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Introduction: art, politics, purpose

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'You can refute Hegel,' wrote Yeats, 'but not the Song of Sixpence.' All of the contributors, supporters and scene-shifters of this special section start from the assumption that art matters, ethically and politically; affectively and intellectually. It is another way of apprehending the world. It has consequences. Not only does it make us feel, or feel differently, it also makes us think, and think again. It is in a certain sense irrefutable.

Cézanne is supposed to have said of Poussin that he put reason in the grass and tears in the sky. Reason and tears may be as good an encapsulation of International Relations as any. This special section is dedicated to the proposition that art can enlarge our understanding of both. If the way artists see and shape the world is intensely political, this has profound significance for those of us in a field that tries to make sense of the characteristics of that world, and intervene in it. The political issues most fundamental to International Relations – war, peace, order, justice – have always been fundamental to artists as well. Indeed, many artists are highly sophisticated analysts of the international sphere. It is about time that those of us who study global politics became equally sophisticated analysts of that art.

We are not precious about definitions. 'Is it art?' is not a question that need detain us. We are not concerned only with 'high art' from well-established painters, playwrights, photographers or poets. We are interested in creative productions that seek to comment on the current state of global life. And not only contemporary art; we emphasise the importance of returning to earlier work and drawing out its continued significance, often overlooked. This collection is predicated on Valéry's claim that a work of art is defined by the fact that it does not exhaust itself – offer up what it has to offer – on first or second or subsequent reading. Great art is practically inexhaustible. It has the capacity to invite a repeated response. We go beyond ourselves, in Gadamer's phrase, by penetrating deeper into the work: 'That "something can be held in our hesitant stay" – this is what art has always been and is still today.'[1] In short, the artist articulates a vision of the world that is insightful, and consequential; and the vision and the insight can be analysed.[2]

Put differently, we believe that what artists think and make is profoundly interesting and important, and that the nature of their achievement tends to be underestimated. We are with T. J. Clark:

[1] Hans-Georg Gadamer, trans. Nicholas Walker, 'The Relevance of the Beautiful' [1974], in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and other essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 53, quoting from Hölderlin's 'Bread and Wine'.

[2] For a restatement and demonstration of this argument see Alex Danchev, 'On Art and War and Terror' (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

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a good working hypothesis seems to me to be that Poussin's achievement is of roughly the same order of intensity and complexity as Descartes's or Hobbes's [his coevals], and that therefore what is of interest is how Poussin (like them) managed to break and reconstellate his world of assumptions [. . .] in the end proposing a form of access to the world (and a reflection on that access) that was truly unprecedented.[3]

In the academy, especially the Anglo-American academy, we are not accustomed to engaging with art and artists on these terms. In International Relations – to narrow the target just a little – culture, high and low, remains a minority interest, routinely ghettoised. This is not to say that International Relations scholars have ignored art, culture, and imagination altogether. Indeed, there is an important body of work which places creative endeavour at the heart of world politics, and our offerings are much indebted to the explorations of Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, Michael J. Shapiro, Christine Sylvester, Cindy Weber and Jutta Weldes, to name but a few. Our point is that International Relations too often merely *tolerates* scholarship on art, culture and imagination, and therefore underpins all the latent power relations that modes of toleration always produce.[4] So it is that films, comic books and posters have crept in by the back door, like so many stray cats; science fiction and the sublime have been treated to the academic equivalent of the blind tasting, with some swallowing and some spitting out; literary allusion is tolerated, for the most part, as a kind of froth or affectation, as if over-egging the pudding or over-doing the drink. Art, or rather the consideration of art, has infiltrated the pages of the more progressive journals, most often in 'special issues' (like this one).[5] In the profession as whole, however, it remains almost invisible. As if to invert the precepts of Victorian child-rearing, it may be heard but not seen. In a world driven by the strategic priorities of the ESRC and the categorical imperatives of the RAE, poetry is superfluity.

