INTRODUCTION

Images of Power and the Power of Images

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Symbols of power in diverse areas of public life surround us, from insignificant street signs and little-known corners to grand monuments and great buildings. Concrete expressions of abstract conceptions—churches (religion), seats of government (Parliament), railway stations (transport policy), shopping malls (commerce), and newsvendors (mass media), for instance—are regularly translated from these solidities into ideas, for the most part unthinkingly. Images of the control and ownership of public space in everyday matters have great significance in the conduct of human affairs—social, political, and cultural—and they dominate our generally accepted beliefs in the order of things. As we move through and around our work and leisure places, memorials, and construction sites, we rarely pause to contemplate the symbolic meanings of these spaces. Instead, we take the fact of their actual forms for granted, allowing for a glossing over of their symbolism. This is the force of the ‘social imaginary’ (see Taylor 2004), a phenomenon that will be explored in this issue as part of an ongoing examination of the relation between the arts and the state (see Kapferer 2008).

The Aestheticization of Power and Everyday Life

The social imaginary is integral to understandings of the conception, formulation, and design—the imagining—of worlds that range from the most commonplace to the most exotic. I am primarily concerned here with power and its aestheticization with specific relation to the everyday circumstances of life for which such an aesthetics is intended to have both effect and affect. I am thinking of various forms of representation and technical construction, since these both embody and refract dimensions of the socio-political orders in which they achieve expression. In many respects, these phenomena are active in constituting both the way that they are perceived and the kinds of conception that are enlivened in their presence. They do not declare what they are and how

they are to be interpreted; rather, their potency gains force by drawing perceivers into a dynamic that is not apart from them but rather involves those who engage with them in a mutually participatory act.

Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco series on the allegory and effects of good and bad government, painted in 1338–1339 in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico (see Meoni 2005), provides a text for a moral lesson that is highly pertinent to an exploration of images of power. The paintings impart a lesson that, in its teaching, is not totally unfamiliar to contemporary audiences, although it advances its burden of instruction in a more straightforward way than similar lessons of today. Indeed, it might be argued that postmodernist arts actually follow an amoral script, privileging as they do ideas of innumerable, equally plausible interpretations—as many meanings as there are personal perceptions. The fourteenth-century audience that viewed the frescoes, on the other hand, saw the inhabited social world as a given, that is, as unchanging and non-analyzable.

Lorenzetti's work comprises three paintings. The *Allegory of Good Government* and the *Allegory of Bad Government* flank the *Effects of Good Government* (or the *Well-Governed City*). The notion of the 'well-governed city' brought together images of civic rectitude, peace, and prosperity with an unapologetic didactic intent. The relation between the state and its aesthetic was firmly coupled with the idea of the thoroughly legitimate power of authority within the city-state, and, in this respect, the frescoes served as an object lesson to the populace. The artwork is a depiction of power that does not conceive of any message other than itself—a phenomenon that is now unfamiliar. However, this contrast provides contemporary viewers with a wealth of perspectives from which to interrogate the present and future of virtual and actual constructions and deconstructions of everyday life.

I want to focus here on a kind of art that is different from the straightforwardly instructional monumental art that dominates the perceptions of its audience while not including viewers within it. The polysemic nature of postmodern imagery and meaning is at odds with the unambiguity of the aesthetic messages of didactic intent that lie at the heart of the art of earlier eras. As a one-way process, the art, architecture, and literature of the late medieval and early Renaissance periods, for example, are forcefully contradicted by postmodern emphases on individual exegesis and the negotiation of perception. And while individualism is seen by many as a defining characteristic of the Enlightenment and subsequent periods, contemporary understandings of individualism and individuality are open to many other interpretations with regard to the intentions and the practices of art workers. These analyses allow for the circulation of more free-floating ideas that may indeed be internally contradictory, a situation that is celebrated for its multi-directionality of art, technics, craft, and design. But at the same time, the likelihood of cooperative meaning negotiation—the possibility of taking the role of the other—is diminished, both in the arts and in workaday social interaction.

