



A ROLE FOR
ARTISTS
post Covid

Robert Golden

9 short essays about art, artists and society

A ROLE FOR ARTISTS POST COVID 19

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Introduction

This is a series of short essays which offer a link
condition of our political/economic/civil and cultural world

- to how changes were almost invisibly imposed upon us without discussion
- to how those changes affected our ways of thinking and our belief systems
 - to how artists have responded
 - to asking what art is
 - to considering an artist's role in society
 - to artists practically responding
- and to an embrace of art, culture and beauty itself.



empty rail station

1 The Neoliberal Imposition of the “New Normal”

**Artists, as all people,
will have a choice to either allow, acquiesce, re-submit to the pre-Covid
neoliberal ‘normal’ or to work against it to make a better world.**

**As a starting point,
here is what their ‘new normal’ has offered us.**



A night view from hospital bed in my isolation room.

Neoliberalism, a dying form of economic policy - a sub species of Capitalism, intended and succeeded in destroying the Anglo-American trade unions while off-shoring industry to oppressive countries where unions are forbidden. They have used this to create unemployment which, with the absence of heavy industry and unions, successfully drove wages down in the United States and in the UK.

It is hard to believe, but the neoliberals plotted to reduce the middle and working classes to penury. They did this not only to reduce the cost of labour and therefore to increase profits, but to eradicate resistances to their plans to destroy the welfare state and have its wealth sold off to themselves. With their huge wealth they have forced governments to reduce regulations on what businesses could and could not do, they have had their taxes reduced and have financialised all things in public life while securing control of the state itself via financing political campaigns and getting their media accomplices to make sure the people vote the way they want us to. Unbelievably, they have a noun for those who suffer the destruction of their wages and living standards, ‘precariat’ meaning a ‘precarious proletarian’.

The Covid shutdown offers a natural termination for neoliberal rule, in which one of their goals was to atomise, separate, alienate all from each other, weakening our social bonds, our collectivist notions and our support of unions.

Of course, not everyone has so easily succumbed while being forced into meaningless jobs with poor pay, leading to sullen silence because their student loans or other debts are so huge a burden that to complain, object or indeed strike against

the corporate structure means to lose position, security and perhaps to become homeless. Neoliberals have purposely trapped wage earners in what economists now call 'wage slavery'.

The neoliberal swamp is a dark landscape that filters out the light of consciousness and hope, leaving people with an embarrassed identity, confused about who and what they have become and with little hope for change. Self-esteem drains away with the years. Finally, it is easier to participate in one's own oppression than to continue to challenge banks and bosses overwhelming control of their material and moral lives.

The degree of oppression people accept is a measure of how far they will be pushed into indignity or hunger and how successfully rulers delude and buy them off. Neoliberalism is beginning to broadly mimic Stalin's Soviet oppression and gulags (which killed tens of millions of people). Whilst the gulags represented extermination through exploitation, neoliberalism and the alt-right represent oppression through exploitation. At this very moment there is an active rebellion occurring in over 20 US cities with angered gatherings of black and white people objecting to police brutality, poverty, lack of medical care, expensive pharmaceuticals, dead-end jobs, inequality under the law, and within educational institutions and job markets. Although many of those people may name this or that outrage that has encouraged them to think of pitchforking the system, overall it is a clear response to years of oppression and unhappiness.

Soon, after the end of Covid 19, like the liberators of the Nazi death camps, we will need to face our shame for having allowed the neoliberals to rule us and to convince us with their promises of sex and endless credit and consumption that Trump, Johnson and their bully buddies should again be in charge of what, without them, could become humane societies which we should retake and remake in the light of kindness.

Covid is clearly proving that the .01% - the ultra-wealthy, and the 10% - the Establishment, including the political class who do the bidding of the .01%, lack care, are irresponsible, and that their elitism, their deep incompetence, and their sociopathic tendencies created this awful 'new normal'. This system was not inevitable, it is not god given; it is a consequence of decisions made by very wealthy individuals.

