

Art, Progressivism and Post-Woke Enlightenment

by [Sean Bw Parker](#) (June 2024)



Waiting –Ashraf Zamzami, 2019

Art should have nothing to do with the progressive agenda, being as it is an incisive reflection of humanity, but it has increasingly been co-opted by charity or humanistic projects—and the more of that is incentivised, the more ‘woke’ it appears. The marginalisation of actual cutting-edge art goes along with this, as anything counter-narrative or truly ‘disruptive’ is quickly labelled ‘conspiracy theory’ or ‘far right,’ these being the two favourite slurs of the progressive cultural media establishment.

Can art still really be ‘anything goes’? In the postmodern

melee the older have seen it all before, but the young care little about that, being more interested in the moral message behind the piece or the maker. Nick Cave has called this approach to artistic expression 'suffocating,' and been put in the dinosaur bracket by some because of it.

Many artists and comedians privately agree with 'post-wokeism,' or going beyond the current cultural impasse, but are afraid of their management and deals going awry if they are seen to go off-message. There is no rebellion or free-thought in this, which since art separated itself from the Church with the Renaissance, has been its *raison-d'etre*.

Without asking anyone's permission, news media has become the most important artform of the 21st century. Bad news sells, so the media look for ways to incentivise drama. It's not new, and not 'bad,' it's just business. People online compromise their humanity with a moral image of themselves, avatars of reality. Should children learn again how to aspire and wait, for social media and other 'adult' privileges, as they have done for decades with smoking, sex, drinking, driving and voting?

Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff in the US have deep research on the damage being done to young minds by being permanently attached to demanding screens, and a sense of 'delayed satisfaction' needs to be inculcated—at least until when they have a bit more 'life-resilience' to handle social media's current intensity.

While news media has become the most impactful art, social media is the art we learned by accident. Temptations of its instant dopamine hit, the likes, the lights we want to deal with/turn off, and the new industry of crafting addictive sales posts in this new advertising space have led to ever more inventive approaches. The design, the psychology of sales, the response prediction and liveliness of this industry has pushed it into a vital competitive space – and traditional

aesthetics have as much to do with it as they have in art for more than a hundred years.

Social media users are divided between those who take it very seriously and those who don't, but the latter still have a right to reply, and many on the progressive side resent this to the point of cancellation. Young left-leaning white women are being driven crazy by young left-leaning white women in the media. Young women are overwhelmingly more progressive; young men more traditional, or naturalistic.

'Grievance Intersectionality' is big business, makes money through clicks, and heads towards the sort of societal change craved by the (hard) left. The assumption must now be that people of colour in the media are anti-white heterodox, due to the sheer weight of that angle emanating from those people in all parts of the media. Due to all this intersectionality and incentivised progress, and an emphasis on being 'trauma-informed,' Post-LGBTQ+ and pro-Palestine marches, Britain has reached the point where the police are feared but they're no longer respected.

Will the Next Big Thing be neurodiversity and criminal responsibility? *'It wasn't me your honour, it was my ADHD'* may turn out to be an extension of sick-note culture and the similarly incentivised mental health epidemic. It has never felt more likely that a post-technological revolution Enlightenment is around the corner.

If we can have the royal *we* why can't we have the non-binary *they*? Humanists UK now support this kind of inversion of linguistic-biological fact. Following the revelations of first the WPATH files and then the Cass report however, and the lasting damage knowingly done to young people, the mainstream is quickly reverse-ferreting. Whether this post-woke enlightenment will be reflected in genuine artistic expression—as happened in the first Enlightenment—remains to be seen.

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Sean Bw Parker is a British writer, artist and musician, born in Exeter in 1975. He gained a Masters degree in Fine Art from the University for the Creative Arts in 2003, following which he lived in Istanbul for ten years until 2014 where he gave TEDx talk 'Stammering and Creativity,' and also lectured at Istanbul University. He has published several books, poems, albums and paintings, won a number of Koestler Arts awards and a Perrie Lectures essay award.

He has been published by the Westminster Commission, T.S. Eliot Foundation, Time Out Istanbul, Louder Than War, and appeared at the Brighton Science Festival, the University of Bristol, BIMM and others. He has interviewed Julie Burchill, Ed Harcourt, Kristin Hersh, Ian Broudie of The Lightning Seeds and Sarah Blackwood of Dubstar, hosted shows by The Members, Mark Morriss of The Bluetones and Eat Static at his Seafish music and arts venue in 2016, and was interviewed for a Sky Arts documentary in the same year. He curated the Chi-Signs, Blakefest and Wildefest mini-festivals between 2015 and 2017, and has been involved with numerous other exhibitions and live events.

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