful to a way of life and values which the State wishes to protect" – an attitude which Gramsci called *ponziopilatismo*. If, therefore, we can establish what that way of life is, what those values are, decide whether a private voluntary act of homosexuality is more or less harmful to Society than terrorism, wanton vandalism or water pollution, we may gain a clearer understanding of political culture, economic culture, social culture and aesthetic culture.

However, the Constitution is oblique on this issue. It affirms, "in the name of the Most Holy Trinity", that it seeks to assure the dignity and freedom of the individual, while attaining "true social order": in stating the "fundamental rights" of citizens the Constitution in each case having enunciated the specific right (e.g. "to assemble peaceably", "to form associations and unions", "to express freely their convictions and opinions") then proceeds to qualify that right, e.g. "the education of public opinion being, however, a matter of such grave import to the common good, the State shall endeavour to ensure that organs of public opinion,

---

7 David Norris, a lecturer in English literature at Trinity College, Dublin, became a member of the Irish Senate in 1987; he was the principal pioneer in the decriminalisation of homosexual practices which was achieved in 1993.

such as the radio, the press, the cinema, while preserving their rightful liberty of expression, including criticism of Government policy, shall not be used to undermine public order or morality or the authority of the State" – hence the controversial Section 31 of the Broadcasting Authority Act, 1960, which gives the minister for communication the power to suppress material which might "undermine public order".

Constitutional confusion extends to many areas of cultural life. The most severe confusion seems to be in the area of "ungovernability". Maurna Crozier says "our incapacity to develop appropriate decision-making mechanisms ... is a cultural failure" while Sean MacReamoinn says "institutionally we have become spastic, and culturally we have lost our way." As I have already noted, Jennifer Todd calls this "a phenomenon out of phase with social development". The heart of the problem of cultural development in Ireland has been the fact that during European reconstruction Ireland suffered a development from agrarian to capitalist economy similar to that of Scandinavia and Russia of the 1920s: an economic development which became, typically, paradoxically, progressively, detached from its cultural assumptions.

In his inaugural lecture at the University of Lille in 1854, Louis Pasteur pronounced: "fortune favours the prepared mind". While the Irish mind was gradually prepared throughout the nineteenth century for a cultural identity in independence, the consequent development of nationality may have obscured the really diverse nature of Irish society. In 1969 Charles McCarthy wrote: "An Irishman sees authority as something conferred on him from above. There is no tradition which says that a man must first govern himself. . . Dynamism from below has never been a feature of Irish society." So one dimension of the problem may be the introduction not only of a policy, but of a new tradition.

This latter point requires special attention. I have suggested that one of the key elements in a cultural policy would be a serious concern for regional development. This is well, if haphazardly, served at present by the Arts Council, but this limitation to the *arts* in fact has little long-term advantage, because it remains unrelated to other forms of regional development. The essence of a relatively neglected dimension of development such as this is that it should be integrated into an overall planning system. This is not merely to facilitate a comprehensive plan (i.e. to create an administrative convenience) but in order to encourage another vital element in cultural policy, the direct involvement of people in the development of their environment and quality of life.