

Commentary by Rubinoff during the 2010 Forum

Jeffrey Rubinoff May 2010

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF *Cultivating cognizance at the End of the Age of Agriculture*

On purging government of social science

"I'd like to address something that Karun has said, that I think we haven't touched on strongly enough, and that is integration of social science with government and how the prescriptive narratives that are based on theory...especially after Marx...and studying theoretical models of history that have no evidential basis. ... And so what we've had in government is a lot of non-evidential paradigms that come from social science, that end up confusing many issues of truth. And I think that's part of something that hasn't been discussed enough, on how to actually purge it. In the time of the enlightenment there was no such thing as social science. They said, 'We have history to learn from. We have evidence to learn from...' ...Whereas, once you arrive at social science you get paradigms that are done without the evidence of them being necessarily true. ... So, how to purge government of social sciences is a very important question."

On the danger of the idea of art being redemptive

"You have to be very careful about art, because it gives a sense of redemptive or therapeutic qualities that we're trying to avoid. ... The redemptive qualities are extremely dangerous because it gives the idea that you've redeemed yourself when in fact you haven't answered any of the particular questions that you need to face existentially in facing yourself. So, I would be very cautious about the idea of art being redemptive."

On the possibility of non-prescriptive narrative in art

"The concept of non-prescriptive art or non-prescriptive narrative, sets art independent of these prescriptive narratives. So socially redemptive art—I'm not opposed to it—but it's just not the world that I'm talking about. And so this aspect of what this proposal...raises is non-prescriptive narrative. ... So, part of the purpose of this is to arrive at a position ... of a non-prescriptive narrative, as it seems that almost always, prescriptive narratives—as we know them—end in war. So, no matter what happens, you're going to end up arguing some factor of absolute truth...and

gradually you're going to degenerate to that particular position. So, the desire of finding a non-prescriptive narrative is to deal with the issues of war themselves. So, if it's possible to arrive at a non-prescriptive narrative, then it's also possible we can conceive of getting past war, and I don't think we can conceive of getting past war until we do get to non-prescriptive narrative. That's how all of this ties together. ..."

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF
The Artist and the New Humanism: an Evolutionary Model for Art History

On the notion of collective memory as the total memory of human beings

“What I mean by collective memory is the sum of total human knowledge that makes up the human soul... The artist who is mapping it or moving it in evolution is actually *effecting* the universal knowledge base for all of human beings. It moves forward, and it's not fixed in time. It moves forward and grows. It evolves.”

On the relation of political and art historical context of Read's argument to its purpose

“This was the lecture in 1953, wasn't it? Part of it is, there was a very painful transition that art went through for about five different reasons. But two of the major ones are that Europe collapsed and by 1945 America became the ascendant culture. And Americans weren't much interested in art at all. Read brought a legitimacy to American abstractionism, not the least because he came from England. So he knew what he was doing—giving the panoply of art history to the then publicized avant-garde American art. If he couldn't prove that Sam Francis and Jackson Pollock et al were at the apex of the evolution of art, then he had no future either. ...”

On the historical basis of the differences in the transition of music and art into art abstraction

“What was a very painful transition for visual art seems to be significantly less painful in music: to move from a liturgy or a pictorial or a verbal or a storytelling narrative in music, into the abstract world. Musicians managed to make transitions that didn't seem to have caused a major argument among their patrons. ... But nobody seemed to think that this was a very significant problem, partly because they were using prosthetics. ... The composers made their living from ... selling their written music to patrons who ... as adults could generally sing no more than three notes. So they, in turn, bought the written music to be able to play it on instruments. Somehow that was acceptable, and that happened over a couple of hundred years. ...

As instruments developed so that they actually could tune them to play with each other and achieve a tonic ... and play them in tune and keep them in tune, then we get this great expansion of layered music that is totally abstract. And you can add singers and narrative or not. It doesn't really matter. For one thing, if you don't understand the language it's being sung in, it's just another voice within the music itself... That evolution does not seem to be painful from our historical viewpoint.

For the visual arts, this is a very tricky business. The very tricky business for the visual artist began

with illustration. That's what you got paid for: the innate ability to draw and reproduce something. ... So the ability to illustrate did something that was very important to anyone who demanded permanence. The artists gave permanence through drawing and sculpting to the warrior ruling class. And by giving them permanence, they also gave them immortality. And that immortality was all part of the system of maintaining the oligarchic structure. No matter where that structure happened to be, perception of immortality maintained the right to rule. ...

So this has been a terrible transition because once visual art became abstract, it didn't matter whether there were figures in it or not figures in it, whether there were patterns in it or not patterns in it. That just simply doesn't matter. It's, 'Does it work as art'? This is now the artists' serious question, not the patrons' quest for their own permanence."