Facets of state power that I will address encompass, firstly, the use of the townscape as a focal point symbolizing society and the state; secondly, the usage of secular and sacred motifs to signify fundamental conceptions of

faith, sociality, and cultural difference; and, thirdly, the role of communicative action such as exhibitions and publications in interpreting commonplace human activities. While this might appear to be a rather idiosyncratic selection of subjects (of the thousands available), they serve to demonstrate some of the ideas of the aesthetics of state power that will be explored here and in subsequent articles of this issue. The central question is how social institutions—formal education, religion, the family, for example—are/could be/should be imagined, planned, organized, and actualized. The imagining of other worlds, physical or fantastical, is fundamental to an understanding of that otherness of humanity that informs and inspires the invention, discovery, and aesthetic recognition of itself.

I concentrate on the relation of material phenomena to the symbolic representation that is brought to bear on a range of mundane events at various sites. The relations between real and unreal, concrete and abstract, image and substance are entwined in these representations of a social imaginary that simultaneously expresses and signifies the prosaic and the poetic of customary practice, wrapped up in the familiarity of banal existence.

It might be useful in this context to locate specific social geographical and metaphorical spaces in concrete places and events to give some shape to analyses of state activity and effects in both the arts and elsewhere. To illustrate: the imaginaries and the imagery of equal and unequal social relations are a universal theme. Spaces of power are entangled with spaces of resistance in situations of resignation, unease, or outright hostility, not only in state-people relations, but also in and among factions and conflicting perceptions of otherness. Similarly, social subordination and dominance are marked in significant spaces, where the ownership and control of certain zones within wider areas of the city, the polity, and the economy are contested or conceded. The conjunction of material place and imagined space produces many of the most potent images of social formations and their realities.

The Interrelationship between the State and the Arts

In exploring the expression and materialization of state (and market) power, as well as the ability of ordinary citizens to influence or direct everyday lives in contemporary social formations, the potential of symbols and images to refashion taken-for-granted political, social, economic, and cultural life is central. While such beliefs may offer only a semblance of personal participation through the aura (or the illusion) of democratic sharing, their efficacy nonetheless depends on how well or ill the ideological apparatuses of the state handle the instruments of dominance and persuasion at their disposal. These methods have become more complicated with the spread of popular education, but the habit of skepticism and disagreement has survived, if not exactly flourished.

I emphasize the interrelationship between the arts and the state, whereby the arts, however indirectly, are seen as the product and inspiration of state processes. Such processes constitute art as opening up a distance from the

situations it represents, allowing for the critique and judgment of artworks from myriad perspectives—from the personal and subjective to the ostensibly objective and impersonal. At the same time, artworks themselves may provide a platform for understanding, publicizing, or querying state practices.

The state and the arts are frequently at odds with each other's evaluations and priorities, as notorious clashes between the authority of art and the authority of the state attest. Selecting from a long list of examples, I adduce the furious reception of Diaghilev and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* (1913), Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956), Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (first published in Florence in 1928 but not until 1960 in Britain), and the 1997 *Sensation* exhibition of the works of Young British Artists.

Everyday Images and Social Orders

The focus of the articles presented here is on the connections between those often unremarked images that ground our understandings (and misunderstandings) of the social orders of the city and the state. Our concern is with a range of works that is wide open to a multitude of perceptions centering on the relation between artworkers and the meanings that they and their perceivers attach to their creations. This is an idea that has only comparatively recently engaged the attention of artists and designers, who have generally dismissed the end-users' views of their works. The intention of the artist has often been denied, claiming indifference to the views of lay people and leaving the perceivers to make of the artwork whatever they will. This anti-representational trend—not so much arrogant as perfunctory—has been a part of both modern and postmodern conceptions of artwork. The lionizing and self-regard of architects and their attitudes toward their clients have frequently been observed (see, e.g., luminaries such as Norman Foster, Rem Koolhaas, and Richard Rogers). Furthermore, the aura of the creator extends to the concrete work and, crucially to the owners and proprietors of the buildings themselves. Such an attitude spills over to other modish creators, including chefs, hair dressers, or interior decorators, generically known as 'celebrities'. Nonetheless, an increasing number of arts practitioners are concerned with holding their own creations up for discussion, explanation, and debate (see Jencks and Kropf 2006). The relation of the actor to the audience (see Bensman and Lilienfeld 1991) becomes important to the whole process of sharing ideas, rather than loftily pronouncing upon them.

