

FREE EXCHANGE

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lenge anything, either aesthetically or politically? The literary and artistic fields have always known those false revolutionaries who begin their career with brilliant ruptures, especially on the political terrain, only to wind up in the most profound conformism and academicism, and who make life doubly difficult for the true innovators. In their ultra-radical phase, they "attack" the true innovators from the Left as tepid and timorous, therefore as conformists; then in their conservative phase — that is, after their about-face — they "attack" the innovators from the Right as being implacable and beyond rehabilitation, all the while describing their own disavowals as attestations of intellectual freedom.

Sponsors who know the tune

You mention another phenomenon, that of artistic patronage. For historical reasons, private patronage has not been part of the national tradition in France, and relationships with the business world have been viewed with great suspicion. Under a certain number of very diverse influences — including the encouragement of the socialist government, which, not satisfied with working toward the rehabilitation of business and profit, also very directly encouraged researchers and artists to seek private funding — everything was reversed.

I can speak from experience. Some twenty years ago

when I wanted to undertake a study of photography, I accepted support from Kodak, not so much for the money, which was an insignificant amount, but rather for information, especially statistics, that only the company could provide. My initiative provoked extraordinary reprobation. I responded: "Wait to see my book! If what I write carries the Kodak trademark, you will have every right to criticize me." And today the very people who were indignant at the time are absolutely defenseless when it comes to patronage. They say that organisms that have not been exposed to microbes have weak immune systems . . .

Private patronage is in fashion. Some public relations firms, for example, are hired to help businesses choose the best place for their symbolic investments and to assist them in establishing contacts in the world of art or science.

In face of this, critical awareness is nil, or almost nil. People move along in a dispersed manner, without collective reflection. The same is true in relation to state-commissioned works (which we call "appels d'offre"). Lacking a collective strategy, researchers run the risk of having their objects of study, their problematics, and their methods imposed by their funding agency. We are currently in a situation quite similar to that of the painters of the quattrocento who had to struggle to win the freedom to choose, if not their subject, at least their "style." Perhaps because as artists you are more exposed to these threats — and have been for a longer period of time — and also because your own action has led you to develop defenses against the increasingly subtle strategies of business to

subordinate or seduce artists, you have a particularly lucid perspective on the threats that the new economic order represents to the autonomy of the intellectual "creators." Indeed, it may be feared that recourse to private patronage in order to finance art, literature, and science will gradually place artists and scholars in a relationship of material and mental dependence on economic powers and market constraints. In any case, private patronage may justify the abdication of public authorities, who use the pretext of the existence of private patrons to withdraw and suspend their assistance, with the extraordinary result that citizens still finance the arts and sciences through tax exemptions. Furthermore, they finance the symbolic effect brought to bear on them to the extent that the funding appears as an example of the disinterested generosity of the corporations. There is, in this, an extremely perverse mechanism which operates in such a way that we contribute to our own mystification . . .

But it would also be necessary to analyze the effects of the material and symbolic exchanges that are ever more frequently instituted between corporations and certain categories of intellectual producers, through handsomely remunerated "interventions," "consultations," "councils," or "conferences," as well as the formal or informal contacts developed in the framework of missions, commissions, associations, or foundations. Corporations have thus been successful, at least in France, in making dependent on them a good number of journalists, above all television journalists, by offering them what are called, in the language of the milieu, "ménages" — that is, well-paid participation

for leading discussions or communications training courses. And many media intellectuals have entered the *show business* of conferences for executives which permits them to earn the equivalent of a month's salary in one evening. It is not easy to measure the doubtlessly insidious effects of these kinds of practices, but it is improbable that they increase independence from economic powers and, more generally, from the values of money and profit, against which the literary and artistic worlds were, at least initially, constituted.

HH: I think it is important to distinguish between the traditional notion of patronage and the public relations maneuvers parading as patronage today. Invoking the name of Maecenas, corporations give themselves an aura of altruism. The American term *sponsoring* more accurately reflects that what we have here is really an exchange of capital: financial capital on the part of the sponsors and symbolic capital on the part of the sponsored. Most business people are quite open about this when they speak to their peers. Alain-Dominique Perrin, for example, says quite bluntly that he spends Cartier's money for purposes that have nothing to do with the love of art.

PB: Does he say in black and white, "It is to win over public opinion?"

HH: Yes. In his own words: "Patronage [*le mécénat*] is not only a great tool for communication. It does much more: it is a tool for the seduction of public

opinion."⁷⁷ It is, in fact, the taxpayers who cover what corporations save through tax deductions on their "generous contributions." In the end, we are the ones who wind up subsidizing the corporate propaganda. Seduction expenses not only serve the marketing of products like watches and jewelry, as would be the case with Cartier. It is actually more important for the sponsors to create a favorable political climate for their interests, particularly when it comes to matters like taxes, labor and health regulations, ecological constraints, export rules, etc.

PB: I once read an article which recalled that in businesses in the United States, this type of practice is justified by what is called the *check account theory*, the theory of the (symbolic) bank account. A foundation that makes donations accumulates symbolic capital of recognition; then, the positive image that it is thus assured (and which is often assessed in dollar terms, under the heading of *good will*, on business account sheets) will bring indirect profits and permit it, for example, to conceal certain kinds of actions.

HH: To quote Monsieur Perrin: the strategic goal is to "neutralize critics."

PB: In the world of high fashion, it is well known that the annual presentation of the new collections assures designers the free equivalent of hundreds of

⁷⁷Alain-Dominique Perrin, "Le Mécénat français: La fin d'un préjugé," interview with Sandra d'Aboville, *Galerias Magazine*, no. 15 (Paris, October-November 1986), p. 74.

pages of advertising. The same goes for literary awards. In all cases, it is a question of controlling the press and getting it to write favorably about the companies at no cost. Firms that invest in patronage make use of the press and oblige it to mention and praise them. In a very general sense, economic leverage is exerted on cultural production largely through the medium of the press, particularly through the seduction it exerts over producers — especially the most heteronomous — and through its contribution to the commercial success of works. It is also exerted through dealers in cultural goods (editors, gallery directors, among others). It is above all through journalism that commercial logic, against which all autonomous universes (artistic, literary, scientific) are constructed, imposes itself on those universes. This is fundamentally harmful, since it favors the products and producers who are most directly submissive to commercial demands, such as the "journalist philosophers" of whom Wittgenstein speaks.

Creating a sensation

But, in fact, through your work you carry out a diversion of the processes used by wise managers. You use an analysis of the symbolic strategies of "patrons" in order to devise a kind of action that will turn their own weapons against them.

I find this exemplary, because for years I have asked myself what can be done to oppose modern forms of