

In the face of the real Issues, namely of terrorism, globalisation, global warming, and like-the-tide mechanisation it can seem arduous to find a point to the arts and humanities: they have little use, only minute utility compared to, say, pharmacy or civil engineering, climatology or the discovery of nuclear fission. The average person, without bias of vocation is heard saying – what is the point to it, *really*? The accentual stress on ‘really’ seeming to ridicule an indulged delusion, that has never been fully explained nor to any resolution is explainable in full anyway; the answer by implication is presupposed, that there is none at all.

As though the walls of the academy were a fortress to defend, arts and humanities fall under attack threefold: drops in government funds; disparagement, albeit jovial, by other faculties; taxpayer radicalism against ‘mickey-mouse’ degrees. All three fronts of attack garrison beneath the banners of common sense, or of economic pragmatics, but mostly a united front of the two. And all demonstrate an instinctive flair for rhetoric. The creative metonymy of childishness – by association - to Disney, and from Disney to Mickey Mouse himself in the pejorative of ‘Mickey Mouse degrees’, is a fine example. Unconscious to most decriers they are using the arts of language, in doing, falling on their own spears.

The humanities matter in Triad: aesthetically, ethically, didactically. They give pleasure, simple entertainment, enjoyment. Provide judgement, vicarious experience, decision. Impart criticism, wide-minded thinking, emulation.

The humanities do not abide by reductive formulations or all too-simplistic, traditional dichotomies but instead do justice to what is true, messy and tender, to human complexity.

Drama provides Aristotelian catharsis; literatures inform us about the inexhaustible contingency of our relationships; works of art reframe how we perceive the world, history; innumerable case studies of how society does and - most important, perhaps - does *not* work. Philosophy, ‘love of wisdom’ meanwhile teaches us how to think, politics how to organise.

The worth of drama, visual arts, history, political science, philosophy, literature is doubted only theoretically, but never practically: for whatever is said of them: a ‘waste of resources’, ‘a societal drain’ being the prime examples, they simply happen, and as the Law of Averages dictates always will

in multiform.... We understand – as much we can, and as little as we do - because of our predecessors, because of the legacy of Hellenic History.

The importance of the humanities is doubted because of the social prestige for Science in an increasingly technological world. Nevertheless, rather than be overshadowed their very importance is highlighted by the furthered reach of Science. In a materialist society, both vacuously commodity-driven and secular, thinking has become more mechanistic than ever before: all perceived as resource-to-be-used.<sup>1</sup> Some examples: in human resources (humans as instruments for business), or banking (humans as numerals on webpage), or a photo on a webpage (human-identity summed in a superficial profile), all the way down to unfurnished land – parks and countryside being re-termed as rejuvenation-space, national park, or even greenbelt. Not *the land* it is. Yet, most poignant of all is a graduate degree taken out of love for truth, goodness and beauty becomes a mere adjunct toward an employment possibility.

Recognisable to all is *déjà vu* in our hybrid reality where our life can seem less like life and more like a work of art, waterlilies become more waterlily after seeing 'waterlilies', absurd situations Kafkaesque. A *jouissance*: how rich and complex it is! How worthwhile to not be The World (dull, homogenous) but Worlds (interesting, novel).

As Nietzsche contended: without organised religion, meaning is not discovered or revealed but a comfy veil to oblivion: there is nihilism, to remedy the aporia of meaningless, culture: literature, music, philosophy, art, are requisite.

Heidegger canvassed the dehumanising effect, domination in fact, of technology on our lives as a tool not used by us but rather *it using us*, however metaphorical my explanation may appear - the limited agency implied is all too real: there is no societal choice to *not* use electricity for example so, in a sense tied down, we are plugged in.<sup>2</sup>

Dehumanised technological thinking is, in Hannah Arendt's analysis, responsible for the horror of The Holocaust, and Totalitarian societies in general-- societies that prized function before ethics, that made machines of the humans that had made them, the creators undone by the created.<sup>3</sup> Such is warned against in - contemporary example - famed UEA graduate, Kazuo

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism Or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (New York, Verso, 1992)

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (London, Harper perennial, 1974)

<sup>3</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1973)

Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*<sup>4</sup> that explores post human ethics: the clone characters are manufactured, mechanistically, but it does not follow that they have no souls; in spite of artificiality, they are - in effect - still human. Still deserving of life. The effects, the results after all, are what matter. In reading *Never Let Me Go*, as with any valuable writing the phrase of Emerson applies: "in every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty."<sup>5</sup> We realise the prescient suspicion of dehumanised technology in reading, likewise we do the full wonder of love, in a way (hence I choose *realise*) we relearn our thoughts, are introduced to our deeper selves.

The discourse between humanities disciplines is reciprocal hence fashionable dystopias, *Metropolis* (1927), *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Matrix* (1999) and most recently— a genre revival- *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) share a point of origin in the written medium: novels, a short story, even contemporary Theory— Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, which is blatant - all too clear - when pointed out. Further: from such films come comic books, games, graphic-novels. Modern, alive, evolving, with us.