An analysis of the connections among the quotidian images that ground our cognizance of the interrelationships between the social order and its realities is important for understanding the uses to which these symbols, emblems, and brand names may be put in advancing disparate ends. While canny users of information technology and further education have become more self-consciously aware of the attitudes and the social construction (and deconstruction) of everyday life (see Berger and Luckman 1966; Schutz 1970), much potential knowledge and its deployment remain opaque or dissimulated, with no ready-made guides to meaning. It is these latter significations that we concentrate on

in this issue. From a wide variety of angles, the authors examine issues that are in general taken for granted by the subjects, whose experiences and their relationships to other aspects of daily existence are the topics of our investigations. These experiences are the stuff of commonplace events and social interactions that are important to people caught up in the midst of their own life-worlds, however much they might be unaware of or disinclined to probe the causes and consequences of their actions. The authors seek to analyze and understand the ideas and attitudes of those engaged in these (often unwitting) partnerships.

Lorenzetti's frescoes preach a sermon to a people always on the brink of misfortune and rebellion. The iconography is grounded in the dialectical structure of the allegory on good and bad government. The idea of the three panels of the painting portrays a clear political—even ideological—intent in what seems to be a very modern interpretation of a time-honored topic: the relationship between the state and the people. But here it is the taken-for-grantedness of Lorenzetti's work that is its meaning.

Social Structures and State Practices

Social structures that have materialized through the use of metaphor and artistic license have the effect of persistently obscuring state practices while claiming their informational content and legitimating their power. Picasso's *Guernica*, Goya's *The Disasters of War* series, and Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* are 'personified' to make an unmistakable point: an ill-governed people will be visited by war, misery, and death. The moral lesson to be drawn is one that concentrates on the positive aspects of the effects of a well-governed people, who are conscious of the benefits that they receive from the state—in the building of roads, the construction of housing, or, less directly, in the contemplation of religious icons, landscapes, or townscapes.

Thus, in the articles that follow we can discern, for instance, religious observances and icons now including members of the congregation, who are active in the orchestration of worshipful events and circumstances. While this might once have been considered a recognizably Christian or particularly Protestant idea, the present approach to such images indicates a shift toward a different relationship between signifier and signified. The use of the vernacular rather than the heightened language of the Mass is one sign of this change, as is the dismantling of the arm's-length distance previously maintained between the priest and his flock, well illustrated by the practice of breaking bread in a circle of believers without the benefit of an interlocutor. This is a process whereby devotees have fashioned a new relationship with the object of their piety. It is not only Christians who exhibit such changing stances: in a post-positivist world, all kinds of spiritual and religious practices—Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and others—and their depiction are opened up to the scrutiny of a postmodern, globalized consciousness (see Vadakkiniyil and Verdi in this issue).

Similarly, the eye of the beholder now assumes a more central position in attending to the work of art as a knowing observer. The act of contemplating a

wall, a bridge, a street, or a public building enfold observers in the meanings of such structures (see Handelman and Harvey in this issue). These structures also implicate onlookers in their reception, thereby shaping their very reactions to the place. The state remains a central actor in these public works of art and architecture, but the people themselves become actors in their own drama, while more tightly binding people and state together—in some cases wittingly, in other cases not.

The creation and utilization of public works to teach or imply an alternative reading of state practices and state effects offer other instances of the shifting relationship between builder and beholder of images of significance in everyday life. In one case, such effects involve readjusting the state versus people relation—as road creators versus road users (see Harvey in this issue)—in the construction of a road in an out-of-the-way location. The two groups do not see eye to eye on the merits of the government transport program, with engineers finding their creation damaged by the road users and the local people seeing the road as having unintended and even alarming consequences for their livelihood. In much the same way, the designers of public housing units have rarely attended to the dwellers who must live in these often intimidatingly impersonal structures that have been thoughtlessly sited without considering contexts or surroundings (see Glendinning in this issue).

In contrast with the motif of creation, the shock of death is chillingly concretized in many exhibitions and memorials relating to war, military occupation, and torture. One such is the exhibition ‘Body Worlds’. Devised and curated by German anatomist Gunther von Hagens, this display has perplexed and/or sickened viewers in diverse sites since it began touring in 1996. The ‘plastinated’ bodies of the dead hold up to public scrutiny the remembered or half-remembered experience of wartime destruction and subsequent efforts to educate and re-educate contemporary generations about post-denazification in Germany and farther afield (see Linke in this issue). Once again, the juxtaposition of artist and perceiver, mediated by the execution, content, and context of the work, realizes a new association between them—one in which the viewer is an active participant.