This posture, we contend, is not only philistine but curiously self-denying. Art transforms us into epicures, as Charles Mauron said. And yet, here in our corner, we remain half-starved. Is it too much to suggest that art, broadly conceived, is 'the missing dimension' in the study of International Relations? That position used to be claimed by intelligence. Now intelligence has come in from the cold. As an academic pursuit it remains perhaps a little recherché, but it is widely accepted and widely practised. Our hope and expectation is that art and IR will follow a similar trajectory, and that the conjunction or interfusion of the two will seem quite as natural, and as beneficial, as any other intellectual partnership.

The following pages deal not so much with the formal or technical aspects of photographs, films, music, literature and websites, although these aspects are in some fashion intrinsic to the analysis on offer here. Nor are our concerns focused on the politics of the art world or its market, although these issues often have a

[3] T. J. Clark, *The Sight of Death* (London: Yale, 2006), p. 150.

[4] Wendy Brown, 'Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire' (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[5] Important special issues that engage with art, culture, creativity and imagination include 'Poetic World Politics', *Alternatives*, 25:3 (2000); 'Art and Politics', *Alternatives*, 31:1 (2006); 'Nuclear Stories: Cold War Literatures', *Cultural Politics*, 4(3) (2008); 'Images and Narratives of World Politics', *Millennium*, 30:3 (2001); 'Between Fear and Wonder: International Politics, Representation and the Sublime', *Millennium*, 34:3 (2006); 'Securitization, Militarization and Visual Culture in the Worlds of Post-9/11', *Security Dialogue* 38:2 (2007); and 'Painting Politics', *Social Alternatives*, 20:4 (2001).

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bearing on what kind of art gets produced and valued. Rather, we are more concerned with how particular examples of artistic endeavour intervene in our world and prompt us to think and feel differently and perhaps more cogently about it.

This means refusing to see art as merely illustrative of more fundamental issues in the 'real' world. IR is replete with such thinking. For us, it is insufficient. It is not enough to suggest that while Picasso's 'Guernica' may be a great painting, it is only a footnote to the Spanish Civil War, or high-technology warfare, or civilian casualties. That kind of analysis is neither critical nor reflective; more to the point, it denigrates the productive aspect of art in relation to political issues, or the role that art can play in helping us think and feel our way through difficult political problems. For us, there must be a *politics* in our observations. Today, Guernica lives through 'Guernica'; and 'Guernica' lives on the streets, as a global symbol of man's inhumanity to man, and in the sanctum of the UN, as talisman and goad (and embarrassment) for those who would do good in the world. 'Painting is not made to decorate apartments,' said Picasso. 'It is an offensive and defensive weapon against the enemy.'[6] Let us mobilise it.

It seems to us that artists are on to something – 'the creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggests and engenders', in Virginia Woolf's words – and we have need of that fertility.[7] And yet we are wary of unduly privileging, of saying that artists have a way of seeing or understanding or intervening in the world that is somehow *better* than ours, as students and scholars. What we wish to argue is that some of the most provocative and innovative analysis of difficult political problems comes from interaction among artists, scholars, curators, students and audiences. In this sense, we are flying the flag for collaborative research – truly collaborative – not simply 'interdisciplinary' excursions that remain timidly enough within the academic pale, but collaborative work with artists and practitioners. We need to understand how artists make sense of the world, and we need to apprehend what art is doing and saying about the world. Our job is to reveal the connections that exist between academic debates about global life and the way artists struggle to grasp and represent such issues. Among other things, this means taking artists seriously – artists of all kinds – treating poets, as Martha Nussbaum has written, 'not simply as people who might have written a treatise but didn't, nor yet simply as repositories of "popular thought", but as thinker-poets whose meanings and whose formal choices [are] closely linked'.[8] Barnett Newman made the same point from the other side. 'The artist is approached not as an original thinker in his own medium,' he noted acerbically, 'but, rather, as an instinctive, intuitive executant who, largely unaware of what he is doing, breaks through the mystery by the magic of his performance to "express" truths the professionals think that they can read better than he can himself.'[9] Some reorientation may be in order. Thinker-poets,