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF
A New Global Humanism Beyond the Age of Agriculture: Pan-Humanism

On the importance of a lingua franca

“The first and most important question in all of this “What is the lingua franca?” Esperanto tried to do this. It didn’t go anywhere. ... But until you deal with the question of language, you’re not dealing with the essence of the way that people perceive nationhood. ... Without a lingua franca, there’s no way of even discussing these things, it won’t happen. It just simply won’t happen. And I hate to say that, but that’s just the way that it is, because people will fall back into all of those prejudices that come from the very, root cultural level. ... Are people willing to go there? In many ways English has become it. Well, it’s becoming it. And I really think that was Jeff Foss’ point last year about the Internet becoming Terra’s brain. ... But that’s the first step towards two things: the breakdown of the nation, and the possibility of international human rights. I don’t think there is a possibility without [a lingua franca].”

On the lack of clear ownership of land as a barrier to access to capital in Africa

“An argument along the same line as Jay [Winter], but from capitalist point of view has been postulated by *The Economist*. One of the problems in Africa at this particular time is that there’s no clear ownership of land, and their argument is—so this is the anti-Marxist argument— that there’s no property recognition so that they can actually own their own land and borrow against the capital to grow food. ... And then the second part of this, which they were adamant about, was that the European Union had to open up so that Africans can trade, and actually enter the market of international agriculture. ... They’re arguing very strongly against that centralized [distribution] system that seems to automatically grow out of Marxism.”

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF
The Lost Generation of the First World War: The Suicide of the Military Caste

On the novel as the form of art emergent from the second world war

"In the Second World War, much of the works that came out of it were novels by people who had directly experienced it. So I think of *The Naked and the Dead*, and *The Thin Red Line*. These became sort of icons of American literature as opposed to paintings."

On nationally based wars destroying an emerging view of a non prescriptive narrative for art

"Look at the history of Modernists at that particular time, who they were, what countries they came from, and their ideology of having a new set of design, ... revolutionary aspects of the thing, including architecture, which might or might not be a plus. ... For artists, it was the new world that they were creating which was this escape from the prescriptive narrative ... that they were required, in a sense, to meet before photography. So there was this great revolution that was coming of being able to think of art liberated in much the way that music was liberated in the 18th century. So those people all communicated with each other. There was a time when the Modernists all were just communicating. And they ended up on the German side, they ended up on the Russian side, they ended up on the French side, and the Belgian side, as a matter of fact."

On the divisiveness of the World War I among artists

"The [Great] War was extraordinarily destructive to the blossoming art of that particular time. Franz Marc died in it. A number of artists died in it. A critical part that was destroyed among the Modernists was their universality. There was a hope on the end of the nineteenth century that there would be something revolutionary happening among them. The divisiveness of the war was an immeasurable catastrophe. And out of that came Dada—the artists' reaction to their smashed futures."

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF Nuclear Winter and the End of the Age of Agriculture

Question about whether decommissioning really means weapons are rendered harmless

"Part of the goal of this [Forum], is to pass this knowledge onto another generation. Now, one of the aspects of it, to this next generation, is what happens to the residual nuclear material, even if the weapons are decommissioned? Are they really decommissioned, or are they simply put on the shelf, ready to be pulled out at another time?"

On cognizance of the euphemism of battlefield nuclear weapons

"The part that's missing from here for this generation, is the euphemism called 'battlefield weapons,' ... battlefield weapons sound like something that's going to happen somewhere out of town. By now, we already know that there is no out of town in all out war. And so, this euphemism needs to be accounted for. ... The battlefield weapons that we're talking about, each one is more powerful than the ones used on either Hiroshima or Nagasaki. And so, they sound like things that, you know, you'd use at the Battle of Waterloo, or something like that, and it'd be out on a playing field somewhere. What we know about that is in all out war, war still goes back to cities. So if there are three, or four, or five thousand of these battlefield weapons still out there ... this is a very important aspect of awareness in the next generation. This is your stuff – the next generation. Our generation has not done a whole lot about it. And so you're going to inherit it. And I think it's very important that that information be available."

On application of intellectual pressure on policy makers not to ignore nuclear weapons

"Is there some form of organization where pressure can actually be applied at the intellectual level to bring about the kind of change that needs to be done? And the reason I say that, is that we can name 40 key people, say, in the Manhattan Project who changed the world. Is it possible that there is a level of intellectual pressure that could be placed by a large number of people, a much larger number of people than that, but at a level where these things can actually be discussed, and actually approached, and awareness brought to government that something needs to be done about it? If it's simply left in the realm of politics, what we can see is that very little will be done about it. And in my presentation will ask the question as to what the default condition is, if whether or not war is a default condition. So, if we leave this in a default condition, it's most certainly that these weapons will either be used, or misused, or in another way simply be ignored. And what is the consequence of ignoring them, is another thing, even if they're no longer weapons?"