The humanities enlarge our Selves whether it be logos, icons, or the combination of both. We have a quite right ambivalence to technology that makes us who we are blaringly beyond our individual agency when individualism is the prized policy.... In spite of modernity the perennials of human nature: love, death, birth, rebirth, tribulations remain the same. The undercurrent of human experience of the Heraclitian River; the river is different but the water still H<sub>2</sub>O.

Universal to all is expression. While Rousseau saw writing as his true self manifest in writing (necessitating *The Confessions*) because in person "[I am] not just at a disadvantage but completely different from what I am" and Foucault writing the dissolution of self both had to express, or conversely 'aexpress', which amounts to much the same thing.<sup>67</sup> Although, their theories differ the result is the same, enlightening.

Sontag stipulated the 'two cultures' divide between Science on the one hand and the humanities on the other is temporary and illusory because it rests on

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<sup>4</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005)

<sup>5</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance, Essays*, (New York, Harper Perennial, 1981)

<sup>6</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000)

<sup>7</sup> Paul Rainbow, *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon, 1982)

the assumption that while science and its constituent technology changes, that arts and humanities do not.<sup>8</sup> Where Science culture is brash and has obvious utility, the literary-artistic is seamless, cultivated, which often goes unnoticed precisely because it is so clearly manifest, so evident. Akin to noticing our nose on our face - it was there all the time we simply paid no notice. Such is the case for radio and film and scripts and books and travel investigations --- they are simply *givens* (taken for granted), the structure (institutional humanities) which catalyse overlooked by 'consumers' who assume, frankly, that appreciation is superadded, that knowledge accumulates naturally or magically. Fallaciously, it is thought being entertained is easy, so making entertainment is easy; and also – implicitly - that the humanities are meagre in comparison to Scientific Truth which renders the humanities as diversion, recreation (as I cloused earlier- 'entertainment') rather than the investigation it has far longer been. Science, it must be remembered is at heart Natural Philosophy and, mostly, what earns the name knowledge is coherent or incoherent, probable or improbable opinion<sup>9</sup>.

Our cultural past makes us human as much as our physical evolution. It is not just the body but also mind not of individuals but an, often-divided, collective consciousness that is at stake. (Such is implied by epigenetics: ubiquitous interaction - blurring, alloying between nurture-nature.) To be one racial human and not another human rests on culture, 'race' being unrecognisable by natural science— it is a social construction. And what brings together rather than asunder is the joy of learning culture, a relishing of distinctions rather than prejudicing difference.

Social science makes us view ourselves (for some quite literally) in the second or third person – as symptoms of social totalities rather than fully ourselves; as characters not the authors of our lives.<sup>10</sup> Narcissism is rife, peer imposed objectives, peer-imposed performatives also. Appreciation for the small things is lost in the mostly 'unpostable' that forms most of Life: "that best portion of a good man's life/ his little, nameless, unremembered acts/of kindness and of love".<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Sontag, *The Two Cultures and The New Sensibility, Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, (London, Penguin, 1963)

<sup>9</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Knowledge, Error, and Probable Opinion, The Problems of Philosophy* (New York, Cosimo Classics, 2007)

<sup>10</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Style, Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London, Penguin, 1961)

<sup>11</sup> William Wordsworth, *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey On Revisiting the Banks of The Wye, The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth*, (London, Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1994)

Such is evident in what we applaud. We uproar over gold statuettes but not The Nobel Prize. We value the extraordinary disproportionately and celebrity perniciously highly. Better than fame given self-actualisation (in itself illusory) would be a condoning of the ordinary: it is fine to be ordinary: most people are. Rather than the ideal portrayed to us, yes, by the media, the arts-humanities most often present failures— in persons and societies, providing a normative standard— where to be an ugly failure is as *natural* as the reverse. ‘Success’ meaning Power is burdensomely scribed into language, and (braided) culture.

The humanities transcend borders, making us cosmopolitan- not parochial. Vicarious identification allow us to go beyond sympathy to-- *empathise* with the other. Real issues like the divide between west and Island of Islam, Syrian refugee crisis, and the urgency, need, for egalitarianism become realer by representation. Humanities work from the non-self to self, collective to individual, particular to general. The seemingly alien other to the universality of humanity, ultimately, toward inclusion. The consensus task of prior humanities was nationalist; today it must become internationalist. Indeed, it *is* becoming. Such is clear in the contemporary (especially Western) tirade against binaries of all kinds. The borders of maps are more like the borders of bodies than we often realise. Self-determination; self-identification.

Yes, the humanities can appear inessential in the widest scheme of things – but curtain-fall death considered, such would apply to everything, Science included. Terrorism, globalisation, global warming, mechanisation can make all modern effort (of a little self) seem redundant but the humanities are the venue of hope, for they alter our perspective to the sheer breadth of average reality and of imagination, just as history does expose tentative time, and the potential for change and hence hope. The humanities at the particular provide solace to the sad and company to the lonely. And in the general make us empathise, teach how to think, how to argue, how to read, how to organise. The humanities matter-- aesthetically, ethically, didactically. Rather than mere entertainment, books as beach holiday diversion being sadly far from parody; as is the commonplace of film as not art, but tweaked ‘capturing’; philosophy condemned as pedantics and history as dead past....

The Humanities deserve respect, even great adulation.

What makes us human is a physiological given

Edward Sudall

But what makes us *human beings* is up for consideration