[6] Interview with Simone Téry [1945], in Dore Ashton (ed.), *Picasso on Art* (New York: Viking, 1972), p. 149.
[7] Virginia Woolf, 'The Art of Biography', in *Collected Essays* (London: Hogarth, 1967), vol. IV, p. 228.
[8] Martha Nussbaum, 'Introduction: Form and Content, Philosophy and Literature', in *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 15.
[9] Barnett Newman, unpublished review of Thomas B. Hess, *Abstract Painting* (1951), in *Selected Writings and Interviews* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 121–22.

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thinker-painters, thinker-photographers and their kin may help us to glimpse previously unseen possibilities for thinker-politics – and actor-politics.

The special section emerges from the 'Art and Politics' group, a loose collective founded in 2004. The group is a meeting place for academics from many different disciplines (International Relations, Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Art History, Geography, History and Politics), as well as painters, curators, DJs, sculptors, photographers, video artists and public intellectuals. In addition to panels at academic conferences (BISA, PSA, ECPR), the group have organised two successful workshops dedicated to exploring the relationship between art and conflict. The first, at Tate Modern in 2006, staged a series of open-ended conversations between artists and academics in order to identify the terrain of the debate; the second, in Belfast in 2007, pursued more specific questions of photography, identity and security.

The work gathered here feeds on some recent discussions with the ECPR standing group on Politics and the Arts and the BISA Post-structural Politics Working Group. First of all, it consists of academic papers that address the perplexing and provocative question of how violent events (conflict, war, terrorism) can be represented in a creative manner. Each of the papers focuses on different creative producers: artists who use photography, novelists, ordinary soldiers with cameras, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, and the late Jean Baudrillard – Situationist poet (retired) and nihilist terrorist (self-proclaimed). They engage with the vexing and irresolvable ethics of what it means to respond, imaginatively, to violence – how to represent it, and how to interpret it. Given that all of these papers are efforts to penetrate deeper – to go beyond ourselves – none pretends to offer prescriptions, and that is as it should be.

To show our commitment to collaborative research, and to demonstrate its possibilities, we also wanted to expose readers of the *Review of International Studies* to some contemporary visual art that deals with conflict, and offer a series of original readings, responses and criticism of that artwork. Angus Boulton's photographs of decaying Cold War installations and Suzanne Opton's photographs of American soldiers returning from the battlefields of Iraq are provocative interventions in on-going debates about war, memory, history and healing. In soliciting short responses to this work, from various quarters, we were interested not so much in their academic framings, though such framings are undeniably present, but more in the emotional impact these images had on their viewers – and in the way the images continue to haunt us and disturb us long after our initial exposure to them. What do these feelings mean, and how can we make sense of them in our own terms? Have we asked the impossible by urging contributors to translate their initial affective and emotional encounters with these images in 'rational', academic prose? We hope that the opportunity to think about such questions – to think *creatively* – may help us to think freshly, or at any rate to jolt us out of our comfortable categorisations.

The special section is offered, then, as a kind of *hors d'œuvre*, accompanied by a salutary thought from Auden:

> The primary function of poetry, as of all the arts, is to make us more aware of ourselves and the world around us. I do not know if such awareness makes us more moral or more efficient: I hope not. I think it makes us more human, and I am quite certain it makes us more difficult to deceive, which is why, perhaps, all totalitarian theories of the state . . .

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have deeply distrusted the arts. They notice and say too much, and the neighbours start talking:

'There's many a beast then in a populous city,
And many a civil monster.'[10]

[10] W. H. Auden, Introduction to *Poems of Freedom* [1938], in Edward Mendelson (ed.), *The English Auden* (London: Faber, 1986), pp. 371–72, quoting from Shakespeare's *Othello*.

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