On the awareness of the need to looking after a nuclear materials for millennia

“The consequence of the material is that it needs to be looked after. As I understand it, if you’re going to deal with plutonium, you’re going to have to look after it for 25,000 years. We don’t have a structure to think about anything like this – we have no history that says: ‘We will look after something for 25,000 years.’ We don’t even have very good abilities to look after our offshore drilling for any length of time. ... A strong reason for dealing with the finality of the end of the age of agriculture is to bring awareness that we’ve entered into issues that we’ve never encountered before in our history. For example, 25,000 years of having to look after a material that we’ve created and make sure that it’s properly accounted for. And so, this is a very different mode of thinking that we’ve entered. The finality of this—the closing of an age that we could no longer afford—requires an entirely different kind of thinking than was ever used in that particular age.”

RUBINOFF'S COMMENTARY FOLLOWING PRESENTATION OF
Art Beyond War: A Discussion About Prehistoric War and the History of Art by Artists

On the importance of the fusion of the artist with the subject whether collective or singular

“What I wanted to show is the idea of art being a fusion with the subject. So, it wouldn't have mattered to me whether it was collective or singular. I wanted to show works that are not that commonly shown. I picked Michelangelo's drawings because the drawings in the cave use that lifeline so strongly. So, there was a different purpose to this showing.you noticed that there was this fantastically complete abstract painting from the cave. So, you could say, “Well, you know, they're painting animals.” Well, no, they're not just animals. They had abstract vision, so there is a complete modernist painting there that crosses the line. ... It seems to me that if your experience is collective you're going to fuse with the collective reality, if that's the reality that you choose to fuse with. Dix fuses with many singular subjects later though his collective experience in the trenches are the ones that he expresses in *Der Krieg...*”

On the mastery evidenced by the cave artists' use of abstraction

That's why I showed those Michelangelo drawings. You can see that he just shows parts and each is a very complete drawing. There is ... an ibex in the presentation from Lascaux, that's just a stroke and a couple of horns and you see the whole ibex. Now, that's the nature of abstraction itself. So, well, when you say sketches, I don't regard those as sketches. If you can catch that lifeline, *that* may be the whole work. But that is to my modern eye. I don't know what they thought, but certainly they left those pieces... The cats are amazing, and those come from the Chauvet Cave. There are three cats in that drawing and they're side-by-side-by-side. Firstly, the cats are scarier than hell, because you have to then think what would they do with the cats? Did they eat them? Did they share food with those cats, or did the cats come and raid their food? Who the hell were those cats? There are no cats in Lascaux. There's no cats in Altamira. I found those cats terrifying, but very interesting.”

On the extension of the concept of lifelines from life drawing

“Well, the lifeline is from life drawings, so anyone who has done life drawings knows. You know when that thing is alive and because you've brought that line up exactly vibrating with the life of those lines. One line can do. [Pablo] Picasso used to do it just to show off—“Watch me do this”. It's in every one of those pictures that I showed. It manifests itself in very many different ways. In my work I like to use it from nature itself. The work lives in counterpoint, because there's so many of those lines everywhere that I look. The mountain has one, the set of mountains has it, tree lines

have it, individual trees with leaves have it, trees without leaves have it , and so the piece works counterpoint to all of it. The awareness of it is absolute.”

On the prescription of the stylized line and the peculiarity of the European lifeline

“If you look at ancient Chinese art, you’re going to find what I call the stylized line. It’s very important to understand that stylized line, just as it’s important to understand the lifeline that I have talked about. The stylized line is a prescriptive line for artist-to-artist, and you (Robert) are dealing with Islamic art. If you look at the way most of the world has perceived their art and their artists, including many musicians over generations, is as craft. And the ability to faithfully reproduce that craft was considered talent. And so when you look at the Chinese line—I used to love those—[William] Turner did a great series after Chinese landscape painting; his were European to the core. But if you look back on the Chinese ones, they’re very carefully done. The lines are all represented in a very specific way, and you realize that the student tries to match the master’s ability, and then that’s passed from generation to generation to generation. And so the lifeline really is very peculiarly western, so that’s why I stayed there. I looked at art from everywhere. In the Americas, it tends to be warriors highly stylized with a totally macho statement. What I wanted to do was show Rembrandt at his most gentle with the same fury in his work as those artists in the cave. And it’s there because it exists in the fusion of the art where the artist becomes the art and the art becomes the artist. I don’t know that that happens elsewhere in the same way. ... I know that that’s the route of European art, and that’s why they were shown that way.”