It shows their engagement with Hitler's stolen concept of the 'Colossal Lie' - when you repeatedly state an idea so crazy or contrary to common sense as "there is no such thing as climate change" or "this is just an ordinary virus", many people finally accept it is true. Consider the Tory spokespeople, whilst overseeing the largest number of Covid deaths in Europe, repeatedly saying they have done a wonderful job; and that, for instance, they have provided nursing homes with Personal Protective Equipment, even as, day-by-day, the media show place after place and exhausted carer after exhausted administrator claiming just the opposite.

The neoliberals and their political class deserve nothing from us. No adoration, no loyalty, no support, no tolerance and certainly no vote. How many loved ones have they sacrificed through slowly impoverishing the welfare state during the 10 years of austerity (213,000 in the UK), how many have they let unnecessarily die because of their indolence at the beginning of the pandemic (150 thousand and counting in the US and the UK), and how many have they killed directly or indirectly in Iraq, Afghanistan and too many other places, as Yemen? (hundreds of thousands).

Let us turn our backs on them, surround their castles and mourn in silence for all lost loved ones, lost freedoms and lost dreams, and as we mourn in silence, let us block their entrances and exits until they have to capitulate to our plans for change. Indeed, if we do nothing, we will be lost in tears.

Why are they cruel? Why do they murder? Aside from attaining huge power and wealth, they claim to represent individual liberty. Their rationalization of individual liberty is the centre of their cancerous smoke and mirrors: that without lowering taxes on the rich, without loosening health and welfare restrictions on industrial practices, without selling the country's wealth to private enterprise, entrepreneurs, CEOs and bankers will be denied their liberty which will stall continuous (and unneeded) economic growth. This is how they rationalise their murderous ideology. More to the point, the Establishment and the political class disdain the 90%, they are under the financial influence of the .01%, they have a slipshod morality, they are disconnected from other's reality, and many are probably sociopaths, incapable of emotionally connecting their actions to often tragic consequences.

It is worth knowing that many liberators of the Nazi concentration camps felt a shame for humanity and an intolerable embarrassment before each other when they witnessed what their fellow human beings had done.

The neoliberals and their fascist friends show no signs of such regret in the face of the deaths and suffering they have caused. Amongst their other sins, where do they try to help free political prisoners (freedom fighters, artists, journalists and human rights workers) from the terrible grip of their allies in Cairo, Brazil, the Philippines and too many other places?

During lock-down, we have listened to silence. In the silence we have begun to hear the birds and ourselves. We buy less, consume less and realise we don't need to work to purchase their tat, that we can find meaning and occupation, busyness and perhaps even joy in each other's company and with our children. The news tells us that for the first time since the 12th century, cranes have laid eggs on England's east coast. Even in this short respite from our contamination of the earth, it is healing, and we are beginning to understand that the nature of work, transport, production and consumption really are awful for most people and for the environment and that they need to be changed now.

2 THE GRADUALNESS OF HISTORY

How have the neoliberals been able to fundamentally change our world with so little resistance?

Paramount to their manipulation of the industrial and financial markets, they understood two basic historical laws of power:

1

That to have an obedient population they needed to buy the top 10% by providing them wealth and power, encouraging them to control the 90%;

and 2

that through controlling popular culture, education and the news, they can and have convinced the 90% their best interests are tied to the establishment's best interests which is the only viable solution on offer.



Old Atlanta swept away by 'development'

Years ago, a friend of mine was asked to institute a redesign of the Financial Times. He was to take another designer's overall plan and break it down to 1000 changes. Every day for three years he instituted one of those changes. By the end of the third year the paper looked entirely different.

As the editors suspected, no one knew when the changes began. It was as if somehow the changes had occurred before the reader's eyes, but without them recognizing how or when they happened.

This is how we missed seeing the neoliberal cage constructed around us. At no single change did we recognise this new policy or that new sell-off of the rail or the post office or even privatising army units were a part of the long-term systematic construction to entrap us in ignorance and poverty. Gradually they left us incapable of finding common ground with each other or of standing united against the neoliberals, their bureaucrats and armed enforcers.

In many countries, including Russia and China, but also Britain and the United States, the Establishments (top 10%) of those countries have de-politicised their working and middle classes by subverting them into believing in a new way of living that places consumerism at the centre of cultural, political and economic lives.