The apposition of creator and perceiver (including sellers, buyers, and onlookers) is further complicated by the presence of third parties: professional critics and reviewers (see Kapferer in this issue). At art fairs (as with other trade fairs), most creators and designers of artworks have an ambivalent relationship with those who assess their offerings for ‘public’ approbation and/or sale. Many will profess to be unaware of or uninterested in the critiques of viewers, while others (Andy Warhol, Damien Hirst) claim to be nakedly interested in profit making. However, an art fair focuses on a smaller, closed circle of cognoscenti, and while the didactic appraisals of professional critics and reviewers have implications for the long-term success of the artists concerned, it is the wider public of educated lay persons whose estimation is sought after more often than in earlier eras (see, e.g., Birnbaum and Graw 2008).

Within temples, shrines, and other spiritual centers, the attitude of the perceiver of the work is of a different order. In a Zen garden, initially mediated by

Zen masters (see Weiss in this issue), observers become more than onlookers. The garden envelops them, and they become one with it, ingesting its structure and its philosophical meanings. The distance between creator and participant is negated within the object itself: its we-they relation almost disappears. As with many of the other topics explored in these articles, auto-didacticism comes into the foreground of the work, whether consciously or unconsciously experienced by the perceivers of these messages.

Such realities, as I have suggested, may be a village road in Peru, a Zen garden in Japan, the built environment in Jerusalem, and public housing in the United Kingdom. All have as their centerpiece townscapes or landscapes that express the relation between the people and the state, and they all embrace a spectrum of ideas that utilize abstract qualities and figures of the imagination to analyze state power as it affects the lives of those taking part in their construction and being acted upon by it. Some of these concepts are of ancient lineage, for example, the striving for peace and tranquility, security, and national or local prestige. Some are seen as being directly related to the welfare of citizens and conceptions of the modern. Here the figure of a suffering Christ and the contemporary embodiment of the god Muttappan (see Verdi and Vadakkiniyil in this issue) are iconic with the reverence, compassion, and faith that bespeak a direct relationship with beliefs in the power of intercession and supplication to bring succor to the devout. At the same time, they display a present-day understanding of older truths, with the result that worshippers now pursue more personal ends than previously.

Of perhaps more contemporary application, images of the communicative action of media and exhibition express more ambivalent understandings of the links between the market and the state in the service of the people: a German exhibition evokes images of death, and a London art fair calls up greed and envy. These analyses of intercultural friction examine racism, capitalist transactions, memory, and imaginaries of collective guilt as they are depicted in newspapers, magazines, and occasional installations of street theater in Europe, North America, and other outposts of empire.

The Social Imaginary at Work

The spaces and places that supply the contexts with which we deal in this issue are generally rather more opaque than representational artworks, such as paintings or sculptures. This conclusion is based not only on the habit of the interpretation of such works (common perhaps to all expressive uses of imagery and imagination) but also on the obfuscation involving less obvious subjects, such as state (or market) practices that are realized in tall buildings and suburban housing estates, wide boulevards and country roads. The semiotics of such phenomena structures the raw material of social imaginaries of power and subordination, consent and dissent, conflict and persuasion. Icons and exhibitions are interpellated in terms of their discursive properties and their ability to concretize abstract formulations of, for example, hegemonic

elites at an art fair or state-sanctioned and state-promoted installations, such as Zen gardens, walls in Jerusalem or the US Southwest, or Holocaust museums in Israel and elsewhere.

Symbolic manifestations of legitimated power—achieved through media such as artworks, architecture, town planning, landscaping, and dramatic performances—are easy enough to find. But their importance lies in unraveling the shifting relations between image and reality. Those relations constantly discover novel interpretations of fundamental beliefs and values that are thought to characterize the well-governed nation-state. Or, conversely, they lay bare a narrative of deception and propaganda, exposing the perils of the ill-governed state. The power of images is such that they may be bent to multiple forms and purposes, to the construction and expression of the social imaginaries of modernity. It is this capacity that separates the imagery of the pre-modern world from that of the modern and characterizes the diversity of images available to the practice of the arts and humanities today. The construction and deconstruction of images and mythologies of power is thereby vital in the analysis of the ever-changing social assemblages of postmodern global formations, the discovery and invention of new ways of recasting new realities. This is the social imaginary at work.

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