
Counter-Critique: The Arsonists of Art Works

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One of the aspects that stands out every year when discussing decolonization is that of cultural legacies. We are witnessing marches in which books are burned, statues are toppled, and paintings by great artists are destroyed. They call it cancel culture or cultural readjustment. And I emphasize the Anglo-Saxon term because it's a phenomenon—born from British cultural studies—that has no roots in the anticolonialism of the periphery that emerged forcefully in the first period of modern struggles against the old empires. It's not a vision grounded in the peoples actually affected, but rather a kind of trend, where the flag of racial and ethnic minorities is waved simply because "it's in fashion." Elements of group and generational cohesion, community visions more characteristic of urban tribes; such are the breeding grounds in which these symbolic processes expand. Culture seen as a trend and not as the essence of a critical and emancipatory issue.

Thus, in addition to cancel culture, there's the term "cultural appropriation" which is when someone—belonging to white Western culture—appropriates a cause or struggle of another people or country. As if solidarity should be defined by fixed identities and not by empathy and human understanding. Put this way, if you identify with the struggle of the Mapuche people, that doesn't give you the right to wear clothing or a hat alluding to it, because it's interpreted as an attempt at cultural usurpation that diminishes the prominence of those who should be at the center. The issue of identities is more about the desire to segment, to divide, than the desire to fight, and it's not surprising that in this postmodern world where none of this ultimately makes sense, there are fierce battles between radical feminists and transvestites, between trans feminists and identity feminists, between environmentalists and vegans, between animal rights activists and defenders of bullfighting. These "cultural" battles seem to be more important, cooler; in fact, they are given all the space in the media and it polarizes society in such a way that participation hangs between the extremes that serve the elites. Let's take the case of Spain: there, you're either a defender of the faith and a staunch nationalist in the style of El Cid, or you have to ally yourself with the opposite side, progressive without being truly socialist, diluted in the many segmented struggles that lead nowhere. There are no middle grounds, and that's the political model that arises from the cultural agendas that govern the West. Furthermore, once you delve into these segmentations, their superficiality, their lack of understanding of the social, and how they serve overarching interests, at the service of more shady matters, becomes evident.

Returning to the debate surrounding cancel culture, the end of monuments doesn't imply erasing the history that created them, and it seems that those who subscribe to this ideology not only want to readjust, but to travel back in time and win the wars they lost. It's true that one shouldn't advocate for what, in some way, didn't build anything in line with justice, but Erasing it doesn't make it better, it doesn't bring balance. It wasn't only the Nazis who burned books, but doing so was a reckless act, going beyond the simple process of the authors disappearing in the flames. It was the denial of a truth, the imposition of lies, and the creation of a post-identity in which nothing has to be rational, but rather malleable, manipulable, fluid. Power uses culture at will, takes it to its hidden corners, and doesn't respond to ethical truths. Likewise, cancel culture doesn't see rational processes in these matters, but rather opportunities to crush opponents and reaffirm its interests from a position of power.

Cancel culture is a weapon that can be used both to agitate and to stupefy the masses. The cases of people who damaged classic paintings, just to draw attention to climate change, would seem like something out of a comedy, were it not for the tragedy of the event. Art pays the price for today's damage, all because for cancel culture, the general readjustment is unforgiving and... Everything is affected when it comes to works from the past. There's a desire to deny everything, without contributing anything. An anti-intellectualism woven from the tangle of ignorance and the power that manipulates, lies, and leads us to become its flock.

From our point of view, it's wrong to attack even the statues of those who weren't ethical, because these works serve as documents for critiquing the past and striving to be better. That is, if we are humble enough and capable of engaging in healthy exercises of historical deconstruction; otherwise, it's best not to comment on these matters. Cancel culture is doing something else that is fatal: it gives voice to a legion of ignorant people who use fury—iconoclasm—as their way of getting attention and destroying without achieving anything. These postmodern struggles are not only toxic, but they lead to nothing but the reaffirmation of the colonial pattern, since there's no strong critical subject in these groups to confront and think about these phenomena with Strength.

Between the contrast of appropriation and cancellation, the average person, the human being of our times, understands politics as group socialization—typical of adolescents—and not as a tool for change. They adapt to the worst and idealize it instead of considering that beyond it lie other realities where conflicts and controversies are resolved.

The antidote is to think, to exercise humanity over the inhuman. Alienation is only possible when we have consciously renounced who we are and want to resemble a hypostatized model. That herd mentality rarely leads to safe harbor, and in those groups where cancellation prevails, we see processes of irrationality bordering on the hallucinatory. They have, nevertheless, taken over the postmodern left, leading it down paths that were not its essential ones and denying the paths of cultural struggle that go to the very core of the system. Denying Columbus won't bring back the indigenous peoples, denying Hitler won't erase the concentration camps. History must be studied as it is, with all its features; it must be consumed critically, but scientifically, since the alternative is mere rhetoric, a false narrative, and the acceptance of versions that don't fully represent the facts.

Every year, when October 12th is commemorated, we see statues defaced or toppled, and groups claiming responsibility for these actions as if they were miniature French May protests in the midst of present-day history. But in parallel, despite the burning and destruction, in the parts of the world where oppression truly exists, no one does anything. The Western progressive's perspective, the one that consumes ideology as if it were MTV, cannot encompass the whole of what, in essence, they haven't taken the time to study or understand. That's why cancellation, more than an act of overcoming or dialectical dialogue, is an annulment and does not empower anyone.

Canceling only cancels, but it neither builds, nor contributes, nor assumes the consequences of what it destroys. It's adolescent inconsistency elevated to the level of politics, without smoothing out its rough edges, its unfinished understandings, and that immature mania for going against everything without knowing anything.

Translated by Amikal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff