



MONASH University

Culture
and the
Conversive Community:
Framing Arts Policy
for the
Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

This research explores the question of how we might develop public policy for the arts that actively engages the many in a meaningful, enriching and impartial way. Setting the research into an ethical framework, two postulates are established to clarify what is meant by art and what is meant by impartiality. The first asserts that the nature of art is vested not in the object, but in the *experience* of the object. The second asserts that all members of the community should have equal opportunity to access and experience the arts in their own way.

Taking a radical and innovative approach, the thesis is a synthesis of two distinct lines of argument. Part One undertakes a critical review of the development of the arts council movement as an intermediary body. Set against the broader canvas of industrialisation, educational reform and eventual universal suffrage, the research shows a marked shift in policy emphasis during the twentieth century. This began with the encouragement of citizens to be active participants in the nation's cultural life. However, following the Second World War, an increasingly hard line was drawn between a minority of professional producers and a majority of passive consumers. The research traces the fortunes of the arts council movement from the 1940s to the present, and the way in which it was adapted and adopted in other Anglophone countries. Finally, the current relationship between art, the people and the arts council is discussed. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the funded arts faced a crisis of

legitimacy linked to falling attendances and waning confidence in elites, while new communications and economic models facilitated by the internet, the renaissance of the professionally skilled amateur (the pro-am) and the deliberative potential of the 'wise crowd' were opening up new possibilities.

Part Two addresses the challenge of how arts policy might be shaped to serve a diverse, increasingly multi-cultural society. To explore this question a range of scientific research in the fields of evolutionary psychology, neurophysiology and theories of mind combined with archaeology, ethology and demography are employed within the nascent discipline of sociobiology. The research identifies a number of aesthetic mechanisms that are common to all – part of our human nature. These include the pleasure of shared attention (but not shared meaning) and the significance of 'making special'. Distinct groupings of value in the arts are traced back to the evolutionary processes of sexual selection and group selection – one with an emphasis on individuality, spectacle and 'uselessness', the other on mutuality, intensity and empathy. The origins of Palaeolithic cave painting are discussed in the light of recent scientific theories that suggest they arose from mechanisms of empathic connection.

The thesis begins by setting the social, economic and political context for the research. The final chapter outlines a series of deliberative and delivery frameworks and educational reforms through which improved policy may be developed and enacted, and citizens creatively empowered.

Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All ideas have their antecedents and I must begin by acknowledging the many thinkers, researchers and analysts I reference in this thesis whose wealth of ideas I have had the privilege to encounter through their writings. If they have enriched my search for answers, the impetus to ask questions arose from those with whom I have had the honour to work and learn from throughout my career. They are many and my debt is great. A few are mentioned in the autobiographical prologue, but I would particularly mention my respected university tutor, Winifred Sillitto; my long-term colleague and friend, Robert Livingston; Julie Sundberg, whose innovative program with young homeless adults made so evident the value of the arts in even the most compromised of social circumstances; and Joanna Capon, who chaired the Australian Centre for Photography with such accomplishment for much of my time there and supported me in commencing a PhD while I was Director of that organisation.

Over the nine years of this research I have been ably supported by my supervisor, Robert Nelson. His breadth of knowledge and agility of mind are matched by his generosity of spirit and openness to my unconventional lines of enquiry. He has been an unstinting and inspiring guide. My thanks also go to Gabrielle Foster for her careful proofreading of the finished text. However, while it has been proofread, this thesis has not been edited by anyone but me and all errors are my own.

Finally, and most profoundly, this could not have been achieved without the whole-hearted support of my family – Kirsty, Gabby and Ben – whose love and patience have been inexhaustible. My wife, Kirsty, has been my soulmate and life companion since our late teens. She is a person of immense practical and theoretical knowledge, sound ethical judgment and infinite subtlety who has taught me much about empathy, about the way we learn and about the importance of striving to change things for the better.

Tell me and I will forget;
Show me and I may remember;
But *involve* me and I will understand.

Chinese Proverb

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACA	Arts Council of Australia
ACE	Arts Council England
ACGB	Arts Council of Great Britain
ACP	Australian Centre for Photography
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAC	Canadian Arts Council
CACD	Community Arts and Cultural Development (Australia Council)

CEMA	Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts
COSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
CWE	CultureWatchEurope (a Council of Europe initiative)
FCA	Federation of Canadian Artists
GDP	Gross domestic product
GLC	Greater London Council
HIE	Highlands and Island Enterprise
ISM	Incorporated Society of Musicians
NEA	National Endowment for the Arts (United States)
NLA	National Library of Australia
NZPD	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (<i>Hansard</i>)
ONS	Office of National Statistics (United Kingdom)
QEIIACNZ	Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand
RAA	Regional Arts Association (United Kingdom)
SAC	Scottish Arts Council
SDA	Scottish Development Agency
SWB	Subjective Wellbeing
YBA	Young British Artist

PROLOGUE

Personal Stories, Public Narratives

This research springs from a series of intuitions and observations that have accreted and evolved during my working life over the past forty years. They were not always clear to me and it is only recently, in constructing this thesis, that I have begun to connect many of these ideas in an attempt to describe a bigger picture. Indeed many of these 'ideas' began as feelings, direct human responses arising from my engagement with people and the visual arts in the world. That said, I realised that if this was not simply to be a collected memoir, I had to find ways to stand back from those intuitions, to set my ideas within the larger structures of thinking out-in-the-world, connecting them to each other and to the thinking of others. To be useful this had to go beyond my personal experience and the frame of the expedient.

Working, as I did for twenty years, within the funded arts, much of what one does is based on intuition and rule of thumb in a shifting environment with limited resources. As such, one learns the current shorthand to articulate effectively to busy bureaucrats and politicians with their eye firmly on the main chance.

What I did learn though, is that public policy has a significant impact on a society – or, as I would prefer to express it, a community of communities: significant, but often opaque. I recognised that addressing public policy could be a useful means by which to effect change. Culture is not, of course, controlled by governments, at least not in the relatively free and democratic West. The art market, the tastes of the rich and the strategies of commercial dealers also have a significant impact, as does the enterprise of philanthropists and institutional founders. The third point in what is essentially a triangular relationship is the ‘academy’ – the critics, taxonomists and intellectuals who assay, categorise and theorise the cultural flow. There are relationships and accommodations between each point on the triangle – some useful, some less so. But I would argue that a healthy culture requires all three and perhaps more (something I will expand on in later chapters). However, my main focus is upon the way in which governments might facilitate the visual arts, and the arts more generally, as a public good.¹ Not that they can or should control or even influence all aspects of visual culture, but that my interest lies in how the larger community engages with, participates in and comes to co-produce our visual culture. This is most closely associated with the interests of government, if for no other reason than the very practical one that the community are voters, and voters choose governments.

While this thesis should certainly not read like a memoir, I have bookended the main body of my research with two short personal narratives, setting those ideas within the frame of my professional experience and future plans. In this prologue I review some of the experiences that raised in me the questions which initiated this research. Meanwhile, the epilogue reflects upon what I have learned over the past eight years and how I might act upon it.

The vignettes that follow in the remainder of the prologue outline a number of formative episodes in my life. In each case they brought me in contact

¹ I develop the definition of a ‘public good’ in Chapter 2.

with some remarkable people and some stimulating new ways of thinking. Ways that were not always fully appreciated at the time, but nonetheless influenced the direction I took and the values I came to embrace.

The Physics Common Room

I studied physics at Edinburgh University from 1972–75, graduating with a BSc.

The physics common room on the King's Buildings campus was a place of wide-ranging discussion: science, philosophy, culture and politics. At the time we recognised it was much more outward looking than, say, the chemistry or biology departments and put this down to physics being a philosophical science (the head of the department was known as Professor of Natural Philosophy until 1975) while chemistry and biology have a more empirical focus.

Winifred Sillitto was one of my most influential tutors. A woman with an Irish brogue and sensible skirt, she took enormous pains to find novel ways to explain physical laws so that I could grasp them with my pictorially rich and mathematically impoverished mind. However, she lost patience with me on finding I had not heard of Paul Klee. Science, she allowed, was often abstruse and hard to follow, but not to be aware of one's culture was to be ignorant. She lent me a book on the artist, making it clear we would be having a conversation about his work when the book was to be returned a couple of weeks later.

Mrs Sillitto went to great lengths to find alternative ways of explaining certain physical phenomena. When I remained perplexed as to why sound waves in a tube should be reflected back at the open end, she went to find out how an organ pipe was explained to music students. That I could understand. It was not so much the facts as the language of their communication that was the issue. Later, she arranged for me to study the history of science and the literature of modern theatre within the Bachelor of Science course. In my final year, I was given permission to undertake photographic 'experiments' during the practical classes – these used science equipment to aesthetic ends, something that

enraged one particular lab technician, who felt this was tantamount to scientific turpitude, if not actual departmental treason.

I spent much of my spare time at university writing short stories and scripts, and drawing storyboards for what today would be called video clips. Having graduated, I went to work in the film industry.

It may seem that the time at school and university spent studying physics was largely a waste. But I soon came to realise and to value what had been learned and how that learning could be applied outside of the laboratory in the wider world. I may have struggled with the language of physics, but its concepts fascinated me as did the broader approach of the sciences. While the facts I had learned were interesting, it was the deeper philosophical approach of science that had now become a part of my way of coming at new ideas and challenges. It was certainly not a 'pure' scientism, but a personal hybrid that led me to stand back from issues and try to see the bigger picture. While I remained sceptical of dogma and wary of ideas that only flourished within the narrow confines of a single specialty, I also retained a powerful sense of wonder at the world and the potential of things that the study of physics reveals.

At the time, one of the theories that was much discussed was Thomas Kuhn's notion of paradigm shift, which had been outlined only ten years earlier in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn 1962, 209).

The idea of paradigms, as I remember it, had little truck with the denizens of the physics common room. While the word 'paradigm' was useful to describe a way of thinking, a particular worldview, the rationale that Kuhn attached to the cycles of paradigm shift were less popular. Looking back, there were always a number of perspectives at large within the broader discourse, even if a given individual adhered to only one such point of view. While Kuhn argued that a paradigm becomes the dominant framework of 'normal science' until it is over turned in a paradigm shift,²

² Kuhn coined the term 'normal science' to describe the processes at work within a paradigm. These he saw as principally ones of graduated problem solving without questioning the assumptions on which the paradigm was founded. Eventually, anomalies would arise that challenged the current (*this note continues at the foot of the next page...*)

the very ambience of the physics common room was of the coexistence of paradigms and the possibility of dialogue between them that need not be destructive. Kuhn suggested that a principal difference between science and the humanities was that science operated within a single paradigm, except at points of fracture when there was a shift, whereas “a student in the humanities has constantly before him a number of competing and incommensurable solutions to these problems, solutions that he must ultimately examine for himself” (Kuhn 1962).

Behold the Man: A Heterogeneity of Artefacts

In the 1980s I became involved in what was to become a substantial piece of research into the history of the representation of the male body in photography from 1840 to the (then) present. The research grew from my own practice and for the want of any serious discussion on the subject in the field. As the research amassed, it became the basis for a large survey exhibition developed in partnership with Stills Gallery, Edinburgh; established in 1977, it was the first publicly funded photographic gallery in Scotland. The exhibition toured the United Kingdom and went on to Europe and North America. It drew large audiences and considerable positive media coverage.³

While the subject was unusual at the time, this was not, in my view, the most innovative aspect of the exhibition, nor was it the one that caused such outrage as there was. At the time, photography was still struggling to be accepted as a legitimate and fully-fledged art form in its own right. Most photographic exhibitions

paradigm, which would be overturned in a major shift of perspective that subsequently settled into a new paradigm and a new period of normal science.

³ “Event of the week is the fascinating *Behold the Man*” – *Guardian*; “Brave scholarly exhibition ... particularly well-timed ... a welcome analysis of a sensitive subject in a climate of very mixed reactions.” – *Independent*; “This proved to be a more varied and wide-ranging subject than you would ever imagine ... It is one of those shows which ... offer endless food for thought on the medium” – *Times*; “An exceptionally interesting exhibition ... a focus for essential cultural criticism” – *The Scotsman*; “Fascinating” – *Sunday Times*; “That is the main success of the show: it makes us look with an actively engaged mind... the tools used are scholarship and wit” – *Spectator*.

– whether historical or contemporary – aimed to emphasise the fine-art nature of the print. *Behold the Man* surveyed not only fine-art practice, but popular culture, science and political propaganda. A tear sheet from an old magazine and a modern reproduction of a nineteenth-century medical photograph sat beside a rare print by an acknowledged master. What the exhibition demonstrated was that it was not just aesthetic taste, artistic style and popular culture, but also scientific and political imagery that followed the same trends in pictorial construction and allusion, which, in the case of the male body in a patriarchy, were highly sensitive to shifts in attitude and world events. The exhibition emphasised that art is an expression of the times, contiguous with other forms of visual expression and communication. It was not ‘timeless’ or ‘avant-garde’, elevated beyond the everyday, but firmly rooted in it. This approach and these observations have since become commonplace, but at the time, in the United Kingdom, in an exhibition attracting a wide public, they were seen as radical.

A Peoples’ Charter for the Arts

In 1989, the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) proposed the development of a Charter for the Arts. It was to be an in-house initiative among the Council and its subsidiary outposts that would cover the whole of the UK. It fizzled out almost immediately. However, Seona Reid (the then director of the Scottish Arts Council [SAC]) decided to run with the idea and undertake the process on purely Scottish terms. At that time SAC was officially the Scottish Committee of the ACGB within a federated structure that also permitted it a level of autonomy.⁴

Two qualities made Seona Reid’s approach exceptional. First, it did not remain an in-house project; SAC invited other cultural agencies to be involved – as many as wished to be. The project included major collaborations with the Scottish

⁴ SAC was established by royal charter in 1967, became an independent body in 1994 and, in 2010, merged with Scottish Screen (formerly the Scottish Film Council) to become Creative Scotland.

Museums Council, the Scottish Film Council, the Scottish Library Association and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). Further, it was decided to seek comprehensive public input. One hundred and five arts organisations and thirty-three individual arts specialists were consulted; wider public input was gathered at seventeen public meetings across the country and during five focus group sessions. Additional feedback came from a further eleven independent conferences at which the Charter was discussed in depth – conferences organised by groups that ranged from Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and Sabhal mor Ostaig (the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture, based on the Isle of Skye) to Disability Scotland and the Girl Guides Association. It was a substantial investment in a project that occupied the SAC staff and its partners and researchers for over a year.

A number of independent researchers were hired to gather opinions from the field on a given art form area and present their findings in a series of reports. I was commissioned to conduct the research on photography.

The second quality that made this approach exceptional was that it was not presented as corporate report. Once collated, all this material was given to senior arts journalist called Joyce McMillan to bring together into a single coherent document: *The Charter for the Arts*.⁵ Unusually, she was encouraged to write the charter as a personal perspective. This was not to be an anonymous bureaucratic document, it had an authorial voice and it had passion. Significantly, the Charter made no reference to either the cultural industries or the creative industries. The only bracket term it identified and used for its wide scope was ‘the arts’ (McMillan 1993).⁶

5 “Joyce McMillan is theatre critic of the *Scotsman*, and also writes a political and social commentary column for the paper. She has been involved in many campaigns for democracy and human rights, both in Scotland and internationally, and has been a freelance journalist, based in Edinburgh, for more than twenty-five years. She was a Visiting Professor in the School of Drama and Creative Industries at Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh from 2006 to 2010.” (McMillan)

6 I am indebted to Robert Livingston, the SAC Officer with whom I worked on the Charter report, for drawing this point to my attention during a recent conversation.

So, for whom was the Charter written? The language of naming was important: it was not called a strategy, but a charter (a name that carried connotations of the Chartists,⁷ Magna Carta⁸ and so on). In retrospect it can be seen as a step towards devolution in its ambition to set a clear agenda for the arts in Scotland. In 1994, two years after the publication of the charter, the Scottish Arts Council was formed as an independent body following a restructuring of ACGB.

The Charter certainly had more effect than the later Scottish Cultural Commission produced by the Labour Government in 2005 (Boyle 2005). *The Charter for the Arts* was more fundamental. It led to a commitment by SAC to craft and traditional music and arts, which before that had remained firmly outside the scope of the SAC.⁹

So, *The Charter for the Arts* opened up SAC from narrowness of purpose. It brought an interaction with what was to become known as the creative industries. It also coincided with the process of SAC withdrawing from direct provision. SAC ceased to operate galleries in Edinburgh and Glasgow, passing them into the management of independent not-for-profit structures, divested itself of its

7 Chartism, a working-class movement seeking political reform in Britain, took its name from 'The People's Charter' of 1838. The Chartists were a loosely coordinated network of local groups, often called Working Men's Associations, active between 1838 and 1848.

8 Signed in 1215, Magna Carta was the first attempt to limit the powers of a King of England and to protect the rights of at least some of his subjects, the feudal barons.

9 Robert Livingston (who was Visual Arts Officer at SAC from 1989 to 1993) argues that the traditional music scene was one of the first examples of a 'creative industry' to be included in the SAC's expanding purview (even though that term was not used at the time). Up until then, while orchestral music (and some jazz) had been funded by the SAC music department, traditional music had not. It had had to survive as a wholly commercial activity when it did not rely on unpaid volunteers.

Traditional craft also entered the SAC funding frame at this time; however this was not as a direct result of the Charter for the Arts, but of government initiated changes to another public body. Previously, craft had been the province of the Scottish Development Agency (SDA). When SDA merged with the Scottish Training Agency in 1991 to form Scottish Enterprise, craft was dropped from its portfolio. This created a funding vacuum for craft leading to pressure from the sector for something to be done. A high profile group, the Association for Applied Arts (chaired by the arts philanthropist, Sir Gerald Elliot) was formed to spearhead the campaign and lobby government. Subsequently, one of SDA's former senior executives (Helen Bennett) was brought into SAC to run a new (autonomous) Craft Department. [from the author's conversations with Robert Livingston]

collection, and ceased touring and presenting lectures. It adopted a model by which it contracted independent companies to deliver services in line with its overarching strategic plan. As such it was moving from considerations of provision to those of actively shaping the arts in Scotland.

The Experiment of Fotofeis

Even before the *Charter for the Arts*, there had been a working party investigating ways in which the profile of photography as an art form might be raised in Scotland. It was chaired by David Bruce, the then Director of the Scottish Film Council. At the time, many photographers felt that their art form was undervalued and underrepresented. In London, the ACGB had employed a photography officer, Barry Lane, since 1973, but the SAC had resisted this, arguing that it was better to embrace photography within the larger visual arts than risk ghettoising it in a peripheral sub-department and so, potentially, limit its funding. The working party determined that the solution was to stage a festival of photography; a major event to focus public and political attention on the medium in all its variety of forms and content.

There were at that time two models for a photographic festival: the metropolitan (à la Paris and later Houston, Texas) and the historic town (based on the Arles *Rencontres* in southern France). The former model offered many institutional spaces, but ran the risk of being lost in the general chaos of city life. The latter, which was the model of the very first photographic festival, had fewer bespoke art spaces, but offered a greater concentration of activity that could take over the whole town for the duration of the event.

Where should the new Scottish festival be held? Views diverged along geographic lines.

There were a number of cities that could lay claim to be a centre of excellence for one particular photographic expertise or another: Glasgow for contemporary art practice; Edinburgh for fine printing; Dundee for the nascent

medium of electronic imaging; Aberdeen for its effective integration of gallery and community arts; Inverness as the gateway to the Highlands with its strong traditional arts and what was, at the time, Europe's most sophisticated rural telecommunications network.

As a solution, the working party decided that the festival should be nationwide. It had never been done before and no one had a very clear idea of how it might realistically be achieved.

I became very interested in how a festival might raise the profile of photography, how a truly nationwide event might function and how it might involve not only all the key cities, but actively embrace suburban and rural areas as well. I undertook private research into the mode, budget and outcomes of a number of festivals in Europe and the United States of America and, from that initial data, began to formulate a working model for a festival that might span both the geographic extent of the country and its demographic diversity.

When funding was finally agreed for the new initiative, I applied for the job of director and presented my proposals at interview. On that basis, I was appointed and began work in 1991. Despite those who considered such a large event could not be realised (especially those south of the border), the first festival took place over a four-week period in June 1993 attracting an audience of half a million. Two years later, the second festival drew three-quarters of a million visitors to its events; this in a country with a population at the time of around five million.

The festival took the name Fotofeis. 'Foto' being the most common prefix associate with photography (among European languages) and 'feis' being a local Gaelic word for a festival. Thus, the name encapsulated a philosophy of 'the international in harmony with the local'. The festival embraced a wide and heterogeneous range of practice by internationally established artists, emerging talents and those who worked with and within a given community. Significantly the festival was able to break through some of the so-called 'silos' that effectively constrained certain forms of art practice to particular types of venue and streams

of public funding: international art to the city museums and art galleries; local and amateur art to suburban areas; and crafts and community art to rural areas. Fotofeis created an atmosphere and energy that opened this up. The program included international artists working with remote communities, new-technology artists creating an exhibition in a highland forest, community groups presenting their work in a major museum. The rigid divisions of Scottish visual culture were softened, at least momentarily ... and the sky did not fall in. Indeed the festival attracted wide critical acclaim for its innovative and inclusive approach.¹⁰ While the 'political beauty contest' between arts organisations competing for public funds can easily lead to a defensive exclusivity over territory, I believe Fotofeis offered an opportunity to explore new forms of collaboration that did much to advance the 'conversation' between 'silos'.

ACP: Art and the Pro-Am

In 1998, I moved to Australia to become the seventh director of the Australian Centre for Photography (ACP) in Sydney. The institution operates across three interconnected areas: exhibition, education and publication. Importantly, I felt that ACP needed to be owned by its public. It was essential that those who ran the institution understood themselves as custodians who served the communities of photographers and the wider public rather than dictate to them. To achieve this, ACP should have a 'personality'. It should not seek to be neutral, but to be a 'real place'.

10 "Fotofeis have accomplished something truly wonderful ... they have created something that will be remembered for years to come" *Sunday Times*; "I am impressed by the eclecticism of Fotofeis. It sets out to cater for the widest possible interest in the subject, making no assumptions about public taste, or the place of the avant-garde versus the most popular common denominator. As it should be, it is pro photography and versus nothing." *Scotland on Sunday*; "Top rate, exciting, exhilarating ... It's diverse, truly international and incredibly well-run" *Glasgow Herald*; "Fotofeis is an astonishing feat of collaboration" *Artwork* magazine; "The most innovative photographic festival in these islands" *British Journal of Photography*; "Bold and original" *European Photography*; "The organisers deserve congratulations for bringing such an ambitious project to fruition" *Guardian*; "International and original ... One immediately recognises the high quality of these exhibitions" *Nippon Camera* magazine (Japan)

I learned much in the thirteen years I was at ACP, but here I want to focus on the important role of the educational unit within the larger institution. When I arrived, it seemed that the workshop had been considered a somewhat embarrassing 'community' space that had to be kept separate from the gallery if it was not to taint the high mindedness of the exhibition program. (Workshop was treated like the feeble-minded relation banished to the attic.) My view was quite the opposite. It was the fact that photography was being created in the building that breathed life into the exhibitions and empowered the viewer with the understanding that they could be active participants.

Over the years, this shift in attitude, and a range of innovations and investments in the workshop programs, saw annual student enrolments rise from 375 to over 2,200 in a dozen years. Over that time the curriculum evolved with changing technologies and with shifting consumer demand. In turn, the ethos of the workshop evolved from the idea of skills training to the more open concept of creative learning. While a small percentage of those taking classes did so with the aim of becoming professional photographers or artists, the majority were what we called 'pro-ams'; people who wanted to attain high-level expressive skills for their own sake. For many, their day job was in a large industrial business. They were just one small cog in a vast corporate machine, unable to point to clearly identifiable outcomes and say 'this is mine; I did this'. Learning an expressive skill and doing it well enabled them to make something they could be proud of and truly call their own. It satisfied a deep urge to create something concrete and personal. Later, when images created in the workshop were displayed in the main gallery, they attracted serious critical appraisal by a number of senior arts figures.¹¹

11 These opinions were verbal and so this information is anecdotal. It raises an interesting question of how 'voices are heard' when individual reviews in print carry weight that the opinions of the viewing public do not. That said, increasingly interactive forms of online information gathering and sharing may offer ways to capture such information in the future.

Form, Content and Audience

Over the past thirty years, I have been responsible for organising, curating and presenting hundreds of visual arts projects. These have ranged from large-scale historical survey shows through group and solo gallery and museum exhibitions to public art and performance, and interventions within the urban and natural landscape. They have been presented in the United Kingdom and Australia, and also in many other parts of the world including Bangladesh, Canada, China, Colombia, India, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan and many countries in Europe.

I have also had the pleasure of attending a wide range of visual arts events and festivals internationally, and a smaller number of theatrical and musical presentations. Throughout this time, one of my central concerns has been to try to understand what these projects – those I have had involvement with and those initiated by others – mean to the people who visit them. What feelings they evoke; what ideas they inspire; what challenges they throw down.

Much of what I have learned has come through conversations with audience members either informally in the museum, gallery or on site, or through the more structured interaction of a floor talk or Q&A discussion. The Fotofeis team developed an affordable paper-based survey allowing visitors to give their feedback. The survey forms combined a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions: the former providing metricated answers that permitted the integration of opinions to yield a distribution curve; the latter providing a means by which audiences could raise issues we had not considered and offer fresh insights in their own words. While it was not possible to reduce this latter feedback to tidy numerical form, those qualitative opinions were of immense value in helping us, as organisers, understand how we could improve the way we served the public. When I moved to ACP, I looked for ways in which what I had learned in the context of a temporal event might usefully be applied to the context of a gallery with a year-round program.

One of the things I learned over the years – something that remained consistent across diverse modes of presentation and in different parts of the

world – was that a non-specialist audience expects art to have both form and content. They are drawn to and respect the self-evidently well made, and they are interested in ideas. Those ideas might be innovative (seeing the world from a different perspective) or they may be resonant (echoing something deep within the individual and creating a sense of mutuality). Highly formal work with a beautiful finish but little by way of ideas failed to sustain attention or generate word of mouth recommendations. Highly conceptual works, avoiding or devoid of formal elegance, for the most part, left audiences cold or frustrated.

While the history of art for many centuries was the story of how form and content united to become a work of art, the twentieth century saw, in modernism's restless quest for innovation, experimentation that explored the notions of pure form and pure concept. As loci on the human drive for novelty, the more extreme expressions of formalism and conceptualism define important milestones in art history that I believe have done much to inform and progress those works which constitute a synthesis of both. But for audiences coming to the gallery in search of a more direct and immediate relationship with art, I have found that it is works which integrate both virtuosic elegance and powerful or affective ideas which best engage attention and generate conversation.

Attention and conversation are important. We live today amid a torrent of information and stimulation. Images, sounds, ideas, opinions, philosophies and factoids are everywhere. If one has something to communicate, it is necessary to draw and hold attention, to encourage experience and, if found to be of value, to consolidate that experience so that it is retained and not dissipated amid the tumult of life. Conversation becomes an important way in which such consolidation can be effected.

One of the concerns I had while working at ACP was the way in which the experience of an exhibition or event might usefully be retained by the visitor. How might experiences held in the short-term memory be laid down more permanently in the medium-term memory and thus, hopefully, remain with the individual over time. How can the art experience become *transformative*? One

simple, very human way, is to talk about it. Including social gatherings after events and providing an environment in which visitors are encouraged to sit and digest what they have just seen – before heading into the visual and aural cacophony of the street outside – were ways in which we tried to facilitate this kind of retention of an art experience in the hope that, for some, it would be of lasting worth.

Over the years I have come to understand that the synthesis of form and content, the sharing of attention and the encouragement of conversation are highly significant factors in the art experience.

Now and When: Art and the Homeless

Now and When was an outreach project run by ACP in partnership with the Salvation Army Oasis Centre in Surry Hills, Sydney, in 2009–10. The project was initiated and managed by Julie Sundberg, a long-term tutor at ACP who had recently become manager of the workshop. *Now and When* was developed to apply the creative learning skills of the workshop team to help young homeless adults take control of their lives and to give them a voice within the community. It was self-funded from the income generated by ACP's user-pay classes and delivered free to the program's participants.

There was a clear division of responsibility in the partnership with the Salvation Army: they knew their clients, had established relationships with them and appropriate modes of working with them over the long-term. ACP had skills and equipment that could usefully be adapted for this program. The primary purpose of this project was not to create professional photographers (although it did lead to one participant pursuing a career in photography and another two went on to undertake further training in film and video). Rather, photography was a means to an end. Photography is 'sexy'. It caught the imagination of these young people and it had the ability to hold their attention. The basics of the digital medium are not too hard to grasp and the camera can quickly be used as a communication tool and a means to personal expression. The program required

the participants to set goals and manage their time. This is something that young homeless adults find hard to do as they tend to live chaotic lives: buffeted from one event to the next by external circumstance, they have little individual agency with which to resist and take charge. We also put our trust in them, lending them expensive SLR cameras to take away and make work. Not one camera was damaged or stolen. Each participant rose to the expectation we set by placing our trust in them.

What was surprising about this project was the nature of the photographs the participants created. They did not, as one might expect, focus on the squalor of their lives, bearing witness and making evident in order to elicit sympathy and support. They went in search of beauty; of things that were uplifting, life affirming, aspirational. We knew from confidential histories we had worked through with each participant that they had suffered the most appalling treatment at the hands of adults while they were children: physical and sexual abuse, humiliation and abandonment. Yet, when they had the opportunity to make a creative—expressive statement (and gathered up their self-confidence), their observations were about how beautiful the world can be and the little things that can bring joy to life.

Now and When culminated in an exhibition. The structure of each body of work was in two parts. The participant made a series of images that, in one way or another, reflected their life now. Next they created a staged 'performance' of what they would like to be in life: a nanny, a forensic police officer, a good (single) parent, a recording engineer... The results were presented at the ACP, which lent the images a status that did much for the participant's self-esteem. They were also exhibited in the local library, reaching into the community that, for the most part, shunned or ignored them: giving them a voice, opening up a conversation.

It was a project that had a substantive and positive impact not only for the participants, but also for a number of the ACP staff involved, of which I was certainly one. It opened our eyes to the true power of the arts and did so in a profound way.

The program was not sustained after I left ACP in 2011.



In some ways, this series of events might seem to run counterintuitively: against a notional flow of progress. It starts with the big questions of art in the larger sphere of human endeavour and passes to a people's charter and a national festival of international art to the creative learning of pro-ams and the feedback of audiences, and culminates in a modest community project with young homeless adults. But I have come to understand that it is only when one has some grasp of the bigger picture that the redemptive potential of art as a practice – an activity in which we are active participants and not simply passive consumers – becomes clear in its fullest sense.

It is these experiences and intuitions, garnered over my professional life to date, that bring me to the research described in this thesis.

CHAPTER 1

Whose Art Is It Anyway?

*How might we develop public policy for the arts
that actively engages the many and not just the few
in a meaningful and enriching way,
and does so impartially?*

• • • • •

It is the aim of this research to propose alternative principles on which to build public policy for the arts. In undertaking that exploration, I will look at the role of art in relation to people – its function and purpose – in the hope that it may cast useful light on how public policy for the arts might be re-thought, re-cast and, hopefully, improved. Combined with the professional observations and intuitions outlined in the Prologue, my research seeks more objective data and models of exploration to begin to build a methodology through which to address the question that begins this chapter. It is a question that will drive the innovative line of argument that this thesis takes back from recent history to the dawn of humankind.

My approach is twofold.

In Part One, I take three different perspectives on changes in the past two centuries that have impacted on the developing nature of art, the emergence of public policy for the arts and the creation of the arts council movement as a means to its realisation. In doing so, I will show how attitudes from the preceding century and a half, often conflicting, are manifest in the values of the arts council movement. Those values determine the art it subsidises, directly or indirectly, through the institutions by which that art is authorised and through which it is consumed. I then go on to review the challenges and opportunities afforded by recent changes in communications technology, before discussing the role such technologies might play in diversifying active public engagement in the arts. Finally in Part One, I explore the relative virtues of meritocratic elites, the feasibility of collective creative action and the conditions under which the many may judge wisely.

In Part Two I focus on the origins of art – its pre-cultural roots, the way it acts on our brain physiologically and our mind psychologically – and the qualities associated with it that have arisen through the process of human (and pre-human) evolution.¹² Art was not, of course, devised by Nature as part of some grand plan. As Darwin made clear, evolution is not a teleological process, but rather the winnowing of randomly occurring mutations in our genes. There is no end game – just an ongoing series of adaptations to the world as and when circumstances change or opportunity arises. The evolutionary process has, however, shaped the way the brain works and much of that functioning is common to all human beings. This is not to say that evolution has determined the thoughts in our minds, though it has certainly defined the limits of those thoughts. From this, I develop some core principles that might usefully be carried forward to the present day and the formation of public policy for the arts.

¹² The pre-cultural roots of art refer to those evolved traits shared by all human beings. It is a concept I will elaborate in detail in Part Two.

I begin this research with a fundamental premise: the things we share as human beings greatly outweigh the things that make us different. While those differences are essential to the richness of our social and cultural lives and to our individual sense of self, I believe we can draw on the things we have in common as the first step in establishing a fairer and more open approach to public policy for the arts; one that respects and celebrates those differences while also strengthening our heterogeneous communities.

While this thesis proposes a number of radical ways in which we might encourage a freer and more actively engaged sharing of our arts and culture, it does not define an end goal. The way things progress from here will depend on what works and what does not. Broadly, the approach is along the lines proposed by Karl Popper for the development of an Open Society – one in which governments are responsive and tolerant, and political process is flexible and transparent – not by having a utopian ideal, but through the piecemeal fixing of what is manifestly wrong (Popper 1945).¹³ So, exploring what is dysfunctional and misunderstood and what, at least for a time, might be a better way, is at the heart of this research.

When drafting policy, one begins by identifying the stakeholders in order to assess the opinions and interests at play. This is not easy. We live in a world of many points of view. At an extreme, one might go so far as to say there are as many perspectives as there are people on the planet, but let us assume that there are, broadly, groupings of interest. Our first question is: whose art is it anyway?

I have borrowed that phrase from the title of a paper written by John Knell in 2006 for Arts Council England (ACE). It explored how far the personalisation and choice agendas shaping other areas of UK publicly funded activity at the time – areas such as health and education – might have relevance

¹³ Writing during the Second World War he was acutely aware of the dangers of utopian political ideals of both the Left and the Right.

for the arts. In this view art was defined and shaped by the public through individual tailoring and choice in consumer-oriented systems in which citizens (as voters) became the 'customers' of governments in a process of personalised publicly-funded service provision. It was an intentionally provocative piece, challenging traditional notions of authorship and production in the arts, issues about which there are often strong feelings but for which there are no simple or clear answers (Knell 2006). While I have borrowed his title, what follows does not reflect the content of John Knell's paper. Rather it is my own rollcall of the usual suspects...

Does art belong to artists? After all they made it; it was their ideas and creativity, time and skill that brought it into being. Certainly current laws around intellectual property, copyright and moral rights (which include assurance that an artist's work cannot be treated in a way that damages their reputation) seem to be premised upon the idea that whatever artists make, they own. They have rights over it: rights to recompense if it is 'used'; rights to attribution; rights to the assured maintenance of the work's integrity; even the right to have their reputation protected from detractors.¹⁴ Does an artwork belong to its maker as a child to its parent; at least for a period (18 years after birth for a child; 70 years after death for an artwork)? If so, is it for artists to define what art should be simply by the fact that it is they who make it, they who control the process and shape the range of what is available?

But is art property or is it a more open form of human intercommunication? Why should an artist be able to assert that their work may not be changed, decontextualised, deconstructed as it travels out into the world and is experienced and felt, engaged and assayed by those it meets on its way, just as our opinions are tested by the listener. After all, no artist creates an

¹⁴ This legal protection is balanced by the terms of fair use (or, under common law, fair dealing) which allow for limited extracts of a work to be quoted in criticism, news, parody and certain other contexts, without first seeking the permission of the copyright holder.

artwork from nothing; he or she builds on a legacy of those who have gone before: artistic practice is an incremental development that mostly involves adapting ideas and forms that have gone before. It is not *creatio ex nihilo*.

The problem becomes more difficult when one considers the makers themselves. Today there is no objective way in which the term 'artist' can be claimed or applied. Artists are not like doctors or lawyers, required to gain a professional qualification before they are permitted to use the title and practice. Artists may be trained or they may be self-taught. They may be lauded or ignored. Their works may sell for high prices or not at all. 'Artist' is essentially a self-nomination; a way of describing oneself without recourse to external authorisation. Of course, the matter of whether one is a good artist or a bad one is another question.

Perhaps that question is best answered by those who put their hand in their pocket and buy art: the collectors. Perhaps, in real terms, they define what comes to be accepted as art. It is they who set the monetary value of art within the free market of artefacts; what John L. Austin called "moderate sized specimens of dry goods" (Austin 1962).¹⁵ In certain celebrated cases, it is individuals of this ilk who have bequeathed their collections to public institutions to ensure their preservation – in some cases also founding those institutions for the purpose – thus filtering what passes forward to future generations of the public as the

15 Austin is critiquing A. J. Ayer's definition of what Ayer proposes is the 'common man's' perception of material things, which Ayer suggests is a class of things such as "chairs, tables, pictures, books, flowers, pens, cigarettes" (Ayer 1940). In doing so, Austin argues that Ayer implicitly draws a distinction between that class of what one might call material objects and other perceivable things such as "people, people's voices, rivers, mountains, flames, rainbows, shadows, pictures on the screen at the cinema, pictures in books or hung on walls, vapours, gases" (Austin 1962). I would suggest that implicit within that distinction is, among other things, the fact that the former class can be considered commodities for purchase, while many of the latter do not. In turn, this appears to assume that the 'common man' has a distinct and different perceptual relationship to things that might be considered commodities in themselves from those that might not. Even examples such as pictures on the screen at the cinema, while we pay for the experience of seeing them, are not things we can buy outright – or at least they were not when Austin was writing, video and streaming having since changed the nature of ownership in relation to the moving image.

defining art of the past. Perhaps it is really *their* art. After all, the laws protecting tangible property are vastly older than those that police copyright.¹⁶

Not all those who collect art do so for the aesthetic pleasure it brings. For some corporate interests it is a financial investment made with the express view of turning a profit, a commodity whose “principal social role is to be investment capital, or, in the simplest way, bullion” (Hughes 1981, 111). Like gold, art has the property of rarity and symbolic value. While gold can and is used in a variety of practical ways, its chief property is that it is shiny and rare. It can be hoarded as a symbol of value without the requirement that it be used. If wealth were measured directly in the things we use – oil, copper or praseodymium – it would be depleted in the realisation of its worth. Gold and art exist outside of that cycle of production and consumption. Art here is defined not by aesthetic experience or even the status of taste, but by the expectation that it will accrue in value. As such, it places trust in those who assay and authorise art, not so much that they are right as that they, as a profession, will not change their minds later.

When an artist makes work funded by a government department (such as a state ministry) or government-funding agency (such as an arts council), whose art is it: the artist’s, the government’s, the agency’s or the public’s? Governments make investment for a reason; they want a social or economic output to flow from their funding input. Certainly they want political benefit. Under Tony Blair, UK New Labour sought a strong correlation between publicly funded art and social impact. Identified as ‘instrumentalism’, it was but a new take on an approach that can be traced back through Thatcherism to the late eighteenth century and on back to the Classical Greece of Plato and Aristotle (Belfiore 2012). Certainly artists like Scott Redford would argue that government-funded art is simply a form of

16 Property laws go back as far as Sumer and the Code of Lipi-Ishtar (c1870–1860 BCE) (Roth 1995), while copyright laws for visual works date from The Engraving Copyright Act of 1734; although the origin of copyright law in most European countries lies in efforts by the church and governments to regulate and control the output of printers in the sixteenth century (MacQueen, Waelde, and Laurie 2007, 34).

propaganda, shaped and emasculated through control of the money flow (Redford 2013). Then again, governments only have money to spend because they raise taxes. Their money is really our money. Does government-funded art ultimately belong to us all?

The question of what is bought and what is funded is one of relative value. Notions of artistic value are translated into price in order to facilitate the transfer of ownership. Such decisions about value are within the purview of critics and curators, academics and assessors, publishers and dealers. It is they who proffer opinion either overtly through critique and assessment or implicitly through selection for sale, display or publication. Figures like Bernard Berenson (1865–1959) exerted great influence on the choice of what was bought by the tycoon collectors of the American industrial boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; they were collectors who subsequently became philanthropic donors, establishing many of the great public art museums in the USA. Perhaps art belongs to those who hold sway over its ordination into art history: those who stand in judgement on which are the legitimate heirs to the title of art and which are merely bastard imposters.

The rules and moral status of bastardry, of course, are moot; the estates of power that seek to control perception through what Hume called the moral sentiments, do so for their own ends. As the Australian artist Ian Milliss expressed it, in characteristically forthright terms: “I see the artworld as rather like organised religion, as a set of parasitic cultural memes that exploit a natural human activity and attempt to control and divert it to serve them when it has a quite different reason for existing” (Milliss 2013).

And, finally there is cultural ownership by a group, which broadly espouses the dictum ‘if you are not one of us, you cannot judge what we make, say or do’. Such groups can, or have been, organised around many different criteria: gender,

sexual orientation, ethnicity, colour or coalition.¹⁷ Arising from the twentieth century struggle for emancipation and the post-war civil rights movements, groups formed that were defined in terms of their oppression by the majority or hegemonic powers of the status quo. The cultural fragmentation that followed reached its zenith in the cultural relativism of postmodern theory. Meanwhile, those on the right from John Howard to George W. Bush denounced it as 'victim politics' deployed in order to unfairly skew the 'proper' evaluation of worth and undermine such right-wing critic's own particular notion of 'democracy'.

So, whose art is it anyway? How best can we address this question in the interests of all those with a stake in our visual culture, including (perhaps especially) the wider community who constitute the body politic?

When John Knell named his paper he was adapting the title of a 1972 television play by Brian Clark: *Whose Life is it Anyway?*¹⁸ In doing so he suggested a resonance with the concerns aired in the play about the role of government in the life and choices of the individual. The play tells the story of a young sculptor who, following a car accident, is paralysed from the neck down. No longer able to do the things which give life meaning for him, he seeks to die. Unable to effect suicide unaided, he argues passionately for euthanasia. The strength of the play is that it looks at both sides of a controversial issue: the sanctity of life versus the right to die. Clark presents arguments both in favour of and opposing euthanasia, questioning to what extent governments should be allowed to interfere in the life of a private citizen.

Life and art are not, of course, the same thing. But passions also run deep on issues of art: how it is defined, how it is valued and evaluated, whom it is for and indeed who can be said to be making it... As Hippocrates observed, life is

17 In Britain in the 1980s and 1990s the term 'Black' could be used to embrace all non-white minority populations, especially in the discourses of cultural politics (Bhopal 2004).

18 Clark revised the TV play for the stage, premiering the live production at the Mermaid Theatre, London, in 1978. The play was later made into a cinema film starring Richard Dreyfus and adapted by David Benedictus into a novel, both of which were released in 1981.

short and art is long. The choices we make about art today may outlive us all and become the legacy of one era to another. It is a consideration that can urge us to invest value not in what pleases audiences today but in what we imagine will impress those of future generations. Consequently, there can be an aura of would-be prescience around art; with an implied rationale that art must be what the future will value, regardless of whether it is relevant to the wider contemporary citizenry. It is a sensibility that drives the rhetoric of innovation and too often stands as a defence for those things which fail to engage the present in a meaningful way. Hans Lenneberg considers this a “myth”:

Today this notion that the artist is a misunderstood prophet has been encouraged by artists themselves. The more avant-garde of our authors, painters and musicians, those who have not attracted a large audience, have persuaded themselves and us that this is the way it has always been; that no serious artist can win instant recognition and immediate reward, and that therefore he creates solely for the future. Some even deride those colleagues who receive popular acclaim and consider their success as virtual proof of superficiality or lack of seriousness. (Lenneberg 1980, 221)

There are, in fact, very few artists from the past who failed to find an audience in their own time only to become famous posthumously. As Lenneberg concludes, “most of the great creators of the past ... received recognition quite early in their careers” (Lenneberg 1980, 221). Figures such as Vincent van Gogh that furnish the Romantic tradition of the misunderstood artist are the exception and not the rule. Leonard Meyer is of a similar opinion that “the myth of the unappreciated genius” constructs an image of the artist as being “at once saint and seer, the genius through inspired vision reveals new worlds and, because he is ‘ahead of his time’, is misunderstood, neglected and vilified.” This Meyer sees as arising from a “change in the nature of patronage ... that had begun in the late eighteenth century” (Meyer 1989, 181).

Meyer argues that Romanticism was “fundamentally egalitarian” while, at the same time, catering for a society in rapid stratification, concerned with tastes

construed as delineating divisions between one class and another (Meyer 1989, 182-183). As Lenneberg notes, while “music was becoming a medium of popular entertainment almost to the extent that television is today” it was limited to the active participation of the middle classes (Lenneberg 1980, 222).¹⁹ As such, a composer’s work was only commercially viable “if amateurs could play it” (Lenneberg 1980, 224), yet that same music must also satisfy elite taste if it was to be truly valued. This was a contradiction not limited to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; Alan Bradshaw and Morris Holbrook describe a similar tension plaguing jazz in the mid-twentieth century, with the marketing construct of “the iconic self-destructing artist” resulting from the “competing career orientations arising from the contradictory demands for musicians to produce aesthetic experiences for an audience of experts, cognoscenti, or devoted fans while also facing the need to earn cash in the mass market constituted by non-experts” (Bradshaw and Holbrook 2007, 115).

With so many conflicting stakeholder interests, where do we find the common ground on which to set the foundation of public policy? Is there a fundamental way in which to consider art, and how might that be applied to such a diverse set of demands and expectations?

Two Postulates

Art is central to our experience of life in the community. It is a way to speak of ourselves to ourselves. It is – or can be – a powerful way through which we feel connection with others and, when truly successful – perhaps even empathy. The heart of art lies not in ownership and control, but in connection and dialogue.

¹⁹ William Weber illustrates the enormous increase in the availability of music during the Romantic period. “During the 1770s and 80s most publishers’ catalogues listed between 100 and 1,500 items. By 1824 the London firm of Boosey cited 10,000 foreign publications alone; by 1827 the general catalogue of Whistler and Hofmeister in Leipzig had accumulated a total of about 44,000 items; and in 1838 Parisian firm of d’Almaine claimed to have access to over 200,000” (Weber 1977, 10).

Accordingly, my approach will not focus on individuals per se – be they maker, buyer, commissioner, authoriser, critic or audience – but on the space art occupies *between* individuals and its openness to interpretation.

I will begin, therefore, by proposing the following two postulates on which to base this research.

Art as experience

My approach echoes that of an American exponent of the arts and crafts movement, Elbert Hubbard (1856–1915), who defined art not as a thing, but as a way. In my view it is a profound way by which we come to better understand ourselves. That understanding may be felt more than fully comprehended, rational comprehension being more appropriate to the sphere of words. This leads to the first postulate on which I will develop this research:

The nature of art is vested not in the object but in the experience of the object.

In this, I seek to build on the Pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey who argued that what characterises the process of art is not the object itself, alone, but rather the experience created in the viewer apprehending the object. For this to be an *experience* (as opposed to just part of the general flow of the things of which we are conscious), the experience must be complete in itself. While Dewey is certainly not going so far as to say all things can be part of the art process, he does maintain that the supposed division between fine art and popular culture is artificial. This is unfortunate, he believes, because it has tended to mean that the ‘average person’ feels alienated from the forms of art to be found in museums and galleries, while not recognising that the popular forms that do interest him or her are also part of the larger family of art experiences (Dewey 1934). Which leads me to my second postulate...

Equality of access

I do not seek to limit the nature of that experience or prioritise the experience of one viewer over another, but to approach the formulation of policy from an egalitarian perspective. Thus, the second postulate for this research is:

All members of the community should have equal opportunity to access and experience the arts in their own way.

This is not to say that I think all people have the same level of skill and knowledge about art making or art viewing, but that all should have equal access to it and equal right to their own personal experience of it.

On the face of it, this seems commonplace. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes within Article 27 the affirmation that “everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts”. The arts council movement has always had, as one of its tenets, the concept of ‘access’. However, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, the other tenet of the arts council movement, ‘excellence’, has often undermined or distorted considerations of access in practice. Various groups have vied for the right to define the terms of such excellence. They have employed a diverse artillery of argument from taste, convolution, criticality, disinterest, moral worth and fiscal value, to more covertly held interests in exclusivity, status and profit. Whatever the currency of their particular evaluation, it has, inevitably, been closely linked to self-interest.

The postulates of art as experience and equality of access are likely to raise significant criticism on the grounds of precedence and practicality. Surely, one might argue, the history of art has demonstrated that it is objects that pass down through the generations not experiences – which are likely to change from one historical context to another – and it is only through proper study, by those with detailed knowledge and special faculties of discernment, that we may determine the messages therein contained. Surely, the most cursory reading of history demonstrates that art has always been the province of the few, a special breed or

class with wealth and leisure. Surely, to open out the interpretation of art to everyone would be to dilute its power; to dumb art down. Surely...

Much of Part Two of this thesis examines the prehistory of art and competing theories as to its psychosocial meanings. Looking further back, I will discuss the genesis of the fundamental aesthetic responses that first arose from evolutionary processes of natural selection. I go on to explore attitudes and values that we now associate with the arts (and other areas of contemporary life) that have their origins in more consciously controlled forms of evolution: sexual selection and group selection. I will test the validity of these postulates, trace their lineage and elaborate upon their contemporary implications.

First, however, I will trace how the attitudes and values associated with the arts have shaped the development of public policy for the arts in the context of representational democracy and universal suffrage. It is a context that has seen within its institutions and markets a continuing competition between groups as to the function and value of art, and who should have authority over it. Against this background, I will go on to review the impact of recent advances in communications technology and the failure of meritocratic systems of social order to deliver what is in the best interests of the community.

For now, I want to explore in more detail how art is experienced – how an artwork can give rise to very different experiences in different individuals and why this is important for the community – before returning to the question of ‘whose art’ in order to refine a way of considering the relationship between artworks and people. Since the roots of this research lie in intuitions formed during my professional life, I will begin by describing two related personal experiences and the way I interpret my own particular engagement. From these specifics, I will attempt to build a more general model to describe the way in which we respond individually to a single artwork in a multiplicity of ways.

Personal Experience

Room 59

In August 2009 I was in London and, as I always do, I went to the National Gallery. Or rather I went to Room 59, for it is here that the works of Carlo Crivelli (c1435–c1495) are displayed. Quite what it is that draws me back on every visit to these fourteen works has been, in itself, an ongoing reflective puzzle for me. They are all religious images of saints and the Virgin Mary, with one representation of the dead Christ. I am a Naturalist and while I have some curiosity about religion as an organising and expressive principle, I have no real concern for the identities depicted here. Rather it is an uncanny and intense sense of connection that I feel; a connection with the past but, more specifically, with a sense of an individual experience in the past. A connection to people long-since dead who, in some way, live on within these paintings. They may wear the allegorical mantle of sainthood, but the artist has captured within them an essence of real flesh and blood. This is especially true of the peripheral figures. The virtuous celebrities who constitute the main subject matter are clearly circumscribed by religious mores and dogma, but even here, a remarkable humanity emanates from beneath the somewhat formulaic encoding of religious symbology. At its most obvious, it is in the delicately understated communion of mother and child in images of the Madonna, which touch on a fundamental human sensibility to which it is hard not to be drawn and feel connected.

However, in their detailing, the tiny hagiographic scenes gathered into the predellas are rich with an idiosyncratic character and empathy, even when depicting the more gruesome narratives of the Christian tradition. In the predella of *La Madonna della Rondine* (The Madonna of the Swallow, flanked by Saint Jerome and Saint Sebastian)²⁰ are three small scenes that include Saint Jerome in the wilderness

²⁰ The painting is named after the swallow ('rondine' in Italian) perched to the left of the Madonna, which the museum's didactic panel suggests may be intended as a symbol of the Resurrection.

and the attempted execution of Saint Sebastian.²¹ Unlike many depictions of Saint Sebastian in which he is transcendent, passively accepting his fate as martyr, Crivelli's Sebastian is strung up awkwardly, his body contorted and expression wild. His upper arm is already turning blue where the ropes bind tight. In paintings remarkable for their sharply defined lines (even the shadows are formed with fine cross-hatching) the bruising is in a delicate sfumato. It is a technique that appears in only one other painting in the room, *The Annunciation, with Saint Emidus*, in which a laser-like shaft of light strikes down from heaven onto the Virgin Mary at prayer in her chamber. It is a hard, golden beam but, as it passes through the small arched window into the chamber, it casts a soft golden glow on the stonework. I find this echo of softness fascinating and, in the way it draws a thread between the formidably spiritual and the abjectly human, deeply moving. I feel connected to the writhing unfortunate and a sense of parental anxiety for the young woman who is about to have so much thrust upon her.



Figure 1. Carlo Crivelli *La Madonna della Rondine* (after 1490)

Predella of from the altarpiece from S. Francesco dei Zoccolanti, Matelica, Italy
National Gallery, London

21 While Saint Sebastian's martyrdom is invariably depicted at the hands of archers, the story is that, though left for dead, he did recover and was only later bludgeoned to death and thrown into the Cloaca Maxima (Rome's sewer). Nonetheless, the painters of the Renaissance focused on the image of a naked young man pierced by arrows. Meanwhile, Klemens Löffler concludes: "These stories are unhistorical and not worthy of belief. The earliest mosaic picture of St. Sebastian, which probably belongs to the year 682, shows a grown, bearded man in court dress but contains no trace of an arrow. It was the art of the Renaissance that first portrayed him as a youth pierced by arrows" (Löffler 1912).



Figure 2. Carlo Crivelli *The Annunciation, with Saint Emidius* (1486)
National Gallery, London

In the image of Saint Jerome in the wilderness a small rabbit is seen from the back, crouched in the mouth of the hermit's cave. It is a tiny figure created in few brush strokes, but handled with such charm that it is clear the affection with which the artist viewed the small creature. It is, in a curious and probably 'inappropriate' way, not unlike the sentiment with which Beatrix Potter imbued her illustrations of the Peter Rabbit books, four centuries later.

There are other, more formal, aspects of these paintings that, I think, made them initially attractive; that drew my gaze and held me long enough for the subtler aspects to begin to resonate in me. The sharp delineation and exquisite detail are pure pleasure to the eye. Since I have been working on this thesis I have come to understand more clearly why this might be, something I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6.

I will not dwell here on the many insights and ideas that have surfaced as I gaze at these images. Those that are relevant will come up as I develop my arguments in this thesis. But, without doubt, the most profound and the one I feel most strongly whenever I am able to return to Room 59, is the sense of human connection across time that they evoke in me and the remarkable feeling of 'completeness' that this feeling of connection brings.

The Fourth Plinth

Leaving the National Gallery, my eye was caught by a small crowd of people at the north-west corner of Trafalgar Square. They were gathering around the 'fourth plinth', one of the stone blocks that mark the extent of the square, three of which support larger-than-life bronze statues. When the block was erected in 1840, it had not been possible to raise the necessary funds to pay for a statue to place upon it and consequently it remained empty for many years. In 2005, a project was initiated to present a series of temporary sculptures on the plinth, each created by a different contemporary artist. In 2009, however, Antony Gormley chose to use the commission not to show his own work, but to invite members of the public to occupy the plinth for an hour each, for a total of one hundred days.

They could use that hour for whatever they wished to do. The project was called *One & Other*.

I was not sure what the person on the plinth was doing – reading poetry, I think – because the breeze was carrying her voice in the other direction. But a small crowd was watching attentively. A police constable was standing by – there had been trouble previously – and I asked her about the project. She beamed and spoke with the enthusiasm of a new docent about the project and how it was letting ordinary people become involved in art. I realised that the success of *One & Other* was its process.

There were some visually arresting performances over the 2,400 hours that the project ran. These included a Godzilla, a recreation of a Gormley sculpture in bread, assorted nudes and a Nazi in a wheelchair (a protest against the way disabled people are treated), all of which made the *Guardian's* 'Top Ten'. However, the heart of the project lay not so much in its end results as in the way it signalled the idea that anyone and everyone could, if they wished, be a part of what we call art. Maybe not a major part, but a part all the same. *One & Other* engaged the imagination of those viewing it in a remarkable way. Jonathan May-Bowles spent his hour reading out secrets texted to him by the public. During this time, as Alex Needham recounts, "Trafalgar Square reeled to a riveting succession of sad, hilarious and sexually explicit admissions, which May-Bowles delivered without moral judgment but a lot of humour. The effect was weirdly life-affirming" (Needham 2009).



Figure 3. *One & Other* 2009
Trafalgar Square, London

Not everyone liked it. Jonathan Jones thought these “plinth people’ don’t stand up for democracy, they just stand there – and they look stupid” (Jones 2009). But, for me, Adrian Searle got closer to the heart of the project. Describing one participant, who just stood at the end of the plinth with his hands in his pockets, he observed that “his presence was what counted”. Searle reminded the reader of a statue presented on the fourth plinth back in 1999: artist Mark Wallinger’s *Ecce Homo*, which set a human-sized figure representing Christ on the oversized plinth. Far from making the figure appear insignificant, it drew the eye. I would suggest that this is because we are attuned to sensing the human (at human scale) in our midst. We connect with the form and scale. Identify. “Just as some sculptures have more presence than others (a tiny bronze Giacometti can somehow fill a whole room),” Searle noted, “so it is with the living” (Searle 2009).



Figure 4. Mark Wallinger *Ecce Homo* 1999

Trafalgar Square, London.

Image courtesy of the artist and Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London

This was not something that happened with every performer, just sometimes. There was a frisson of risk that you do not find in the National Gallery, where everything is authorised simply by its presence in that august institution. Searle concluded: “Gormley offers the possibility both for action and inaction. This is where the project’s magic lies – and also its danger. It is probably his best work, even if it risks bringing out the worst in people. The artist has set up the conditions, and what follows is unknown” (Searle 2009). I would add that as an artwork or art performance, *One & Other* depends much more upon the viewer for its legitimacy, than do the works in the museum. For all its height, the plinth offered something of a level playing field on which art-making and art-consuming met face to face, if not always eye to eye.



I was a couple of years into this research when I made that London visit. It was not so much a revelation as a timely moment for reflection. It helped me draw together some of the diverse strands of thinking that I had begun to evolve. It led me to consider the wide range of situations, processes, manifestations and effects that, while they are all very different from one another, I consider to be art.

One aspect was the highly subjective way in which, once I thought about it, I realised I responded to art. How can a work of art be so personal? This would imply that it can be many things to many people. It seemed to me that engaging with art is rather like a conversation – an exchange which, as it unfolds, is shaped by both sides – in this case the absent artist through his or her work and the present viewer in his or her imaginative engagement.

And why did I feel as if the artist spoke to me personally? Even the declaiming poet elevated beyond the audible on the fourth plinth stood for something that felt more than simply generic. She was more than simply an everywoman figure.

These are, of course, just two highly personal experiences. If they are indicative of a more general mechanism, what might that mechanism be? How can the objects of art – out in the world – mean so many things so personally and differently to each of us who spends time with them?

Art Experience

While all human societies undertake some of the practices we might term ‘art’, in many it is so embedded in their daily lives that they do not have a specific name for the activity. In reviewing three thousand indigenous cultures in Canada, Australia and Taiwan, researchers found none had a word for art as such. The researchers went on to suggest that the practices we might now describe as art were so bound up with the activities of life as a whole that it would be more appropriate to consider “the notion of cultural performance in which the visual

aspects of culture are embedded in the performance of culture” (Irwin, Rogers, and Wan 1999). This is true also of much of our own history and a great deal of what we now think of and value as art was not conceived of in those terms by its creators. The Greeks of antiquity, whose culture was in many ways the foundation of western civilisation, had no word equivalent to the contemporary meaning we ascribe to ‘art’ (Grey 1952). Indeed it has been argued that art as we think of it today began around 1400 (Belting 1983) or as late as c1800 with Hegel (Grey 1952) and ended in the third quarter of the twentieth century (Danto 1997a; Belting 1983; Kuspit 2004). The very concept of art is therefore one that changes – easier to define and apply in retrospect than in the present and certainly for the future.

Indeed, it has been suggested that art is not so much the object of our gaze as the nature of that gaze and the context in which it takes place. Art can, in that sense, be anything, and it is how it is approached that is of greatest importance. This is perhaps the logical conclusion of a line of argument originating in Marxism and finding expression in the theories of post-structuralism, postmodernism and deconstruction: that the function of art is as the subject of critique and that since critique can be applied to anything, the nature and form of the art itself are of little importance (Graham 1997). Indeed, the conservative art historian Ernst Gombrich was of the view that “there really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists” (Gombrich 1950). Given that the definition of an artist is often that of a person who makes art, this argument may appear circular, if not evasive, but it does point to one clear quality of art: intentionality.

At the other end of the spectrum is a cynical (or despairing) view that an artwork has become simply a transferable capital asset. In this case, as Hiro Steyerl argues, “the production of art presents a mirror image of post-democratic forms of hypercapitalism that look set to become the dominant political post-Cold War paradigm” (Steyerl 2010).

Building on the first postulate outlined at the opening of this chapter, my approach is twofold.

First, to focus on one sphere of art activity: public participation and engagement. That is, art made by, for or with the citizen, whether supported by government subsidy, private sponsorship, community action or through the personal resources of the maker. This is not to exclude artists who sell their work – and I will certainly discuss the impact of markets on the role of art in the community – but to focus on the function of their work as experienced in these public contexts.

The second approach is to borrow from Gordon Graham his concept of a normative definition of art (Graham 1997). That is, to ask whether the artwork achieves what is expected of it by those involved. This avoids, as Graham indicates, both the ahistorical essentialist definition of art as an eternal verity ('it is what it is') and the notions that derive from Marxism which, in positioning art as the mirror of a socio-historical critique, so despecify the artwork as to make it undifferentiable from any other object. A normative definition of art saves art from the ivory tower of elitism and from the dissolution into the background noise of everyday life, while still holding it available for scrutiny.

My aim is not to make a narrow qualitative definition of art – one that would automatically equate art with a positive value – but to try to understand the underlying processes of art and, from this, to try to understand its function for and within the community. Thus, I will adopt Graham's practical definition as understood within the context of Dewey's pragmatic philosophical frame that art is an expression of the life of a community.

A normative definition of art, then, requires ongoing vigilance as to what we mean and how we measure success or failure. It offers no certainties. But, what it lacks in stability is outweighed by its demand for transparency. When so many discussions of art either take its definition as a given or, worse still, adopt the attitude that 'if you have to ask, you'll never know', it is my hope that this approach will prove helpful.

This thesis will, at various stages, discuss a range of artforms – visual, aural and performative. The purpose will be to shed light on particular evidence and

ideas in the terms currently available. For example, we are privileged to have access to a number of cave paintings of the late Palaeolithic, but it is a greater challenge to explore the music of that period. Some initial work has been done in this and similar areas, such as storytelling or the possibility of singing among Neanderthal people, but I will not draw on this material as it is, as yet, too speculative to be a reasonably reliable basis on which to build an overarching argument. While I will, on occasion, touch on literature and will explore the narrativising aspect of imagination, I am not for the most part discussing the way in which we communicate through words, but rather the non-word-based forms of music, performance and visual art. However, it will at times be useful to my exploration to touch on the nature of literary metaphor and narrative as examples of imaginative synthesis and evolved capabilities.

To this definition of art as a normative understanding of forms which express the life of the community, I will add a further psychosocial aspect which I have come to recognise over the forty years spent working in the arts: that it is a conduit between internal and external worlds.

Connection and Ecstasy

My own view is that art is a way of coming to terms with the world through the externalisation of the internal; as a non-word-based form of expression, it is also a way of communicating some of the deepest aspects of interior experience. We are all, to some extent, isolated inside ourselves. No other person, however intimate our relationship, can ever fully know the experience of another. Some things remain inarticulable. When it works well, art is able to express at least some of those inner experiences and feelings that lie beyond the scope of the spoken or written word. Art creates a space into which the imagination of the other may enter, at least tentatively. So the experience of art is a synthesis of mute, but eloquent, expression of the inarticulable by the maker and the imaginative interpretation within the interior by the viewer. The artist's work creates the warp and the viewer's imagination the weft. If both people are

involved actively and creatively, the fabric woven of these two is rich and complex.

This is not a simple process of elucidation, a descriptive or explicatory exercise. That is best undertaken within the linear logic of written and spoken language. Rather it is a kind of resonance (to use a metaphor of sound waves) that weaves (to mix this with a visual–craft metaphor) the interior experience of two people into a new, third, material thing or performance with the potential to engender a sense of connection, however tenuous and fleeting.

A mixed metaphor is never a pretty thing, not least because it seems so clearly to be a confusion of states of being. However, I am consciously mixing this metaphor because I want to suggest a form of (non-supernatural) transubstantiation. The sense I want to capture is that of something insubstantial (a wave, a flow of energy) and something concrete that is manifest as a physical form or a physical performance (for example, a tapestry or a dance).²² At the same time I want to suggest a relationship between energy as an undifferentiated force and our sense of interior experience. Like a shaft of summer sunlight or the chill of a night breeze, it is felt on the skin but cannot be captured in the hand: immersive yet elusive, sensed but not grasped.

For ease of reference I will call this the Weave-Wave metaphor.²³

22 The British neurobiologist Charles Sherrington (1857–1952) likened the brain to an ‘enchanted loom’. In describing the mental process upon waking from sleep he wrote: “It is as if the Milky Way entered upon some cosmic dance. Swiftly the head mass becomes an enchanted loom where millions of flashing shuttles weave a dissolving pattern, always a meaningful pattern though never an abiding one; a shifting harmony of subpatterns” (Sherrington 1942, 178).

23 As the reader may have noted, the Weave-Wave metaphor bears some marked similarities to theories of Quantum physics. Quanta have the eccentric quality of behaving at times like wave energy and at times like particles. They also have the peculiar characteristic, described by Werner Heisenberg, that they only become fixed in time and space when they are observed; the act of observation itself condenses the potential of the quantum into the actual. While these qualities have a seductively poetic affinity to the process of experiencing art that I am describing, I want to avoid the term quantum, which carries other associations that are less apposite and may lead to an over-literal construction of meaning. That said, I fully acknowledge that this way of thinking, which my introduction to Quantum physics as an undergraduate opened up for me, has enriched and informed my conceptualisation of the Weave-Wave metaphor.

To extend this metaphor further, in the physics of waves, when two or more wave patterns interact they can combine to amplify or suppress the effects of either one. Where two peaks coincide, they combine to become a super peak. Where a peak and a trough meet, one cancels out the other. At stages in between the relative positive value and negative value of the waves are combined. So, I would suggest, it is with this resonance between artist and viewer. Where aspects of the work carry from the interior of the artist something in harmony with that of the viewer, the viewer experiences a level of intensity, even if the exact source of that intensity is not fully comprehended (our interior is not always fully revealed, even to ourselves); where the waves are out of sync, that interior sense is reduced, pushed to the background.

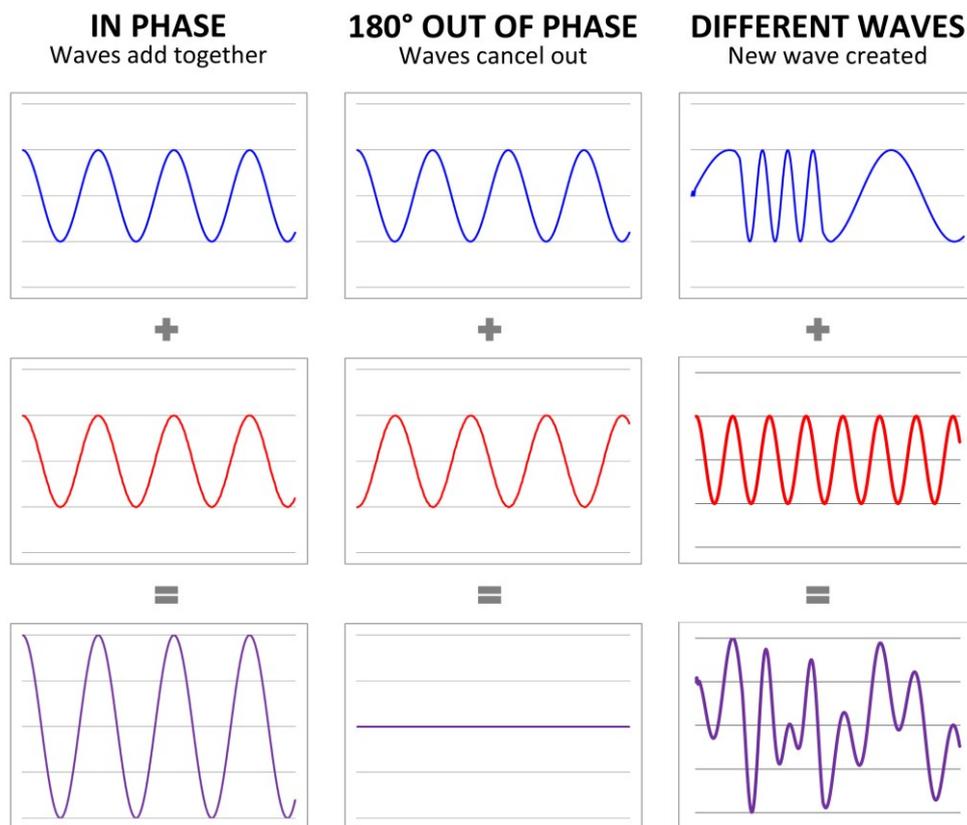


Figure 5. Examples of Wave Interaction

Whether this is positive or negative emotionally will depend on what interior feelings are in resonance. Looking to my own experience in Room 59 of the National Gallery in London, it may be that Carlo Crivelli was a devout man who painted to convey his religious fervour. But for me, with something of an antipathy towards displays of piety, that aspect is neutralised in the image. On the other hand, aspects of the artist's sensitivity to the plight of others, his acute sense of character and apparent love of the natural world do coincide with my own sensibilities and so I feel an intensification: what Marghanita Laski called secular ecstatic experience (Laski 1980) and what I prefer to call 'peak experience'.

To clarify (given that English is an ambiguous language at best) I mean 'peak' as in found at *a* peak and not *the* peak; I am not referring to feelings that are supreme – beyond all others – but simply ones that stand out from the quotidian background noise.

If the associations of that peak are positive for the viewer, the feelings will be pleasant. But if they touch on an area of fear, anxiety or horror, then they will be unpleasant. Such unpleasant feelings may operate as a kind of catharsis, as Aristotle proposed when defending tragedy, or thrill, as in the contemporary horror movie. Or it may reorient our perspective, perhaps even our moral sense, as can images such as Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War*. Or the effect may simply be unpleasant, with no saving grace, and I will turn away quickly.

The neutralising effect of the interaction of interiors may not simply be to wipe clean the slate. A painting that calms the anxiety I feel may do so by reducing the intensity of that feeling in me. A feeling of depression may be lifted, if not to the level of joy, at last to the level of normal function.

The Nexus of Art

This image of waves interacting is the best metaphor I can suggest to describe what I have intuited about the relation of artist and viewer when they meet at the axis of the artwork. It draws on imagery I learned as a student of physics, but it is

not intended to suggest a direct physical explanation or even that the laws of waves in nature might be imported wholesale into the psychology of art. Rather, it is an attempt to understand the diversity of ways in which an artwork can function as a form of interconnection between maker and viewer. And, as noted above, if the relationship is not polarised into one of active creator and passive receiver, if the art process or performance allows for both parties to be dynamically and imaginatively involved (albeit asymmetrically), then those peaks are likely to be more intense and the experiences not simply temporarily stimulating but transformative.

I do not want this metaphorical description of function to limit in any way the range of possibilities in play within an artwork. A sculpture, painting, etching or photograph may contain narrative or purely abstract elements; it may evoke feelings of the erotic, the parental, the filial; emotions of anxiety or joy; a sense of peace or excitement; it may move us to action or calm us to contemplation. It may, and almost certainly will, contain much that can be described in words, that is overt in its meaning with the intention of being just so. But, as I am defining it, if it is to be thought of as a work of art, it will carry within it this other level: the ability to reach into the inarticulable interior and connect us with the interior world of another.

It may seem that the Weave-Wave metaphor principally describes a more traditional approach to art, where virtuosi struggle to create masterworks. How does this metaphor relate to a contemporary artwork that includes the 'readymade' and the staging of scenarios and installations of found objects that appear to require no specific aesthetic skills or manual dexterity? How does it describe Anthony Gormley's project for Trafalgar Square's Fourth Plinth?

This question raises a challenge when trying to define art. If the art experience is one of interpersonal connection, can an individual have an art experience while contemplating an object which was manufactured with no intention of such communication, with no idiosyncrasy of skill in its formulation and no privileged line to an individual interior?

I would argue that here the process is still one of establishing a space in which feelings and ideas are communicated and, while the objects may be commonplace and mass market, the arrangement is specific to the individual who created it. More importantly, when we view such work, we are attuned to be sensitive to the fact that this was assembled by an individual (or group of individuals) for a reason and that it is presented in a context that suggests we should pause and be open to the possibility it will resonate with our own feelings in some way. The ready-made, plucked from the stream of the assembly line to be presented in a museum undergoes a kind of metamorphosis. It may not change physically, but the nature of how we attend to it is likely to be shaped by the place in which we encounter it. The artist may not mould the form like a sculptor, but he or she does shape the nature of how we come to experience it, simply by the connotations of the place in which it is presented.²⁴

The performances on the Fourth Plinth are similarly detached from the visual hubbub of Trafalgar Square and situated in a position associated with a particular way of seeing, of looking for meaning. In this case, the connotations of site focus attention not simply upon the narrative meaning of the performance but on the being of the performer. In the mind of the viewer it is (or has the potential to be) an ontological as much as an epistemological phenomenon.

So, if art, in essence, is established in the experiential space between creator and viewer – or in the case of participatory art, between co-creators – whose art is it?

24 Being a festival, Fotofeis allowed us to program unconventionally across a wide variety of venues and with their generous support. We found that community projects displayed in museums normally reserved for national and international art were viewed with much greater seriousness and found to offer much greater depth and complexity than they would normally have been the case when shown in a community setting. Equally, we found that international metropolitan artists working in small rural communities discovered unexpected commonalities, perceptions and histories that drew them into new creative and productive ‘conversations’ with villagers. In each case the experience of art was shaped by the way the context helped focus the attention of participants and establish their levels of expectation and, thus, investment in the process of engaging.

Identifying Whose Art

I would propose that, at its most fundamental, art belongs to those who are sharing in it at the moment of that sharing. It is theirs not because they make it or cause it, but because there is a real and meaningful communication. It is theirs in the moments of connection. It will be others' at other moments, when the connections will almost certainly be different, as new (metaphorical) waveforms combine and new patterns of experience are woven. Art as experience is both collective and individual: collective in the sense that, over time, it can engage the many; individual in the sense that, at any one moment or in any one experience, the connection is intimate and singular. I believe that it is this ability of an artwork to draw together the uniquely personal and the collective that makes it such a powerful human connector; and why, as Dewey proposes, it can so effectively express the life shared by a community. As such, it is important to hold in mind both the needs of the individual and those of the community when developing public policy for the arts.

The ownership described by intellectual property and institutional authority, by commercial transaction and cultural specificity are all simply expressions of the financial and power relations by which art is interpreted, presented, possessed and paid for. They may be necessary, but they are not sufficient for something we might accurately call art and they can all too easily squeeze out consideration of the individual–community that I am arguing is the very core of art.

Art has many uses and applications. Some are more fundamental than others. Just as a house is a shelter first, then a domicile and perhaps subsequently a status symbol (a place to show off interior décor and 'keep up with the Joneses'), so art has both substantive and peripheral aspects. But while a house may belong to the landlord, be designed by the architect, sit on land owned by the state and be subject to the bylaws of the community, with a dollar value estimated by a realtor and ultimately fixed by the market, it is those that live in it who make it a home for the duration of their period of residence.

The Weave-Wave metaphor is proposed as a way of imagining the plurality of interpretation of an art object within the experience of that object, without undermining the validity of either the object as art or the experience as truly meaningful. How then does this fit into the current moment in which we live? How might it inform the contemporary provision and institutions of art? And how might it usefully help in the development of public policy for the arts. To begin to answer those questions we must consider the conditions of the present moment.

A Reformation of the Arts

My speculative hypothesis is that we are witnessing the beginning of a reformation of the arts analogous to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth-century Christian church. That is, not a revolution resulting in the overthrow of one system by another, but the development of an alternative system which places the essence of culture in the heart and mind of the individual rather than in an authorising oligarchic profession.

I suggest that just as the sixteenth-century Reformation ‘de-professionalised’ religion (placing, for Protestants at least, the essence of religion in the interior of the individual) so we might see a ‘de-professionalisation’ of art. I do not mean by this that we will see an end to professional artists. The Protestant church has ministers and specialists, but their role is different from their counterparts in the Roman Catholic Church. Their expertise is (or ideally should be) at the service of the community, not its dictator; and there is often the facility for community member and specialist to swap roles (as with lay preaching).

The printing press allowed the free flow of information previously controlled by the Monasteries. The development of the internet (especially in the early twenty-first century) may well have a similar effect, as information is no longer constrained and filtered by the institutional authority of the Four Estates.

Those who consider that the artworld has lost its way, corrupted by its self-aggrandising power as arbiters of taste and seduced by the marketplace (just as

the venality of the Roman Catholic church of the sixteenth century and the selling of indulgences outraged Martin Luther and his followers) now have not only a way of expressing their concern, but also a medium through which to articulate new and alternative approaches to creativity.

The Protestant Reformation saw the heart of religious life move from an autocratic hierarchy to the personal conscience of each individual. Today, I believe, we will increasingly see creativity and cultural practice become a process involving the many not the few. Just as the Protestant Reformation offered a less institutionalised form of religion, so I believe a reformation of the arts will involve a useful deprofessionalisation of art – or at least the correcting of an *over*-professionalisation that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century in tandem with the reduction of art consumers to passive spectators, where once they had been active participants.

The reformation of the sixteenth century was not a revolution: Protestantism did not wipe out Roman Catholicism, but it did offer an alternative; as religious rule became a matter of personal conscience, it permitted the separation of church and state. Once the state became secular, issues of scientific exploration and mercantile expansion were no longer constrained by the clergy, leading to, on the one hand, the Age of Reason and the Enlightenment, and, on the other, industrialisation and the ascendancy of the middle class. That is, what followed as a result of the initial process of reformation led to outcomes far beyond the scope or interest of those who initiated it. At this stage, I do not wish to speculate on what consequential changes might arise from a Reformation of the Arts, but given the increasing emphasis on experiences over things and the imaginative projections possible in the virtual world, the field is not a small one.

While the strong central hierarchy of Roman Catholicism maintained, more or less, its unity over the years, the emphasis on personal conscience in Protestantism resulted in a cascade of schisms as new smaller religious structures were formed that more precisely suited the needs and aspirations of those who constituted them. Similarly, I would expect that we will not see a singular

alternative cultural structure form out of the social and technological ferment of the new millennium, but an unstable though potent set of interrelations that subsequently divides into smaller systems that more effectively generate meaning and affect for those involved. And while these new systems will offer a range of alternative forms of art and ways to engage with it, they will not overthrow the pre-existing artworld institutions, though they are likely to cause that original system to evolve in new, if less radical, ways.

Finally, the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church embodied very clear lines of communication (from the top down). The individual-focused and fragmented nature of Protestantism led to network communication based on a system of value exchanges – trade. While trade is based on the exchange of goods of equivalent value, symbolic currency (money) and capital became increasingly important as a flexible translator and accumulator of value. The Protestant work ethic is driven by wealth creation and operates in a network system. The new network systems of information exchange through the internet have created an environment in which little or no financial stake is required in order to become an active consumer and producer. As a result, many of the newest network communities of the internet are driven by other value systems than money. The Protestant meritocracy that replaced (or at least provided an alternative to) the Roman Catholic oligarchy is now facing a new democratising sensibility arising from the more level playing field of internet communication, and the social forms and connections that, while not spawned by it, have been given new life through it.

While this hypothesis takes the form of an analogy, I am not proposing that in every way the new reformation will mirror the old, but that there are a number of resonances or similarities. What the Protestant Reformation made clear is that the subsequent effects of such a shift of power can be wide reaching.

If this hypothesis is true, then it is necessary to think about how we will address these changes. How best to respond in the interests of the whole community. It is not reasonable to have some utopian end game in sight. As the Protestant Reformation (and the revolutions that followed in France, America,

Russia and China) the turmoil of radical change creates new and unexpected outcomes. The Reformation of the Arts need not, of course, have such a cruel or bloody outcome. If, through this change, we are to evolve a way forward that is in the interests of the community as a whole and not simply certain powerful forces within it, openness and receptiveness are indicated. But structure is also necessary, or at least a framework in which to facilitate harmonisation, however diverse individual strategies may be. Consequently, if we are to avoid being buffeted hither and thither by events, there is a role for policy in providing some underlying principles. It will be better for us if those principles are not applied from outside – from some ‘higher authority’, spiritual or temporal – but rather grow from our inner natures and the nature of our communities. The arts are, first and foremost, about expression and communication. They flow from us and to us. They are not an external system or structure into which we must fit. An ecological metaphor to describe the world of the arts is more accurate than the industrial one prevalent at the moment.

Implications for Government Policy

With this in mind, we need to reconsider those aspects of art that relate to the public and governmental responsibility to the public. As such, I am excluding from discussion the free market of art as a luxury commodity. This can and will no doubt survive on its own terms, providing income for some artists and not for others. My interests lie in the place of art in the community and the role of government, as the representative mechanism of the community in a democracy, in facilitating the means by which communities shape their interconnectivities. But governments are not the only way communities can be empowered and so I will also explore other ways in which groups may organise to use art. Here, we should be aware that there are means by which governments may, if they choose not to encourage and facilitate such activities, work to stifle them in the interests of maintaining other hegemonic power-structures, even when (perhaps especially when) they no longer serve the interests of the wider community.

One problem when considering government policy in relation to the community is that of the great variety within that community; even more so in a multi-cultural society that seeks to be egalitarian in its cultural provision and expression. How can a fair and even-handed policy be developed? This is especially true in the case of the arts, where there is always much greater diversity of heritage and opinion within the community than that represented in the complexion of the leadership and those administering the institutions within its purview. As the relativism of postmodernity held increasing sway in the theorising and discourses of art and culture, it seemed that a fair and workable system of government patronage of the arts was nigh impossible. Unfortunately, rather than encourage governments to rise to the challenge, such arguments have tended to see them flee the field and take refuge in the language of industrialism rather than culture; to abandon imagination for innovation; story-telling for spin; the community for markets. My proposal is to ask whether it is possible to find some basic principles that are shared by all human beings in general; that are, as I will describe it, *pre-cultural*.

Revisiting Recent History

Beyond that, what exactly is the history of public policy for the arts? My own experience is that most of my peers hold views about art – its role in society, the purpose of government funding and so on – that are very recent in their formulation and practice. Yet those peers tend to hold them as eternal verities.

In the second part of this thesis I look at the development of the arts in relation to the rapidly shifting cultural, social, political and intellectual contexts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries leading into the current century. This includes a review of the inception and development of the arts council movement as a way in which government (that is, taxpayer) money is invested in the cultural life of the community. This exploration will go back prior to the establishment of the first arts council (the Arts Council of Great Britain – ACGB) immediately following the Second World War, to the circumstances and modes of operation of

its precursors and the four-way struggle over culture that arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That history is then set within the rapidly changing context of communications technology, the new platforms for the interconnection of individuals across distance and the formation of groups not limited by geographic proximity. Finally, I will explore the limitations of representational democracy and the failures of meritocratic systems to explore new ways in which arts policy might be conceived and articulated in a useful and forward-focused way.

Exploring Art through Sociobiology

I trained as a scientist. Broadly stated, science has a tendency to look beyond the detail for simplicity; to focus on commonalities more than differences. The arts and humanities tend to focus on complexity and diversity and, in the last fifty years, discussions of art have become so relativistic as to make the very search for a more universal understanding of the role of art in human society almost distasteful.²⁵ Meanwhile, those who frame public policy in a democracy struggle with the balance between the relevance of and access to the arts by a taxpaying public who fund them and notions of excellence authorised by an increasingly professionalised art-world elite unrepresentative of the wider community.

A new area of study which takes a fresh approach to social behaviour, of which the arts may be seen as one facet, is the field of 'sociobiology'. Sociobiology offers a new entry point into the exploration of the arts in human society that involves a welcome emphasis on the things we share and not the things that divide us (Barrow 2005). It is a multifaceted discipline that brings many paradigms together around the central arc of evolution. As such it takes an extended view reaching back long before the recorded history of human civilisation to our

²⁵ Here, I mean complexity in terms of levels of complicatedness or convolution. I am not speaking of the theory of complex systems (sometimes called chaos theory). Given this important other meaning, I will try either to make clear the difference when the term 'complexity' is used or I will use alternative terms to avoid confusion.

ancestral past and, further back still, to our ancestral species. I will introduce sociobiology in more detail in Chapter 2. It is a very new field of enquiry and not without its critiques but, for those engaged in its development, it is a sincere attempt to understand the bigger picture. After all, it is not so many centuries ago that art and science were aspects of the same enquiry into the nature of the world, life and perceived experience. As one of sociobiology's best-known exponents puts it: "The greatest enterprise of the mind has always been and always will be the attempted linkage of the sciences and humanities" (Wilson 1999, 6).

These two periods of history may seem incommensurate and at a great distance one from the other. However, my aim is to suggest a causal relationship between the adaptive traits that were laid down in the many millennia of human development before the rise of civilisation and the way we perceive and engage art today. For, I will argue, it is those underlying adaptive traits that have become the building blocks with which we construct cultural meaning and affect. And, while those ideas and feelings will be variously constructed depending on the cultural context of the individual, the building blocks themselves are part of our shared human inheritance – our human nature.

Having laid out the postulates of What and Who that will guide this research; having proposed a model describing (in metaphorical terms) the Why of polyvalent art experience; and set forth a broad picture of the When of current 'reformation'; I turn to the How. What methodology is to be employed to progress this line of enquiry? This will be the subject of the next chapter.

Original Contribution to Knowledge

While the main focus of my research involves drawing from a wide range of existing material I am, as far as I can ascertain, the first to seek to draw together the recent theories arising in sociobiology with the current discussion of rapid social and technological change and its impact on public policy for the arts. It is this synthesis that I propose demonstrates my original contribution to knowledge.

This research represents a first attempt to develop useful, applicable concepts from a synthesis of sociobiology with the more recent history of government funding for the arts in Anglophone countries. It includes a review of the development of the arts council movement, an analysis of advances in communications technology and modes of consumption, and a critique of contemporary meritocratic systems of social order. It is a big picture painted with a necessarily broad brush. Importantly, this research moves beyond abstract speculation to suggest workable approaches to the framing of arts policy in the future. In the concluding chapter I outline some areas of further research suggested by this initial exploration. This thesis can therefore be seen as a first draft of a map that seeks to chart the journey between theory and the acid test of practical application.

CHAPTER 2

Methodology

In this chapter I will discuss the methodology employed in this research. That is, the constructive framework within which the research is undertaken and evaluated. That framework is itself informed by a range of theoretical structures drawn from the fields of art and politics, and from a new hybrid of science and the humanities gathered under the rubric of 'sociobiology'.

As I noted in the introduction, this is a big-picture exercise and it is necessarily broad brushstroke. My position is generalist, drawing on a wide range of ways of thinking and imagining to synthesise a new, and potentially useful, picture: a map on which we might divine a way forward. In a complex world we rely increasingly upon specialists who focus their intellectual resources in one specific area in order to maximise their understanding. The problem arises when one cannot see the forest for the trees; when the perspective any one specialism brings so fills our frame of reference that other perspectives are hard to perceive or even impossible to imagine. When Henry Ford introduced the production line to his factories building the Model T, he certainly increased the efficiency of production. It also generated an increase in worker pay that allowed them to become customers themselves, thus expanding the market. But, at the level of each worker, that

individual did not need to acquire the breadth of skills whereby he or she could build the whole car and so lost the overview of what they were manufacturing. The production line increased efficiency and took some of the pressure to learn from the worker, but it left the worker more firmly in the hands of the industrialist. It also had a deleterious effect on worker motivation, which now had to be driven by output related incentives to counter the boredom of the routine.

The job of the generalist is twofold. First, it is to try to draw maps that interconnect different areas of specialty and so inform the range of choices we might have in the way we approach a given problem. Second, and importantly, the generalist helps to find ways in which that bigger picture can be engaged and better understood by everyone. The generalist is not just another kind of specialist, but a bridge between specialisms in a dynamic process of the democratising of ideas.²⁶

The aim of this research is to map out realistic ways in which public policy might be revised and reshaped. I am not proposing a revolution – an overturning of political ideologies and structures in order to achieve a fresh approach to the arts. That would be unrealistic and, if it were to prove possible, highly unpredictable in outcome. Rather, I want to review the current frameworks and mechanisms in the light of new areas of research into the underlying nature of the arts and of our responses to them, and to suggest how they might evolve.

My methodology is a hybrid – a framework built from the synthesis of a series of interlocking paradigms. It draws on a diversity of disciplines ranging from psychology and evolutionary theory to economics, public-service history and

26 A. E. Van Vogt introduced a fictional science of Nexialism in his novel *The Voyage of the Space Beagle* (1950). Nexialism was imagined as a form of generalist thinking described as “applied whole-ism [holism]”. The Space Beagle’s name is a reference to the voyage taken by Charles Darwin and its mission is similarly to chart the unknown. The spaceship has many scientific departments from mathematics and chemistry to archaeology and psychology. With each new challenge the various departments offer their diverse perspectives on how it might be addressed. At key moments of crisis, however, it is only the Nexialist who can see enough of the whole picture to recognise the best way forward. His department is small and his discipline viewed with considerable scepticism by the other scientists. The key to the Nexialist’s new science is an innovative form of education; a different way of imagining information (Vogt 1950).

ethics. Hybrids can appear to be ugly compromises. One is reminded of the animal designed by a committee – a camel. But hybrids can also be a way of divining the sweet path through a complex shifting field. A camel may not have the sleek lines of a racehorse, but it is better suited to the harsh realities of the desert where resources are scarce and sparsely distributed. Similarly, the hybrid I will unfold, while it may lack the sleek lines of an ideology reducible to snappy slogans, does, I believe, offer ways by which we may not only sustain cultural life but encourage its flourishing, even in the relative political wilderness of the current age.

My approach is based on the belief that art arose as a human behaviour for a reason. While that reason may have changed as we evolved, its versions form a consistent substratum that we all share as human beings unless specific maladies or damage have modified or destroyed them. I will argue that this 'substratum' may well constitute a useful foundation on which we might begin to build policies that reflect our common humanity, while remaining vigilant in respecting our individual and group differences. I will introduce that field of study later in this chapter, when I begin to explore the relatively new discipline of sociobiology (see page 86).

In order to maintain a degree of focus, this thesis will limit the discussion of contemporary public policy to developed Anglophone countries: essentially Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom; with a particular focus on the two countries in which I have lived (the United Kingdom and Australia). That said, I believe that future research, building on this initial big picture account, will find useful parallels in other countries and cultures, especially in the developed Western nations. This is not to exclude developing countries from the benefits of good public policy for the arts, but to recognise, as I will explain in more detail later in this chapter, that poverty brings a different set of priorities to bear when considering policy.

I will begin by discussing the methodological framework in terms of a series of ideologies and paradigms for considering art within the frame of public policy. This will include a brief note on the impact of postmodern and post-structural

theory upon mainstream political praxis, before reviewing the broadly convergent strands of the New Right and New Left rhetoric within what has effectively come to be a shared neoliberal ideology. Given that this ideology puts a premium upon economic outcomes, I will explore the economic notion of ‘utility’ and, more broadly, the concept of ‘goods’. In each case, the emphasis will be on how those concepts might be expanded and reimaged. Finally, I will discuss the nature of the ‘good’ we are exploring here, before introducing the discipline of sociobiology, which seeks to reconcile the various perspectives of humanities and sciences within a common intellectual framework.

Structurally, the chapters following are grouped into two larger sections.

Part One (Chapters 3–5) will address more recent history to discuss the way in which governments in the Anglophone West became involved in the arts as society democratised. Again, the framework in which that development took place will be discussed from a number of perspectives: the history of the arts council movement; the impact of mass media and, later, of digital recording and communication technologies; problems that can arise in meritocratic systems in an age of the internet and the ultimate failure of elites. Part Two (Chapters 6–8) will explore the emergence of art in human evolution through the multifaceted lens of sociobiology, with a view to understanding which aspects of aesthetic experience and aesthetic value might be shared as basic human traits and which are learned or acquired in the environment.

As the research unfolds, I will draw out a series of working principles on which public policy might be based. In Chapter 9, those working principles will be reviewed and an attempt made to begin to integrate them to sketch a policy framework for the arts. I review my initial conclusions and go on to discuss future areas of research suggested by these initial results. Finally, returning to a more autobiographic mode, the epilogue outlines the way in which I plan to build on this research and develop it further.

The first problem facing an arts policy-maker is that there are a number of incompatible conceptual frameworks upon which policy might be built. Art-

theoretical and art-political frameworks have little in common, while New Right and New Left do their best to maintain a conflict between their converging political ideologies.

Conflicting Models

Cultural Relativism

Much of the art theory arising from ideas of post-structuralism, postmodernism and deconstruction propose that the experience of art is totally subjective. That all values and responses are relative – the result, it is suggested, of tastes and values promulgated by hegemonic power and maintained only as long as that power is in the ascendancy. There is no Grand Narrative. Such a view makes it impossible, on a practical level, to engage in big picture analysis, since any attempt to create a framework fragments into innumerable relative perspectives. How we respond to art, this line of argument asserts, is only a matter of opinion – of personal or acquired notions of taste – and all views potentially have equal legitimacy (Lyotard 1988).

Such an argument frustrates any attempt to understand the role of art in society, since, at its final reduction, any definition or analysis cannot extend beyond individual opinion. It makes impossible the task of developing public policy for the arts or deciding if and how public money might be spent on the arts for the benefit of wider society.

The artworld is a network of careers and businesses.²⁷ Consequently, the openness of what constitutes art that has arisen from postmodern thinking has led to a greater tightening on the notion of who can make art and who can

27 The term 'artworld' was coined in 1964 by Arthur Danto in his essay of the same name. He uses it to describe the theoretical and institutional framework in which art is understood (and, indeed, defined) by connoisseurs, specialists and others with a direct involvement in art as a theory, practice, commodity or area of expertise (Danto 1964). As such, I will be contrasting this group with the broader constituency of 'the many': citizens whose engagement with art, if and when they do engage, remains outside that 'inner circle'.

authenticate it. As one value (evidence) relaxes, another (authorisation) comes into play to maintain professional (jobs) and market (sales) values. If, as I postulate, art is an experience, then the openness implicit in much postmodern theory might result in greater freedom of the individual to come to art in their own way. However, postmodern theory also made clear the power frameworks in which all opinion is formed and the tendency for hegemonic power to shape, if not actually dictate, such decisions. The debates within the artworld and the authorisation of certain works and forms that resulted were, at once, an attempt to resist such hegemony while simultaneously creating it in another form. Recently, however, commentators both within the artworld and outside have begun to question the validity of what results, pointing especially to those spectacular, big-budget events such as biennales and art fairs, and to the growing tendency of curators and other intermediaries in museums to stand between artist and audience rather than facilitate a free ranging engagement and open discourse (Foster 1996; Bishop 2012; Byrne 2014; Zevitas 2014).

Putting a Value on Art

Increasingly, the perceived cultural value of a work of art is affected by knowledge of its price tag. Record auction prices bring renewed kudos to an artwork; exhibitions of works of high monetary value ('treasures') attract the crowds. But how are those prices achieved in the first place. Why do some works of art sell for millions and others not at all?

In market terms, art has symbolic value. Its value is not set by the cost of the materials or the amount of time taken to create it, but by other forms of evaluation. Ultimately the value is based on a set of perceptual measures that can be divided into three types:

1. **Artistic value:** this sets the artwork in a ranked relation to other artworks. That ranking may be purely contemporary or it may also propose a likely relative value in the future. Such judgments are broadly the domain of art historians, critics and the art press.

2. **Cultural capital:** in which the owner of an artwork gains status from such ownership. Museums and galleries, in selecting what they do and do not show, add to the social status that can accrue to the work of a given artist, group or style. In turn this reflects back on the status of the institution.
3. **Market history:** by reviewing the trajectory of prices for a given artefact, or work by a certain artist or group, one may try to assess the relative investment potential of an artwork, much as one does with other transferable assets such as housing. In this case, the value is set by the buyers who, in the case of art, form an oversupplied but limited market or oligopsony.

Such symbolic value is highly susceptible to the judgement of the institutional authority of museums, galleries, critics and academics, which can build up or cut down the reputation of an artist or an artwork in the eyes of those who may be interested in competing for ownership in a small but free market. This has, I believe, brought them into a somewhat complicit and not always transparent accommodation with that oligopsony. As a result, the interest of a small market of art buyers has come to eclipse the interests of the wider community in the institutional processes of evaluating and, indeed, defining art.²⁸

When art becomes news it does so either because it has attracted the moral outrage of social conservatives on the Left or the Right, or because it has proved itself within the free market by achieving a high selling price, even though that price is one established by an oligopsony. The former tends to lead to arguments for the reduction or further constraining of arts funding, the latter to an ever-closer tying of arts funding to market outcomes.

28 That influence can appear to carry real weight, for, as the economist John Kenneth Galbraith, noted, "Wealth, in even the most improbable cases, manages to convey the aspect of intelligence" (quoted in Zandi, Das, and Authers 2012, 262).

Free Markets

Government approaches to the arts have become ever more driven by the neoliberal dogma of the free market. Traditionally, conservative ideology saw the arts as emblematic of stability founded on a Burkean sense of nationhood built on shared history. Meanwhile, the socialist Left focused on social justice and Liberals on the freedom of the individual, including freedom of personal expression.

In the late twentieth-century, political views on how best to manage the economy and those of how best to manage society became separated into streams that unhitched the philosophical values of the one from the other. The New Right espouse the view that, in Margaret Thatcher's words, "there is no such thing as society" (Keay 1987) and that the economic mechanisms of the country should be a matter for the free market of individual self-maximising agents. This became known as neoliberalism (Harvey 2005).

Neoliberalism is, first and foremost, an economic doctrine emphasising free trade, open markets, deregulation and privatisation. The freedom of the market has not necessarily been matched by the freedom of the individual. Indeed, many in the New Right continued to push for stronger control over the personal liberty of citizens to decide for themselves on such matters as freedom of expression, equality of gender and sexual orientation, religious custom and forms of dress, abortion, pornography, pre-marital sex and so on.

While one might expect the New Right to combine economic liberalism with social conservatism, more surprising has been a tendency in some Centre-Left-oriented parties to embrace a similar conservative approach to artistic freedom, with a particular aversion to anything which might be construed as pornographic or politically disruptive. Meanwhile, the 'political correctness' of certain manifestations of cultural relativism have also had the effect of limiting freedom of expression even as they seek to protect the rights of one group in relation to another. However, while the New Left have embraced neoliberal economics, they have sought to harness it to deliver certain social benefits through the mechanism of instrumentalism.

Impact and Instrumentalism

In the face of increasing doubt about the effectiveness of Keynesian and Galbraithian interventionism and the rising influence of neoliberal thinking, a New Left of centrist-progressive politics sought a Third Way between traditional conservatism and socialism. This may be seen as an acceptance of the conclusions of the UK Labour politician, Tony Crosland (1918–1977), who, several decades earlier, had proposed that socialism had achieved a relatively ethical balance between capitalism and a welfare state. This accomplished, he argued, Labour should revise its aims having outgrown the need (as had been claimed by Marx) for the abolition of capitalism (Crosland 1956). The Third Way embraced neoliberal economics in a synthesis with the values of relative social justice.

In Britain, under the Prime Ministership of Tony Blair, neoliberal economic instrumentalism initiated under Margaret Thatcher was maintained with a new emphasis on social instrumentalism, which was in turn to become a significant focus for arts policy. Clive Gray argues that this instrumentalisation of the arts was a form of “policy attachment” by which the relatively weak portfolio of the arts and culture “attached itself” to more prominent and well-resourced departments of the welfare state government in the hope of tapping into their significantly larger budgets and gaining greater political weight through such an association. Under Tony Blair’s New Labour this was not the facilitating of a ground-swell point of view, but the top-down imposition of expectations upon the arts by government (Gray 2002, 2008). Defensive instrumentalism was not a new idea, but, as Eleonora Belfiore observed, while previous approaches “were built into a more constructive and creative attempt to elaborate a coherent theory of art and an intellectually sophisticated view of the effects of the arts on [the] individual and societies ... under New Labour [instrumentalism] retained its longstanding defensive character, but was deprived of the attendant effort to elaborate a positive notion of cultural value” (Belfiore 2012, 103).

From a neoliberal perspective, instrumentalism has the benefit that it shifts the measure of art from one of ‘value’ to one of ‘impact’. It set the arts within a

notion of 'joined-up' government (whereby outcomes were delivered through a holistic integration of departmental mechanisms) that could be measured in the transferable metric of 'utility' (see page 67).

It might be argued that certain residual old-school conservative attitudes remain with regard to the role of art in maintaining a sense of nationhood. However, much of the weight of those arguments has been redirected into considerations such as tourism, whereby a nation, region or locality promotes itself in the hope of attracting inward investment through a series of cultural leisure activities. These activities are either directly paid for by the user or provided as part of the amenity through which tourists are attracted to the location and encouraged to spend their money on accommodation, transport, food and souvenirs. This is a field measured by economic impact studies, which tot up all such benefits as a measure of the impact (and so policy worth) of the arts concerned.

In a neoliberal free market of commodities and services with a price tag, the arts have come to be defined as an industry; as sitting within the so-called cultural industries or the more recently coined creative industries. It is a model that measures success in purely fiscal terms: auction-house prices; proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) generated; export values; employment statistics. With timescales for delivery on investment constrained by relatively short three-to-five-year electoral cycles.

The position of art within contemporary Anglo-Saxon policymaking is, then, one couched in the rhetoric of markets. The value of art is either measured in direct terms as the price paid or in terms of impact, where art serves to help in the delivery of another area of government responsibility, so reducing costs or generating income at a remove. At the same time, the cultural relativism of more abstract and academic discourse spirals inwards on itself rather than outwards to the wider community. And so a seeming paradox has been played out over the past three decades as cultural relativism and neoliberal economics have made their cotemporal ascendancies. With a 'free market' in the authorisation of art

and in the valuation of goods both firmly in the hands of their respective elites, there is perhaps sufficient potential for oligarchic complicity to facilitate a temporary accommodation between neoliberal politics and the institutions of art.

How, then, can we find an effective way to develop arts policy? On the one hand, postmodern and post-structural thinking argue that the responses to art – the meanings we find within it – are so complex and variable that it would be impossible to define a set of policies that would be fair and even-handed to all. In contrast to the spiralling convolution of such analyses, the dominant political rhetoric of neoliberalism reduces all issues, social or aesthetic, to a set of economic values operating within a free market.

Meanwhile, accelerating technological change, especially in the fields of communications and miniaturisation have created radical shifts in the way ideas are developed and disseminated. That technological change is rolling forward at much greater speed than our ethical development or even the rhetoric of politics. It is also having a significant impact on our arts and culture; not simply how it is made and by whom, but how it is evaluated, dispersed, remade and sustained.

My approach is to try to find a way in which a practical workable basis may be developed on which policies can be built that are fairer than those driven solely by market forces and clearer than those described in the language of postmodernism and post-structuralism. To an extent, I will achieve this through an approach that has some relation to structuralist theories of the mid-twentieth century, in that it seeks to find useful commonalities that sit in the calmer waters, below the choppy surface of contemporary society buffeted by the winds of change.

Art as a Public Good

If we believe that art can contribute to our quality of life, how are we to argue our case and how are we to measure benefit?

Utility

In economic terms benefits, are seen in terms of 'utility'. Utility is a measure of usefulness – or perceived usefulness²⁹ – within the market. The greater the value placed on the good by a consumer, the higher its economic utility.

Within the philosophy of Utilitarianism, human happiness is considering the sole and fundamental measure of benefit. Exactly how happiness is defined and measured has been much debated among both supporters and detractors of this philosophy. While its initiator, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), defined it in direct terms as presence of pleasure and absence of pain, with all forms of human pleasure having equal validity, the principal proponent of his ideas, John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), began to add qualifications to types of pleasure, ranking them by notions of intrinsic worth. Others have extended the idea of happiness to broader measure of one's subjective sense of wellbeing (Diener et al. 1999; Diener 2000; Lane 2000b; Layard 2005a).

Such ideas have a long history. Bentham was drawing on the writings of Epicurus (341–270 BCE) for whom the purpose of life was peace and happiness, on the one hand, and freedom from fear and pain, on the other. However, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) had a more nuanced conception of the ideal, which he called eudemonia (εὐδαιμονία: literally, 'good spirit'), a human flourishing that was considered the cornerstone of the good life. Nor was happiness necessarily to be measured in terms of fleeting pleasures. Even the pre-Socratic Solon (638–558 BCE) had considered any meaningful measure of human happiness must necessarily be a cumulative equation that could only be tallied at the end of life.

Utilitarianism is not without its critics. Bentham's focus on pleasure as the single measure of utility raises fundamental questions about the subjectivity of quantifying different kinds of happiness. In particular it raises issues of how we

29 Irving Fisher (1867–1947) proposed that the concept be stripped right back, removing any particular affective qualities, to define utility simply as 'intensity of desire' regardless of what is desired or why (Backhouse 2002, 191).

might usefully balance the benefits of productive unhappiness and facile pleasure. “Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied,” wrote John Stuart Mill. “And if the fool [is of] a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides” (Mill 1871, 281). Much of the debate centres on how we define ‘happiness’. Those making positive arguments for Utilitarianism draw heavily upon the Aristotelian concept of the good life – something more complex than a tally of pleasures experienced – and Solon’s assertion that happiness can only be measured cumulatively, as the measure of a whole life and not simply individual pleasures along the way. This is an idea reflected in the opening paragraph of the American Declaration of Independence (1776) which sets out as a basic right not happiness per se, but “the *pursuit* of happiness” (my emphasis).³⁰

Bentham tried to create a hard measure of comparative happiness, which he called the ‘felicific calculus’. His idea was that laws might be based upon a mathematical calculation of total pleasure and total pain arising from a given decision, prioritising those actions which delivered the greatest net pleasure. This has been the most criticised aspect of his ideas and John Stuart Mill abandoned it in his process of refining, developing and promoting the theory of Utilitarianism. That said, the economist Richard Layard has recently suggested that contemporary neuroscience is beginning to find objective ways of measuring pleasure that might lead to just such a mathematical analysis of the relative levels of happiness arising from different decisions (Layard 2005a). While I will not pursue that particular line, it perhaps helps to demonstrate the relative moderation of my own proposals.

Contemporary political provision has tended to regard money as a direct correlate of utility on the principle that the more money a citizen has, the happier

30 In a letter to William Short of October 31, 1819, Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, identified himself as an Epicurean. He went on to write: “I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing every thing rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us” (Adams 2014, 388).

she or he becomes. Thus, in such a way of thinking, higher material wealth directly equates to greater happiness and so greater utility. By extension, GDP is understood as a comprehensive measure of collective wellbeing. However, in developed countries such as the USA, Canada, United Kingdom and Australia where, for the majority of the population, material wealth has risen steeply since the Second World War, measures of subjective wellbeing (SWB, an individual's cognitive and affective evaluation of their life) have actually fallen.

Wealth and Wellbeing

The graph below shows the rise in GDP per capita in the United States (scaled to 1987 values) set against measures of subjective wellbeing over the period 1940–1990. It shows that despite GDP more than tripling in real terms over the half century, the number of people who subjectively scored themselves as “very happy” actually falls (Lane 2000b, 5).



Figure 6. Happiness and GDP 1946–90

Index of ‘very happy’ responses in US national surveys and GDP per capita (Lane 2000b, 5). Original data sources: fitted line of index ‘very happy’ scores in various surveys, courtesy of Ed Diener. GDP per capita in constant 1987 dollars. (US Bureau of Economic Analysis 1995)

It should be emphasised that this is the situation in a relatively affluent country. The same response would not be found in a country where poverty was a majority circumstance. There, increases in GDP are matched by improvement in the subjective wellbeing of citizens, as one would expect. However, while increases in income have a direct impact on those in poverty, that response plateaus out once an adequate living standard has been met. It follows the pattern of what is known as a 'hygiene' factor: something that creates dissatisfaction by its absence but, once satisfied, does not continue to create positive satisfaction by increases in its presence (Herzberg 1966; Siemens 2005). The widespread belief, especially among governments, that, even once poverty has been alleviated, wealth remains a correlate of happiness is an 'economic fallacy', not borne out when measured, but nonetheless maintained as a widely held belief (Lane 2000a).³¹ Consequently, while wealth-creation remains an appropriate driver for the policies of developing countries, it may no longer be so for those of the developed world – or at least those segments of such populations not afflicted by poverty.

John Kenneth Galbraith (1908–2006) suggested that the pursuit of higher salaries beyond the stage of economic comfort was more about prestige than need. Salaries were a way of keeping score as financial capital became symbolic of social status (Galbraith 1958). Wealth is not the only measure of the good life. For many years Japan's commercial model was founded on its 'salarymen', whose dogged pursuit of promotion and higher income drove the economy. But recently, among the younger generation of employees, is a growing group called the *hodo-hodo zoku* or 'so-so folks', who actively avoid promotion to minimise stress and maximise their free time. For them the good life is one with a radically different work-leisure balance to that of the salaryman (Tabuchi 2008).

31 "That economists should be custodians of that kind of satisfaction called 'utility', is a grotesque accident of the history of science" (Lane 2000a, 105).

It is not simply that a focus on wealth-creation is becoming ineffective in raising utility; it may be diverting attention away from more serious threats to wellbeing. Mental ill health has become a major issue in the developed West. A twenty-five-year-old American today is between three and ten times more likely to be suffering from major depression than in 1950. Similar rates of increase have been recorded in Britain (James 2003), where the cost of mental health problems in 2002–03 came to £25 billion (Layard 2005b). In Australia, the Bureau of Statistics reported that 18 per cent of the adult population (2.4 million people) had experienced mental disorder in the preceding twelve months, with young people aged eighteen to twenty-four having the highest prevalence (27 per cent) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997). The Canadian Mental Health Association reports that 20 per cent of the population will suffer from mental illness during their lifetime. The cost to the Canadian health system in 1998 was \$7.9 billion CAD with an estimated further \$6.3 billion CAD spent on uninsured mental health services and lost through time off work for depression and distress not treated by the health care system. Suicide is among the leading causes of death in 15–24 year old Canadians, second only to accidents (Canadian Mental Health Association 2014).

A 2005 report from the British economist, Richard Layard (director of the Wellbeing Program at the Centre for Economic Performance, the London School of Economics), to the British Prime Minister's Strategy Unit strongly suggests that mental ill-health may be the United Kingdom's biggest problem, with a cost amounting to two per cent of GDP (Layard 2005b). He went on to argue that the focus of government socio-cultural policy should shift from wealth creation to wellbeing (Layard 2005a, 2005b).

This is an idea that is gaining wide support – in theory at least. In 2011, the United Nations General Assembly (echoing Jefferson's language for the American Declaration of Independence) asserted that "the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental human goal" and that GDP as an indicator "was not designed to and does not adequately reflect the happiness and wellbeing of people in a country".

The Assembly called on Member States “to pursue ... measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of happiness and wellbeing in development with a view to guiding their public policies” (United Nations 2011).

National governments have been slower to respond to the stresses and strains on citizens resulting from the prioritisation of money over all other measures of utility. Meanwhile, the evidence is mounting up. Children in the United States at the turn of the millennium were experiencing a level of anxiety that would have constituted mental illness in the 1950s (Twenge 2000). That anxiety may well stem from a sense of alienation and lack of self-esteem in a world in which material wealth has come to be the sole measure of success and human value. Richard Sennett argues that this situation can be improved not simply by individuals having greater self-respect, but by establishing greater *mutual* respect within a society where people are not equals (Sennett 2003). It is important not simply to be in a community, but to feel oneself part of it. How might the dialogues be initiated to help draw the individual into the fabric of the community? And how, in a multi-cultural community, are those dialogues to extend out from the potentially isolating experience of cultural difference, to some shared sense of being a part of the larger enterprise.

According to the Australian social psychologist, Hugh MacKay, active involvement in the arts can help counteract some of the most prevalent ills in contemporary society such as alienation, isolation and depression by promoting mental health and wellbeing. For him, there is no better way “of fostering a sense of community ... and reducing the pressures of a competitive, materialist society than encouraging widespread participation in the arts” (Mackay 2008, 365). In considering the creative industries, a model that is increasingly interpreted with an emphasis on wealth generation, the Australian economist, David Throsby, has recommended an approach to creativity that is driven by more than fiscal instrumentalism: “economics aside, the arts have huge importance in our cultural wellbeing” (Throsby 2005).

So, what *is* the role of art in the promotion and maintenance of wellbeing?

Art, Wellbeing and Companionship

If utility can be described as relating to wellbeing (or, in Irving Fisher's approach, the intensity of desires), how should we define wellbeing? Is it totally subjective or can we draw some general conclusions about where wellbeing is situated and under what conditions it flourishes? Clearly it will be multifaceted having both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. Good health will be a constituent of wellbeing, but is largely outside of the realm of this discussion, with the exception of aspects of psychological wellbeing.³²

My focus, then, is primarily upon the external correlates of wellbeing – those areas in which our relation to our environment plays an important part. The humanist psychologist, Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), famously defined a set of human needs which he ranked in the form of a pyramid, those lower down being more fundamental than those above. His argument was that we seek to satisfy the needs from the base up; with each lower need being satisfied before the one above it is addressed. It is not a wholly accurate description of human psychology and subsequent research has suggested that subjective wellbeing can increase as a 'higher' need (in Maslow's terms) is fulfilled even when a 'lower' need remains wanting.³³ Nonetheless the identification and grouping of these needs remains useful (Tay and Diener 2011).

The needs described by Maslow are, from the lowest up: physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem and self-actualization. The first two can be understood as 'hygiene' needs. Their lack causes distress, but a surfeit does not add to the individual's satisfaction. They correlate primarily with issues of poverty and social unrest. Belonging and esteem can be understood as part of the broader

32 And, aside from the gym junkie, good health might be considered a hygiene factor, causing unhappiness by its absence but not increasing happiness with its amplification, if such is indeed possible.

33 For example, the experience described in the prologue where young homeless adults who had manifestly unfulfilled needs for love and security, nonetheless pursued the aesthetic fulfilment associated with self-actualisation, when the opportunity was made available to them.

way in which one fits into and is valued by family, friends and community, but also in larger groups such as neighbourhood, village, town, peer group, work colleagues and so on. Self-actualisation is a state of being all that one can be (which is different from all one would like to be). In this analysis, community needs are understood as an essential link between subsistence and self-actualisation.

While self-actualisation may initially suggest an inwardly focused concern with the individual self, Maslow argued that self-actualisation should not be confused with simple self-expression or doing things that feel good. Striving to be the best person one can be may serve both the self and others (Maslow 1954). Indeed, as Fritz Perls (1893–1970) noted, self-actualisation is very different from self-image actualisation (being what you *imagine* you want to be) (Perls 1992). Self-actualisation may involve the acquisition of empathy.

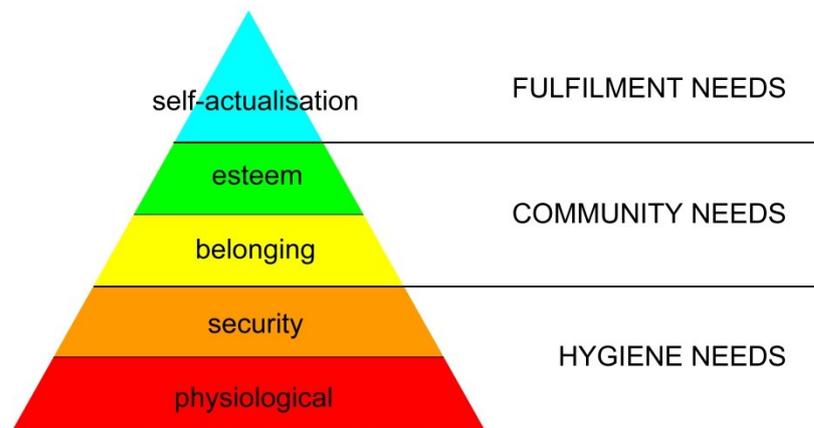


Figure 7. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Hugh Mackay, identified ten desires that “make us tick” of which six were a home, connection, belonging, love, control and respect, all of which relate to various scales of community, as, less directly, do ‘being useful’ and ‘having something to believe in’. The other two – the desire for more and for events (for something to happen) – might be seen as expressions of the desire for self-actualisation (Mackay 2010).

Already, the singular notion of utility has become segmented, though I would argue that many of those segments form subdivisions of more fundamental needs and desires. In addition, I would note that there is a difference between a need and a desire, though within the perception of the individual (as an agent within an economy) that distinction may be blurred.

Robert Lane has argued that, from studies undertaken in North America and Europe and cross-nationally, 'social support' was the biggest factor in quality of life as measured by subjective wellbeing (Lane 1991). Social support includes family life and a circle of friends, which Lane subsequently brought together under the term 'companionship'. While increases in money have a strong positive effect in relation to alleviating poverty, once a certain level of comfort is reached other factors come into play, most notably companionship (Lane 2000b).

The relative importance of companionship to subjective wellbeing depends on whether the culture is principally individualist (as is the United States) or collectivist (as in a number of Asian countries). In the early 1990s, Ed and Marissa Diener undertook cross-cultural analysis of the importance of friendship in both individualist and collectivist societies. To their surprise they found a "stronger relation between friendship satisfaction and life satisfaction in individualistic cultures" (Diener and Diener 1995, 662).³⁴ That is, individualism created an environment in which friendship was harder to achieve and so became more desirable. For collectivist societies, the connection between people is the norm and so friendship was a given, not something lacking and hence to be desired. Both companionship and money are subject to the laws of diminishing returns. In collectivist cultures where family and friendship ties are strong but money scarce, money will become a major determinant of SWB; in relatively affluent

34 The terms 'individualistic' and 'collectivist' are borrowed from Harry Triandis (Triandis 1995). These terms might be seen as closely related to Ferdinand Tönnies descriptions of *gemeinschaft* (community), with its ties of family, neighbourliness and friendship, and *gesellschaft* (society), marked by individualism and a "conflict of wills" (Tönnies 1887).

individualistic countries interpersonal ties will have a greater impact on SWB than increased income (Lane 2000a).

Geert Hofstede also points to the difference in value between individualistic and collectivist societies. He criticised Maslow's hierarchy of needs as being ethnocentric in that its priorities were those associated with individualistic societies, which are by their nature more self-centred. It failed accurately to describe the need to be accepted and to fit in that, in a collectivist society, is valued more highly than expressions of individual freedom and *amour propre* (Hofstede 1984). Patrick Gambrel and Rebecca Cianci point out that Maslow's hierarchy was based upon research undertaken in the United States. Having studied the psychology of workforces in the United States and China as models, they conclude: "In a collectivist culture, the basic need is belonging; self-esteem is eliminated, and self-actualisation is attained in terms of meeting societal development needs" (Gambrel and Cianci 2003, 143).

However, whether endemic or acquired, social needs seem to play a strong role in many cultures, both individualistic and collectivist. In a study of 60,865 individuals across 123 nations (a representation, the researchers claimed, of 66 per cent of the world's population), Louis Tay and Ed Diener undertook research into the relationship between the needs identified by Maslow and subjective wellbeing. They concluded that: "Across diverse regions of the world, it appears that ... social and respect needs are important for positive feelings. The experience of negative feelings is more related to whether basic needs, respect and autonomy are met" (Tay and Diener 2011, 346).

My focus in this research is upon public policy for countries in the Anglophone West. Here the dominant culture is individualistic. However, with increasing cultural pluralism, segments of the population will maintain collectivist traditions, at least for the first generations of immigrants. This should be borne in mind when developing policy.

Broadly, issues of interpersonal connection and community are integral to wellbeing in the Anglophone West. For the individualistic dominant culture, they

are desired because they are rare. For immigrants from collectivist cultures, they will become important since they are no longer implicit within the wider society in which they now find themselves. Such ethnic groups may form relatively closed clusters, operating as a micro-collectivist social system within the larger individualistic one. The China Town that exists in almost every major Western city may be seen as one manifestation of such a collectivist 'bubble'. However, as subsequent generations grow up in a predominantly individualistic culture, they will tend to negotiate a new balance between their collectivistic heritage and their individualistic environment. Activities which promote a sense of connection and community will become increasingly important in terms of how those activities integrate groups with different values into the community while maintaining a coherent sense of self.

So, in terms of utility there are strong arguments for a shift away from simply concentrating on money to a consideration of the nature and promotion of wellbeing. Currently the primary method of measuring wellbeing is in terms of self-analysis – subjective wellbeing (SWB). In the individualistic societies (and predominantly individualistic multi-cultural societies) of the Anglophone West, SWB is closely associated with various aspects of community life: a sense of belonging, respect, social support, companionship. While a number of different approaches have been taken in considering these areas, they all come back to a core aspiration to human interconnection and being a part of social groupings.

To help encapsulate these ideas (and further refinements I will introduce later), I will coin the term 'conversive community'.

Conversive Communities

To take the second part first... By 'community', I mean a wide range of types and scales of human sharing and connectedness from the extended family, friendship groups and neighbourhoods through professional and special-interest networks to larger concepts of the local, national and global community. In other words, community describes not a certain type or scale of group or its importance, but

the forming of groups of people around a sense of shared experience that connects them. Community is then both a form of, and expression of, human interconnection. It is fractal in nature, operating in self-similar ways across a wide range of scales.

I should note here that there is an unfortunate tendency in the Anglophone artworld to use the word 'community' (as an adjective) as a synonym for amateur and uninformed. At best 'community arts' are seen as wholly instrumental, as serving as a societal palliative, a form of therapy whose products have little value save the generation of a certain cosy sentiment. As a result, community art is segregated from 'real' art. For example, in the Australia Council, Community Arts and Cultural Development (CACD) is a single separate department, as though it was a different species of art form. It funds "collaborations between professional artists and communities based on a community's desire to achieve artistic and social outcomes" with a focus on people who are disabled, young, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, on the one hand, and communities that are 'emerging', culturally diverse, regional or remote, on the other (Australia Council). There is nothing wrong with those potential clients, but why should they not be considered within the main art form departments and what, if anything, do they have in common except that they are marginalised by the hegemonic artworld?

And so to the first term: 'conversive' is not a word in common use today. This helps to draw attention to its other quality, that it has two subtly different usages derived from slightly different etymologies. That plurality of meaning adds considerably to its value in the way I want to employ it. The first sense, derived from 'conversation', means ready to converse. Its second sense, deriving from conversion, means capable of change. It is also closely related to 'conversant' suggesting a familiarity born of being inside or among. Therefore, as I am coining the phrase, a 'conversive community' is one that is *communicative, adaptive* and *interconnected*.

Here, I would like to introduce a second term which is closely related to the conversive community. The word is 'conversation'. Conversation is the most basic

and, I will argue, most important way in which we use words. That may seem a strange thing to say. After all, surely poetry, literature, laws, science and religious texts are all much more valuable ways of using words than conversation. My argument is this. In a conversation, neither speaker has total control of the way the dialogue unfolds. What I say will be shaped by what you said before me. What you say next will flow on from wherever I took the dialogue when I spoke. Neither of us drives the conversation to the exclusion of the other. Although we may both be steering in a direction we choose, the final direction depends on the two of us working together. If one side drives the conversation in totality, then it is not a conversation but a monologue. The second quality of conversation is that its most important aspect is not the information exchanged. This may be interesting, but it is subordinate to the way in which the conversation allows us to connect. This is why, socially, conversation is so important, even though it is often dismissed as 'small talk'. Its 'smallness' is its virtue, since it is a means, not an end. It is through conversation that we get closer to others and subsequently maintain that sense of closeness. It is the way we begin to share values and concepts, to trust that what I mean and what you think I mean are the same thing. Without that trust and sense of shared understanding, one cannot construct the more complex forms of language with which we build laws or evoke complex feeling through poetry.

We do not, of course, in order to ascertain meaning, enter into one-to-one conversation with every person whose words (heard or read) reach us. Rather, it is the example of conversations we have with those in our various communities that establishes the basis on which those other, weightier and more distant communications are not simply comprehended, but engaged on an emotional level through the internal 'conversation' between the author and the reader, viewer or listener. A conversive community is one in which not only is there a richness of interconnection between its members, but one that encourages the individual in their development of this kind of internal conversation with words, sounds, images, artefacts and ideas.

Having looked at ways in which the arts might deliver utility and the focus such utility might have on the creation and maintenance of conversive communities that increase our sense of wellbeing, I move on now to consider the nature of the things that deliver utility and the economic structure into which they fit.

Public Goods

Things which provide utility are called goods. There are four main types of good depending on two interrelated criteria. First, is the good by its nature limited, so that one person's consumption reduces the amount left for others to enjoy? If the good is limited then those who wish to enjoy it become rivals and the good is described as 'rivalrous'; if not, the good is 'non-rivalrous'. Second, is it possible to exclude people from enjoying the good? This might, for example, be because they have not paid for it or because they are not considered an appropriate person by some controlling authority. On this consideration goods are described as either being 'excludable' or 'non-excludable'. The permutations of these two pairs of qualities results in four defined types of good: private goods, club goods, common goods and public goods. The table below shows the relation of the four types of good and gives both general and more specifically arts-related examples of each type.

	EXCLUDABLE	NON-EXCLUDABLE
Rivalrous	<p>PRIVATE GOODS General: food, clothing, cars, laptops Arts: personally owned artworks</p>	<p>COMMON GOODS General: common grazing, fish stocks in international waters Arts: public library books</p>
Non-rivalrous	<p>CLUB GOODS General: sports clubs, Foxtel, driving license Arts: paid-entry museums, use of copyright images, women's painting group</p>	<p>PUBLIC GOODS General: free-to-air television, internet, firework displays Arts: art-making, public art, free-entry museums</p>

Table 1. Four Types of Good

The focus of this research is on Public Goods with some interest extending into the areas of Common Goods and Club Goods where these help to deliver the kind of wellbeing I am discussing. While recognising that private ownership of art can also bring a sense of wellbeing, I am not focusing on this area as it is too narrowly exclusive. My aim is to look to the areas of policy that benefit the wider public and not simply those with sufficient disposable income to buy art.

As such, public goods may be seen as a way of resolving inadequacies in provision by a free market, providing access to cultural experiences for all citizens, regardless of their economic status. Views vary on the desirability of public goods and how they are to be provided. The economist Ronald Coase (1910–2013) argued that public goods could be rendered unnecessary if property laws better defined ownership of those things currently considered to be held in common (Backhouse 2002). Harold Demsetz has argued that it is sometimes feasible for public goods to be generated through private production where such production is part of a group of interrelated economic interests served by the existence of the public good (Demsetz 1970).³⁵

The focus of this research is on those aspects of the arts that are public goods (freely available and unlimited), with some interest extending into the areas of common goods (part of a pool of resources that, while ultimately limited, are not exclusive to any one group or person) and club goods (which are unlimited, but from which it is possible to be excluded) where they help to deliver the kind of wellbeing I am discussing. In this respect, I would note that in many cases the ability to exclude someone from a club good is a way of leveraging payment for that good. However, it can also be a way of holding the good to a certain group or type of person, say by gender, class, race, colour, sexuality or

³⁵ Art, of course, comes in many forms and price levels. A hand-made tea cosy from a church fête is unique and may be considered a form of artwork (I have been given such a tea cosy by an artist), but for the general purposes of this research, I want to draw a distinction between the art market and the role of art in wider society. At the same time, as I have indicated previously, I will address those areas where the art market impinges on the provision and delivery of art experiences within the community.

whatever. Such exclusion may be overt or covert, wrapping the aim of the exclusion in terms that suggest some other criterion for access. However, my aim in this research is to look to the areas of policy that benefit the wider public.

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So, to review the above, the methodology is set against the context of a predominantly neoliberal contemporary politics. As the thesis unfolds, I will identify a number of principles which, taken together, can usefully form the basis of a new approach to public policy for the arts. While this research may prove extensible into other national and cultural contexts, my focus here will be on the situation in Western Anglophone countries.

The research seeks to explore notions of utility that go beyond simple monetary measures to explore the role of the arts in personal and collective wellbeing. The definition of wellbeing is left relatively open. It is not tied to narrow measures of pleasure nor is it necessarily measured as a short-term effect. It is understood as closely aligned with the need for human connection and companionship that grow best in communities that communicate freely and expressively. These I have called ‘conversive communities’, emphasising the fundamental importance of conversation (understood as a mechanism of exchange not limited to the spoken word) as a way of building mutuality between individuals and the common ground on which more complex relationships may be built.

As objects and activities that produce wellbeing, the arts can be considered as goods. Those available free and without limit are public goods, while club goods have some level of exclusivity and common goods are finite resources. The art market for private goods will not be part of the research except where it directly impacts on the enjoyment of public, common or club goods.

Having discussed the framework for considering the arts in the contemporary community (broadly the subject of Part One), I will now go on to describe the methodology by which I will explore the question of those aspects of aesthetic response that might reasonably be considered shared by all or most

human-beings (the subject of Part Two). In doing so I will propose how this information may help identify a fairer contemporary public policy for the arts in the pursuit of personal and collective wellbeing within a conversive community.

Art as an Evolved Behaviour

If we accept that there is considerable richness and variety among and between the different cultures of the world and, within each culture, a range of individual sensibilities, then we may expect – as we indeed find – great diversity in the expressive arts of the many cultures globally. With the diaspora of migration, such complexity is no longer geographically segmented, but flows like a network of energy lines, forming nodes within metropolitan, urban and even rural localities. Our communities have become multicultural and our public policies must evolve to best serve the diverse nature of those communities.

Art on Two Scales

My method for exploring this issue is to look at two distinct periods of human history and prehistory: the relatively recent emergence of public policy for the arts associated with the democratisation of government in the industrial and post-industrial West, and the long period of human and hominin development in the prehistory of the Pleistocene (roughly defined as the period spanning from 2.5 million years to 12,000 years before the present). This may seem a strange approach, given that so much analysis of the role of art in society is based upon discussion of the history of art and civilisation; a history that usually finds its perspective atop the peaks of relatively recent human cultural achievement (Classical Greece of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE; the European Renaissances of the twelfth and fourteenth to sixteenth centuries; the restless ambitions of Modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and so on). Those histories have been extensively documented and discussed in immense detail. They tend, even now, to lay more weight on the cultures that sprang from Europe

than those evolving elsewhere in the world. As populations mingle and diffuse through the osmosis of migration, the question of how the arts are conceived and policy framed becomes more complex. Various approaches have been taken to these challenges from the hybridisation of cosmopolitanism, the tolerance of pluralism and the kaleidoscope of multiculturalism to the xenophobia of insular nationalism and the racial intolerance of notions of national 'purity'.

One approach, as I have discussed above, is simply to leave it to the 'free' market – an oligopsony that involves a very limited section of the population. Another is to find evermore-complex systems of checks and balances to divvy up the cultural share among a rapidly diversifying set of stakeholder cultures through some sort of quota system. Such an approach easily ends with the worst of all worlds in that it is both complex and clumsy. It does little to satisfy the genuine concerns of those marginalised by the cultural hegemony of the artworld and it offers no politically expedient means by which governments might address these issues while appealing to voters. The means are too complex and the outcomes too equivocal. Consequently, it fails to provide relevant benefits to engage the interests and energies of public or politicians. My method here is different.

Rather than looking at the complex development of art and the diversity of culture, I will look much further back to explore the common heritage of our species to see if there is some 'pre-cultural' aesthetic constants which might serve as a basis for developing policy for the arts that is more even handed without becoming byzantine in its bureaucratic convolution or so diffuse as to be beyond the scope of public political discourse.

The notion of the 'pre-cultural' may sound dangerously fundamentalist. It could so easily smack of the 'common sense' of a status quo whereby the dominant culture defines itself as the 'natural' culture and all minority cultures as somehow novel or aberrant. Worse, it might lead to determinism; a criticism I will address at the end of this chapter.

The notion of a shared, pre-cultural aesthetic-response repertoire may seem to be at odds with the highly personal nature of art described in the

previous chapter. However, here I would argue that we should clearly delineate between the variety of individual interpretations of our basic responses and those responses themselves. As individuals we are defined by our differences, but as human beings we are bound by our common humanity. This humanity (human nature if you will) is not simply an accepted set of values and practices, but part of the evolved traits of our species. It is written in our genes.

As I will discuss in Chapter 6, many of our evolved aesthetic responses have developed over millions of years, predating not only our own species but our whole genus. The evolution of the eye and the apparatus of the brain for processing the nervous data it produces into mental perceptions, predate our genus (*Homo*), our order (*Primates*) and our class (*Mammalia*). Yet, as I will show, those evolutionary foundations shape the way we respond to colour and even how we define colours relative to one another.

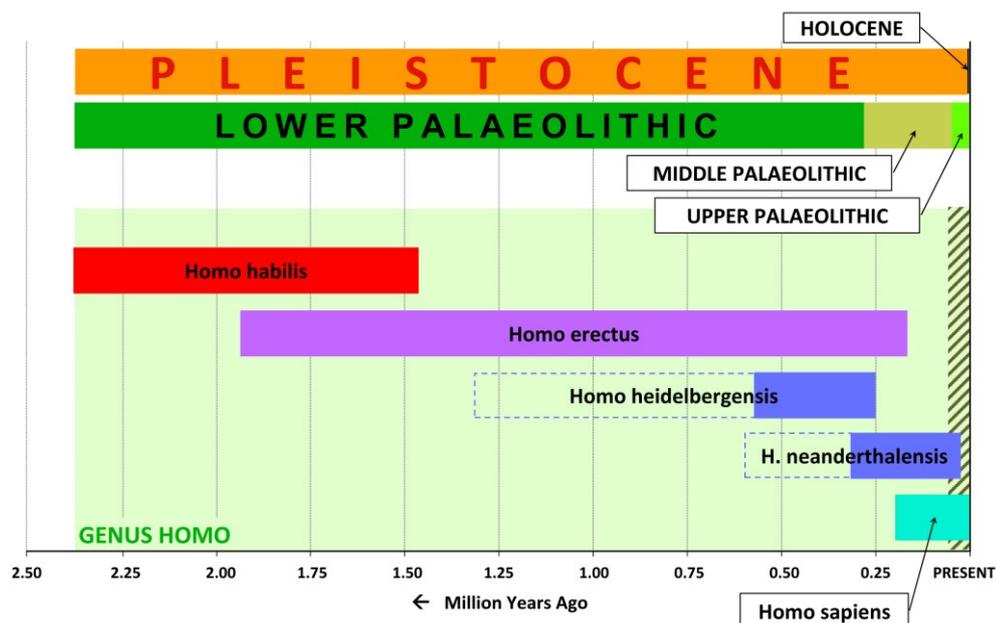


Figure 8. The Genus Homo during the Pleistocene

The crosshatched area on the right marks the period of successful 'out-of-Africa' migration.

As can be seen in the timeline above, our direct ancestors (*Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus* and so on) spent ninety-seven per cent of their developmental history in the African savannah. Evidence from fossil remains and genetic analysis indicate that anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) evolved exclusively in Africa between 200,000 and 60,000 BP and then migrated to colonise the other continents (Hetherington and Reid 2010).³⁶

In those 60,000 years they evolved at relative speed to suit new climates and territories and so differentially adapt into what we think of today as separate races and cultures. But the processes of natural selection that shaped the brain are much slower. We may be modern citizens “living in a very advanced modern world”, but at Robert Winston reminds us, “we all do so with Stone Age brains and bodies” (Winston 2011, 39). The evolutionary psychologists Tooby and Cosmides go further, writing: “our modern skulls house a stone age *mind*” (Cosmides and Tooby 1997, my emphasis). This is a profound idea, one that sheds new light not only on the arts, but on the way we think about them, describe them and critique them. The experimental psychologist and linguist Stephen Pinker predicts “that the application of cognitive science and evolutionary psychology to the arts will become a growth area in criticism and scholarship” (Pinker 2002, 418).

How can these facts be usefully employed in my exploration of public policy for the arts?

Sociobiology: An Alternative to Cultural Relativism

A new area of study which attempts to understand social behaviour, of which the arts may be seen as one facet, is the field of sociobiology. As applied to human societies, sociobiology is a synthesis of disciplines from the biological sciences and

³⁶ While there are signs that initial migrations of *Homo sapiens* may have begun as early as 125,000 years ago, evidence thus far is that the first migrants to survive and sustain lines to the present day left Africa around 60,000 BP (Armitage et al. 2011).

the humanities including anthropology, archaeology, behaviour studies, consciousness studies, demography, ethology, genetics, evolutionary theory, neurophysiology, palaeontology, psychology, sociology and so on, set within the overarching theory of evolution. To this list I am bringing ideas and perspectives from the fields of aesthetics, economics, ethics, philosophy, political science, social history, social justice and wellbeing. One of the most celebrated exponents of sociobiology is Edward O. Wilson, who has developed the theory into a unifying paradigm for science and the humanities he calls ‘consilience’ (Wilson 1999). Recently, more specialised subsets and offshoots of sociobiology have been developed. One such, is the field of evolutionary psychology. Established by the anthropologist John Tooby and psychologist Leda Cosmides, it seeks to identify and explore those human psychological traits believed to have arisen as evolutionary adaptations (Cosmides and Tooby 1997). A further subset specifically explores the evolution of the creative arts. Borrowing the term that Aristotle coined to describe the arts before such a concept fully existed, this new area of research has been dubbed ‘biopoetics’ (Cooke and Turner 1999).

Whereas the focus of much classical sociology is on the difference *between* groups, practises and cultures, sociobiology tends to look for the commonalities. Thus, the term ‘arts’ is used broadly to describe visual, musical, narrative and performative forms and their hybrids as they may appear in particular situations (such as ritual) or the everyday (such as decoration of domestic utensils). As Brett Cooke has noted: “Part of the problem with recognising the nature of art lies in modern conventions that make it out to be far more rare than it is” (Cooke and Turner 1999, 8).

Sociobiology is not without controversy and its detractors argue that it places too heavy an emphasis on genes and insufficient consideration to environmental influences: the nature-versus-nurture debate. However, what is discussed here are behaviours and phenotypes – a phenotype being the resultant expression of genetic traits as shaped by the specific environmental context. Indeed environment may play a large part. In Chapters 6 and 7, I will draw on the

evidence of sociobiological research (most of it from the past two decades) to delineate between three elements or developmental aspects of art as behaviour: first, the basic building blocks of aesthetic pleasure that are common to all humanity, carried within our genes and thus deeply engrained in our human nature; second, the adaptive and selective drivers that first established the practices of art as an instrument or by-product of evolutionary development; and finally the contextual and environmental exigencies that shape the meaning and value of those processes.

But why, one might ask, should we think of art as having anything to do with evolution and genes? Surely it is purely cultural. Ellen Dissanayake points to three qualities of art that strongly suggest that it is an evolved adaptive behaviour. First, it is ubiquitous. Every society known today or from the past exhibits at least one, and usually more than one, of the practices we call the arts. Second, it takes effort. Indeed for Dissanayake it is axiomatic that art involves expending more effort than that demanded by simple functionality. This combination of ubiquity and ‘costliness’ implies, in evolutionary terms, that art must have an adaptive benefit. If the burden of cost was not outweighed by some greater benefit, the ‘art-engaged’ individual would be placed at a competitive disadvantage compared to other individuals with no such tendency. Thus, if art were simply a ‘biological accident’ or mutation with no adaptive benefit, it would not have survived and would certainly not have spread so wide. Finally, art is pleasurable and nature “makes many kinds of advantageous behaviour pleasurable” (Dissanayake 1988, 6).³⁷ Similar arguments are made by other key writers in the field (Wilson 1999; Tooby and Cosmides 2001; Miller 2001b; Coe 2003; Boyd 2005; Dutton 2009).

37 I should note here that Dissanayake is using a convention of expression, often adopted when discussing evolution, that speaks of outcomes in relation to their benefits *as if* those benefits were planned. In fact, of course, evolutionary processes have no teleological dynamic. The trait that proves beneficial and the pleasure response both arise by chance. They survive when other complexions of trait and emotion do not, because they better serve the individual’s ability to successfully produce a subsequent generation carrying those genes.

This feeling of pleasure is fundamental and so, in seeking to understand the evolution of art, I will begin by exploring why we feel aesthetic pleasure at all. I will then argue (as many others have done) that these pleasurable responses have become the basic building blocks of aesthetic response. They are so fundamental, arising so far back in the evolutionary journey of our species (and indeed our genus), that they are shared by all human beings. That said, they can and, of course, are *interpreted* differently. In identifying the fundamental evolved mechanisms that are variously harnessed to build cultural meaning, I will look first at the responses themselves, putting forward some of the hypotheses as to how and why they survived as evolutionary adaptations and the qualities they have that precede, if not prefigure, the construction of meaning.

I therefore propose sociobiology as a useful perspective from which to consider the arts and one that, because of its broad unifying synthesis of disciplines, will allow me to construct an argument across paradigms with a reduced risk of incompatibility or ‘translation’ problems between cultural perspectives. In Part Two of this thesis I will draw on the ideas and insights of sociobiology to hypothesise a shared, pre-cultural inheritance for human aesthetic experience that might usefully inform the development of public policy in a modern, multi-cultural context.

Some Criticisms Addressed

A number of criticisms and concerns may be raised with regard to the above methodology. I have tried to answer some of those as I went along. Here, I address four specific issues that one must consider when discussing sociobiology and wellbeing economics.

The Confusion of Use and Instrumentalism

Given that the arguments from sociobiology are premised on art being an evolved behaviour and that all evolved behaviours flourish because they have (or had in

the past) survival benefits, this must mean that the arts have a use.³⁸ Indeed, I would argue that they do and this is a central tenet of my thesis. So, if the arts have a use, is what I am discussing simply instrumentalism?

I would argue that one can and should try to draw a line between the intrinsic use of art and the way it might be applied to extrinsic circumstances. I will argue that the arts are an important way in which we can share certain interior experiences and emotions that do not translated satisfactorily into words, and that such sharing can develop empathy and so a greater sense of connectedness with and within one's community. However, I see this as distinct from setting the arts to the task of solving specific social issues that lie outside those intrinsic mechanisms and setting measures for its success in those extrinsic terms.

This is inevitably a grey area. As Eleonora Belfiore has pointed out, one can trace a broadly instrumentalist approach to the arts back for 2,500 years at least. In Britain it has become embedded within institutional practice and public sensibility since the late eighteenth century as will be demonstrated in Part One (Belfiore 2012). However, as I develop my arguments I will try to make clear the distinction between intrinsic usefulness and extrinsic instrumentalism.

The Naturalistic Fallacy

Sociobiology is sometimes accused of falling into the trap of the naturalistic fallacy. Proposed by the philosopher, G. E. Moore (1873–1958), the naturalistic fallacy is the mistaken view that things which naturally feel pleasant or desirable can consequently be deduced to be good. Indeed things which are 'normal' or

³⁸ Not all analysts consider the arts to be an evolved behaviour. Stephen Pinker, while agreeing that the arts engage pleasure mechanisms that arose as evolved adaptations, considers that the arts simply exploit those 'hot buttons' as a "pleasure technology, like drugs, erotica or fine cuisine – a way to purify and concentrate pleasurable stimuli and deliver them to our senses" (Pinker 2002, 405). While I agree that a number of our basic aesthetic pleasure responses engage traits previously evolved for other adaptive reasons, I will argue (as have many others) that the development of art as a behaviour was itself an evolutionary process as our ancestors adapted to new environmental and physiological challenges.

even 'necessary' may not, simply because of those qualities, be considered 'good' (Moore 1903). The fallacy is closely related to Hume's Guillotine, which seeks to make an incisive distinction between 'is' and 'ought'. Just because something can be said to be the case does not mean that it *should* be the case; the descriptive should not become confused with the prescriptive. In essence, a natural property should not be taken to indicate a moral property (Hume 1738).

In terms of sociobiology, the criticism is that by demonstrating that a particular trait has evolved is not a justification that it must be good. Such a 'justification' is, of course, in some cases manifestly not the case. Evolving a pleasure response to foods that are sweet or creamy had considerable survival value in the Pleistocene era when life was highly physical and energy sources such as sugars and fats were in limited supply. In the modern urban world where such foods are plentiful and our lives sedentary, such pleasures have a dangerous tendency to lead to obesity. But the point of the naturalistic fallacy is that the relationship can never, in any circumstance, be sustained as a proof of argument in itself.

In looking to sociobiology to discover shared traits, I am not arguing that those traits can automatically be justified as good, useful and appropriate to contemporary society. Rather, I am setting out those things I believe are important for contemporary society as goals and *then* seeing if shared evolved traits can usefully be understood to help us achieve those ends.

The Danger of Determinism

In placing an emphasis on evolved traits which pass to us via our genes, concerns may be raised as to whether an overly determinist argument is being made. While few would argue that genes wholly define the nature and life of an individual, there is a wide range of opinion on their level of impact. At one extreme is the tabula-rasa view that our mind at birth is a blank slate and that our sensibilities are all learned. At the other is a view that genetic inheritance plays an influential role in determining an individual's abilities and sensibilities. Most recognise that

genetic traits are modified by the environment and are 'expressed' in terms of a phenotype. But does that phenotype preclude or proscribe our 'free will'?

My position is that of a compatibilist. I believe that free will exists within the limits of human action and imaginative capacity described by our phenotype: the complex interaction of our genetic adaptations and our environment, including our culture and education. Some elements will be shared with others through genetics (we might think of them as our 'human nature'), some through enculturation and some through learning. Those things do not describe the whole, but they are not insignificant. As Albert Einstein put it, paraphrasing Schopenhauer: "man can do what he wills but he cannot will what he wills" (Einstein 1932).

Consequentialism: Do Ends Justify Means?

Much of the emphasis of this thesis is on the role the arts have to play in helping to create and sustain flourishing conversive communities. To that extent these are consequentialist (even modified Utilitarian) arguments. However, I would make two clear distinctions. The first is that I am not arguing that ends trump means; that any means are acceptable if they produce the desired ends. Means must be analysed and adopted or rejected in terms of a collective ethical framework. Means which do not find resonance with the collective ethic will be unlikely to achieve an end that satisfies the community and so, in that sense, a consequentialist argument can itself explain the safeguard in the process.

Second, I am not pointing to a utopian endgame, but rather small steps followed by a reassessment. Indeed, much of my argument is about fixing what is wrong rather than pursuing an ideal. In this, it draws on Karl Popper's concept (discussed in Chapter 1) of piecemeal reform. It is an iterative process of fixing things that are wrong, each fix followed by a review, the results of which might suggest the next modest step. The conversive community is not so much an end in itself as an *environment* for change; a description of the kind of interconnected, intercommunicative group in which individuals are in a dynamic relation to each

other and to their collective sense as a whole in a way that is as transparent and equitable as possible.



It is easier to understand the recent past than prehistory; indeed it may be easier to understand the recent past than the present. The primordial is so removed from our lived experience and the present too close to gain critical perspective. So, I will begin by exploring the relatively recent history of democratic government as patron of the arts before, in Part Two, exploring ideas about how and why, as a species, we evolved art behaviours at all, and what this might usefully suggest for our present context and condition. My concern is not so much the ideas for their own sake, but for the way they might illuminate consideration of arts policy. For, as I proposed in my opening question, I believe the arts – especially those supported by democratic government – should actively engage the wider population and not just the few, and should do so impartially and in a meaningful and enriching way.

PART ONE

CHAPTER 3

Art, Government and the Public

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the public space of art in the Anglophone world – the location of its apprehension, comprehension and valuation – was shaped in large part by two distinct forces: the market and the arts council movement. Our own era of the early twenty-first century has seen a third dynamic come into play in the form of the internet. I will discuss that phenomenon in Chapter 4. Here, I want to focus on the nature and genesis of the notion and nature of an arts council, which was to become a model that shaped both the funding of art by government and the understanding of art by the public in Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and, to some extent, the United States in the decades following the Second World War.

The model of the arts council arose in Britain during the Second World War, though its antecedence goes considerably further back. It came into being at a tipping point; not the assertive change of balance of a new dawn, but a curiously shaky and uncertain moment of doubt and compromise.

That tipping point is explained differently by different commentators. For Richard Witts, whose *Alternative History of the Arts Council* is recounted as a dramatic interplay of personalities, it comes down to a struggle of wills

between two Etonians: the landowner John Christie, who established an opera company and festival at his home at Glyndebourne, and the economist and aesthete, John Maynard Keynes (Witts 1998). However, while there was considerable animosity between those two men and both had considerable influence, a more fundamental division can be seen in the literature in the positions taken by Keynes and the influential Welsh educationalist, Dr. Thomas Jones (Evans and Glasgow 1949; Leventhal 1990; Hewison 1995; Witts 1998; Upchurch 2004). Jones, who enters this story as the Secretary to an independent educational charity called the Pilgrim Trust, had previously been Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet under no less than four British Prime Ministers (representing the politics of both Left and Right) and has been described as one of the six most important men in Europe (Simpson 2010). The division between Christie and Keynes was one of patronage versus subsidy; the more fundamental division between Jones and Keynes was ground-up versus top-down.

Robert Hewison, in his book *Culture & Consensus: England, Art and Politics Since 1940*, points to a wider phenomenon overtaking Britain at the end of the Second World War: a mood of political uncertainty and public nostalgia that stifled the more visionary socialist aspirations of 1940 which, he argues, had imagined a government role in the arts set within the wider frame of a Welfare State. As it transpired, the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), when it was finally announced in 1945, “was to prove a force for cultural conservatism” (Hewison 1995, 29).³⁹

My own view is that both these descriptions focus on aspects of a larger struggle over the arts that began in the early years of the nineteenth century at

³⁹ The Arts Council of Great Britain was one of the last announcements made by Winston Churchill’s outgoing Conservative caretaker administration. It was subsequently granted its Royal Charter on 9 August 1946 under Clement Attlee’s incoming Labour administration.

least and, in many ways, long before that.⁴⁰ Later in this chapter, I will come back to the individuals described by Witts and the socio-political context described by Hewison. First, I will sketch the growing tensions and shifts at play between education and intellectualism, between popular culture and good taste, and between old property and new money, in the century and a half before the arts council was born.

Four Corners

To understand the context in which the art council movement began, one must look to the century and a half that preceded it, for it was in this period of tumultuous social and economic change that the expectations of, and means for, government support of the arts came into alignment. In doing so, they generated two great rifts in the way the arts were made, valued and understood: bottom-up versus top-down and active engagement versus passive.

Emancipation and the Autodidact

The nineteenth century was a time of inordinate growth. The population, which in Europe had never risen above 180 million in the period between the fall of the Roman Empire and 1800, was, by 1914, standing at 460 million. Meanwhile, industrialisation eclipsed agriculture drawing the population inexorably into the cities which washed outwards in a torrent of suburban building that nonetheless failed to avoid the problems of massive overcrowding. Prior to this, the natural order of things had been for the peasant class to eke out an existence in the fields, overseen by the gentry, while a cadre of educated and professional people

⁴⁰ All of history flows from what went before and so it is never wholly accurate to point to a date and say 'it began here'. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will begin my analysis in the early nineteenth century at a point when industrialisation was driving many social changes, which in turn were having considerable impact on education, on definitions of democracy and on the nature of the arts.

lived alongside merchants and tradesmen in relatively compact cities. In contrast, the nineteenth century witnessed the population of London soar from less than one million to more than 6.5 million. Census records show the population of the city of Manchester rising almost eight-fold in the thirty years from 1881 to 1911 to well over 2.6 million (Carey 1992). The population explosion generated deep unease among many in the educated and privileged classes. Reflecting upon the previous century in his 1905 novel *Kipps*, H. G. Wells describes “the extravagant multitude of new births that was the essential disaster of the nineteenth century” (Wells 1906, 399).

Politics was also changing. Despite the anxiety caused in Britain by the bloody upheaval of revolutionary France and the Burkean conservatism this had engendered in the British ruling classes, there was a growing mood for social and educational reform. The demand for education was driven by burgeoning industrialisation. Industry needed workers with basic literacy and numeracy if it was to be efficient and remain competitive. The employer class sought universal education to ensure a sufficiently competent workforce; the individual because it was the route to promotion and higher wages.

Education became a matter not simply for the state but for the individual. At state level the nineteenth century saw a series of Education Acts extend the provision and duration of juvenile education. The determination to better oneself led to an increased pursuit of adult education and the rise of the autodidact. The first Mechanics’ Institute was established in Edinburgh in 1821.⁴¹ The institute, which began as a school of arts (in the Greek sense of arts as technical skills), was established to “address societal needs by incorporating fundamental scientific thinking and research into engineering solutions” (Heriot-Watt University).⁴²

41 A forerunner to these institutes was established in Birmingham in 1796, when a group of mechanics formed the Birmingham Brotherly Society to assist with the educational needs of a growing class of what today we would call engineers (Kilgour 1998).

42 The institute eventually became Heriot-Watt University.

Institutes followed in Glasgow and Liverpool until, by 1850, there were over seven hundred across the country. Most of these institutes had a library and a museum as well as running lecture courses. In time, gas lighting was introduced to allow for study after dusk (Kilgour 1998).

In Australia, the first Mechanics' Institute opened in Hobart in 1827, with institutes in Sydney and Melbourne opening in 1833 and 1835 respectively. They spread rapidly until there were over 1,200 in Victoria alone (Lowden 2006). The British government had begun subsidising the passage of free settlers to New South Wales. Arriving in the convict colony, visitors were appalled by the "crude provincial hedonism" they encountered (Serle 1973, 54); "a picture of barbarisation" (Nadel 1957, 5). The Mechanics' Institutes were established "to provide a forum for the diffusion of culture which would civilise the 'savage' colony"; that culture would, of course, be in the European tradition (Gibson 2001, 19).⁴³

Such developments were not without their dilemmas and detractors. Would raising literacy among the working class open them up to radical and subversive ideas and make them resistant to undertaking the menial tasks expected of them? Or could it be an agent of social control that would reduce crime and the escalating cost of its punishment (which was certainly the view in Australia)? By 1830, the mood in Britain was towards the latter, with literacy (as recorded on census days) rising from 67.3 per cent in 1841 to 80.6 per cent in 1871 for men and 51.1 per cent to 73.2 per cent for women over the same period (Brown 2011). Following the Elementary Education Act of 1870, all children aged five to thirteen years became eligible for school education.

Rising literacy did go hand-in-hand with pressure for an expanded notion of democracy. Where once democracy had been limited to the male, land-owning

43 I should note, however, that while the original model of the Mechanics' Institute was imported from Britain and while the culture the Australian institutes promoted was European, the Australian model was far from a simple a carbon copy of those in its colonial motherland. As Lianne Gibson notes: "British developments were among many influences that Australian art programs drew upon in specifically local circumstances to come up with distinctive institutions and practices" (Gibson 2001, 17).

few – echoing its prototype in ancient Athens – the extension of suffrage was becoming a pressing issue. Even so, while male suffrage was achieved in the mid-nineteenth century in Australia, with female emancipation towards the end of the century (though, notoriously, indigenous Australians were not fully enfranchised at Commonwealth level until 1962), in Britain universal suffrage was not achieved until 1918 and not fully effected until 1928.⁴⁴

The Intelligent and the Obscure

Not everyone was happy with such changes, especially among the intellectual classes who felt their monopoly over the cultural life of Britain was under threat. In his novel *Howards End*, E. M. Forster describes the attempt by the unfortunate clerk, Leonard Bast, to become educated. Pitying him for having been uprooted from the peasantry which Forster believed to be Bast's natural place in the order of things, Forster writes: "Had he lived some centuries ago, in the brightly coloured civilisations of the past, he would have had definite status ... But in his day the angel of Democracy had arisen, enshadowing the classes with leathern wings" (Forster 1910, 212). Less romantically, Virginia Woolf despaired of the "self-taught working man ... we all know how distressing they are, how egotistic, insistent, raw, striking and ultimately nauseating" (Bell 1978, 189).

'Standards' – which, like the British constitution were something taken as understood and so not requiring explication, let alone one that was written down (Barnett 2012) – were under threat. Like the definitions of 'quality' and 'excellence' that were to become embedded in the ethos of the arts councils later in the century, 'standards' were measures of value that a small 'discerning elite' defined by consensus; a consensus that carefully avoided being too specific. The important point was *they* knew and *they* would decide. Educating the masses simply confused the issue. T. S. Eliot spoke for many of his class when he wrote in his essay 'Notes towards a Definition of Culture': "There is no doubt that in our

⁴⁴ In Britain, women under thirty years of age were not permitted to vote until 1928.

headlong rush to educate everybody, we are lowering standards" (Eliot 1948, 185).

The response of the intelligentsia was to remove themselves and their works from the reach of the newly literate lower classes by making the form more complex and the content more obscure. Indeed, John Carey has argued that "the early twentieth century saw a determined effort, on the part of the European intelligentsia, to exclude the masses from culture. In England this movement has become known as modernism" (Carey 1992, 16-17). Carey goes on to say: "I would suggest, then, that the principle around which modernist literature and culture fashioned themselves was the exclusion of the masses, the defeat of their power, the removal of their literacy, the denial of their humanity" (Carey 1992, 21).

Meanwhile, the new literate working and lower-middle classes constituted a significant new market which the new industrialised means of mechanical reproduction and dispersion (print, then the gramophone, then film, radio and finally television) were equipped to deliver. It was to service (and profit from) this increasingly literate working class that Alfred Harmsworth launched the *Daily Mail* on 4 May 1896. It was an immediate success, soon becoming the world's highest circulation newspaper and remaining so until well into the 1920s. Harmsworth became rich and was ennobled three times in four years, finally becoming 1st Viscount Northcliffe in 1918. Lord Northcliffe was adamant that his newspaper should be "made to pay" and, to achieve this, should "deal with what interests the mass of people" (Fyfe 1930, 83); to give the people what they wanted. And what he understood they wanted was not so much news as 'human interest'.

High-speed printing presses reduced the cost of books and magazines and, with them, a new form of entertaining literature that stretched from Charles Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, to Arthur Conon Doyle's Sherlock Holmes mysteries and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. The advent of cinema brought a new form of narrative, with its own attendant constellation of stars. As commercialisation took hold, so advertising

blossomed to promote each new cultural product in what would become an increasingly competitive field.

The effect on literature, and the visual and performing arts was profound. For many in the intellectual classes, literacy among the lower orders was viewed with dismay and their interest in self-improvement and the acquisition of culture with a disdain. Thomas Hardy, regarding the crowds visiting the British Museum on May Day 1891, concluded “Democratic government may be justice to man, but it will ... possibly be the utter ruin of art and literature!” (Millgate 1971, 179; Sherman 1976, 400). It was an attitude that lingered well into the middle of the twentieth century and was to contaminate the conception of the arts council to be.

But this was not simply a binary divide between intellectual elites and the ‘masses’.

Taste and the Middle Classes

Education and the needs of industry were creating a new class of worker: engineers and clerks who aspired to the status of the middle class. Meanwhile, trade grew not only in numbers but in scale, from shopkeepers to wholesalers to tycoons accumulating unimaginable fortunes through agglomerated multinational enterprise. The middle class had not simply expanded, it had stratified. While not managing to gain entry into the ivory tower of elite intellectualism or the crumbling manors of the aristocracy, these mushrooming middle classes sought to define themselves as distinct from the working class and from each other. Good taste became the signature means to elevation and in its name they took to themselves much of the preceding repertoire of the arts, including Shakespeare...

In his book *Highbrow / Lowbrow*, Lawrence Levine describes the emergence of a cultural hierarchy in nineteenth-century America and the loss of what he perceives to have been “a rich shared public culture that once characterised the United States” (Levine 1990, 9). He suggests that this division arose from an active ‘gentrification’ and sequestration of certain cultural forms by a new aspirant middle class, propelled upward by the economic boom of the mid-1800s. As an

example, he shows how Shakespearean plays, which, at the beginning of the nineteenth century were

performed not merely alongside popular entertainment as an elite supplement to it ... [but] as an integral part of it. Shakespeare *was* popular entertainment in nineteenth-century America. The theatre in the first half of the nineteenth century played the role that movies played in the first half of the twentieth: it was a kaleidoscopic, democratic institution presenting a widely varying bill of fare to all classes and socioeconomic groups. (Levine 1990, 21)

Levine emphasises two important aspects of that early American engagement with Shakespeare (and other classic forms of art such as opera): that it was approached in a highly flexible way and that audiences were not simply heterogeneous, but informed and participatory. Plays were modified to suit contemporary mores;⁴⁵ interludes of popular music were interjected into the evening's entertainment; audiences were vocal in their response to the play both as narrative and as performance, interacting with the characters or calling for particularly rousing lines to be delivered again like an encore. This was, of course, not so different from the relationship of the Elizabethan audience to the unfolding drama in Shakespeare's own time.⁴⁶

By the end of the century Levine reports that Shakespearean plays were performed without change or adaptation and viewed in silence, by well-dressed members of the bourgeoisie. In effect, the plays had been taken from a living, if

45 Levine reports that in one version of *The Taming of the Shrew* "Kate ended up in control, observing that, although 'Shakespeare or Bacon, or whoever wrote the play ... studied deeply the shrews of his day ... the modern shrew isn't built that way,' while a chastened Petruchio concluded, 'Sweet Katherine, of your remarks I recognise the force: / Don't strive to tame a woman as you would a horse'" (Levine 1984a, 35).

46 Levine suggests that, "to envision nineteenth-century theatre audiences correctly, one might do well to visit a contemporary sporting event in which the spectators are not only similarly heterogeneous but also – in the manner of both the nineteenth century and the Elizabethan era – more than an audience; they are participants who can enter into the action on the field, who feel a sense of immediacy and at times even control, who articulate their opinions and feelings vocally and unmistakably" (Levine 1990, 26).

rowdy, engagement with an audience that represented the spectrum of society to become 'sacralised' (Levine's term). Theatres had become temples to good taste and the self-styled 'Chosen' entered to be improved through their polite and passive presence. "William Shakespeare had become *Culture*" with a capital C (Levine 1990, 34, emphasis in original). Just as Thorstein Veblen had argued that the leisure class defined themselves by the pursuit of overtly non-functional activities, so Levine tracks the way in which the upward-aspiring middle class defined themselves by the pursuit activities that did not just exceed popular taste, but consciously excluded those they considered their inferiors.

Meanwhile, as I outlined earlier, the privileged relationship of the intelligentsia with power was being disrupted – and they knew it. Increasing democracy meant that cultural authority was slipping from their grasp. Popular culture, generated in the engine room of industry rather than the libraries of academe, was threatening to obscure what they considered to be the finer things of life: the things that defined a civilisation which nonetheless remained beyond the reach of the majority of society. It was a state of affairs that the critic F. R. Leavis deplored, considering such forms were aimed at "the cheapest emotional responses: films, newspapers, publicity in all its forms, commercially catered fiction – all offering satisfaction at its lowest level" (Leavis and Thompson 1933, 3).

Together with Denys Thompson, Leavis wrote a guidebook for teachers of English entitled *Culture and Environment* in which he argued: "We cannot, as we might in a healthy state of culture, leave the citizen to be formed unconsciously by his environment; if anything like a worthy idea of satisfactory living is to be saved, he must be trained to discriminate and resist" (quoted in McGuigan and McGuigan 2002, 46). For Leavis, culture was in crisis and mass popular culture was bringing about an overthrow of standards. In his view, there was only ever a minority capable of properly appreciating art and literature, and it was that elite who made fine living possible. That minority, he warned, had been "cut off as never before from the powers that rule the world" (Leavis 1930, 25). The intellectual

class needed allies, but ones that did not seek to challenge their authority as elite. They found them in the aspirational upwardly mobile middle class.

The strategy of those, such as Leavis, who sought to maintain elite control of high culture through education, was one of proselytising without granting membership. A. S. Byatt describes this succinctly in her Booker-Prize-winning novel *Possession*. Narrating a formative experience of one of her characters, Blackadder, she writes: "Leavis did to Blackadder what he did to serious students: he showed him the terrible, the magnificent importance and urgency of English literature and simultaneously deprived him of any confidence in his own capacity to contribute to, or change it" (Byatt 2012, 27).

Blue Blood and Blue Chip

At the top of the British societal pile sat the aristocracy, whose lineage and acreage had effectively insulated them, ensuring that the working masses, the aspirant middle classes and the intellectual elite remained in their allotted places within the order of things. But now the aristocracy was failing; their assets shrinking in the face of a prolonged agricultural depression in the latter part of the nineteenth century, only to shrink further with the introduction of estate tax in the early twentieth century. Meanwhile, a flourishing plutocracy (in Britain, but especially in the United States) had amassed enormous wealth in record time through industrialised manufacturing and its concomitants: hard commodities, transport, wholesale and retail. In this situation, art became the currency of ennoblement which began a steady transfusion from blue blood to blue chip.

For example, Joseph Duveen, perhaps the most influential and successful art dealer of the period, steered and coerced into being many of the great nineteenth-century tycoon collections of art. As his biographer, Samuel Behrman, wrote: "Early in life, Duveen ... noticed that Europe had plenty of art and America had plenty of money, and his entire astonishing career was the product of that simple observation" (Behrman 2003, 3). Like the marriage of convenience between a nouveau rich and a poor aristocrat, but with fewer recriminations, art

became the bartered bride of authorised respectability. It also represented an interesting example of the intangible asset. Duveen's approach was to emphasise to prospective buyers (a) that "whereas he had unique access to great art, his outlets for it were multiple" (Behrman 2003, 7)⁴⁷ and (b) that "at any price the priceless is cheap" (Meager 1985, 141). He played on the flexibility of intangible value and the aspirations of those with the tangible assets with which to acquire it. Before too long "their doubts about the price of the art [evolved] into more acute doubts about whether he would let them buy it" (Behrman 2003, 7).

As Paul DiMaggio concludes in his study *Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston: the Creation of an Organisational Base for High Culture in America*, the wealthy elite "were a status group, and as such they strove towards exclusivity, towards the definition of a prestigious culture that they could monopolise and call their own" (DiMaggio 1982, 48) True, these self-made tycoons were of a different stripe to the old-money aristocracy. Having amassed their collections they sought not to keep them within the dynastic lineage, but to bring them into the public sphere, and a number became the foundation for some of the most important museums in North America.⁴⁸ As I will discuss in detail below, it was two such American philanthropists who were to provide the funds for what were in effect, innovative prototypes of the arts council model both in Britain and overseas.

47 An interesting inversion of the oligopsony described in Chapter 2; the great art of the past being a limited resource, contemporary art effectively limitless and its greatness yet to be conclusively assayed in hindsight.

48 The banker and industrialist, Andrew W. Mellon (1855–1937), donated his \$40-million collection, with a further \$10 million for construction, to establish the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC; the transport and real estate magnate, Joseph E. Widener (1871–1943), was also a founding benefactor. John D. Rockefeller Jr. donated the site for the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Benjamin Altman (1840–1913) left his collection of Rembrandts to the Metropolitan Museum, New York and Samuel H. Kress (1893–1955) gifted 776 works from the Italian Renaissance to 18 American regional art galleries; both men made their fortunes in retail. Meanwhile, the collection of Henry C. Frick (1849–1919) is now housed in its own art centre in Pittsburgh and the Art Gallery of Ontario has many artworks bequeathed by the Canadian businessman, Frank Porter Wood (1882–1955). All these men were regular clients of Joseph Duveen (Behrman 2003).

I would not want to romanticise the way in which such philanthropists gifted their art and their money to establish and augment these fledgling institutions; in many cases their methods of accumulating wealth had them dubbed 'robber barons'.⁴⁹ Perhaps it was the fact that many had risen from the rank and file of the working class that led them to consider the wider public when determining the beneficiaries of their legacy, if only to be lauded by them. After all, having invested in the symbols of exclusivity what better memorial than to display them permanently and publicly as assurance of the respect of future generations; and there were quite possibly tax benefits. Nonetheless, it was through just these elite that many of the old masters came to public display and into public hands, especially in North America.

It is also the case that these nineteenth-century industrialists made their fortunes in the areas and activities very much removed from the realms of culture. For them, culture was emblematic of their elite status. Today, in a post-industrial age of information technology, our culture is the very stuff of the business that generates the wealth of the super-rich. As such, I would suggest, latter-day tycoons are much less likely to give it away when they make their fortune by selling it to us.



Thus, there were four distinct dynamics at play by the beginning of the twentieth century:

1. an increasingly educated working class with a growing interest in self-improvement, keen to better understand the world if for no other reason

⁴⁹ Matthew Josephson notes how many of the nineteenth-century magnates were deemed robber barons in their day, including Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, Andrew W. Mellon and John D. Rockefeller (Josephson 1934).

than to get on in it, with access to a rapidly expanding variety of mechanically produced cultural products;

2. an established intelligentsia that delighted in semantic opacity and aesthetic convolution as a hallmark of their intellect; a practice that some critics have construed as a determined effort to remain uncontaminated by the mass who were exhibiting the misguided presumption of seeking to be better educated;
3. a stratifying of the middle classes which, as they grew in number, adopted the notion of good taste as the emblem of upward mobility; and
4. a beleaguered aristocracy hawking their assets to a new haute monde of plutocrats who, in turn, were to shape the cultural life and memory of their communities through patronage and philanthropy; transferring art from private ownership to public ownership by private means.

It is against this background that the first of two cataclysmic events occurred that would each fracture the status quo and give rise to a tectonic shift in British society. War.

Amateurs, Animeurs and the Carnegie

Following the First World War, the British Liberal MP, educator and President of the Board of Education, Herbert (H. A. L.) Fisher (1865–1940), introduced the Education Act 1918. This, among other things, laid emphasis upon the teaching of singing and oratory skills in schools and upon community choral festivals and pageants.⁵⁰ “It was the notion of community that brought this on – that the performing arts and sports were equal means to shape this unifying concept, so vital to ‘social discipline and the maintenance of a grand heritage’” (Witts 1998,

⁵⁰ Fisher also introduced the School Teachers (Superannuation) Act 1918, which extended pension provision to all teachers.

18). Choral groups, brass bands and amateur dramatics flourished such that by 1929 there were more than 14,000 competitive ‘festivals’ a year in the United Kingdom attracting 1.8 million visitors, each paying between tuppence and sixpence entrance,⁵¹ 2,000 choral societies with around 200 members each and 6,000 brass bands (Witts 1998). The arts were firmly about participation – at least the performing arts. Meanwhile, many of the mechanics’ institutes that embraced art and design ran painting classes and facilitated art clubs in their collective pursuit of more individually focused artistic practice, creating a shared space for an essentially solo pastime.

These competitions, while they featured amateur performers, created much paid work for supporting professionals from sheet music publishers, instrument makers, tailors, printers and engravers (to inscribe all those trophies) to conductors, soloists, orchestral players and choral support singers hired by the groups to complement the performance. Witts asserts that “the economic weight of this movement and its crack-up in the thirties created the Arts Council. It also explains why the Council’s music and drama budgets have always been the biggest and why their persistent plights dominate the agenda” (Witts 1998, 19).

While I would agree with the first point, the second is, in part, caused by another asymmetry which had implications for the Art Council structure. In 1753 the British Museum had been created by Act of Parliament, funded by a national lottery. As it grew the art collections were divided, to be re-housed in three new institutions: the National Gallery (established in 1824); the National Portrait Gallery (1856) and the Tate Gallery (1896). All these museums, along with the Victoria and Albert Museum (established in 1852), came under the direct responsibility of government while professional orchestras, theatres, and opera

51 Compared with present-day value, measured in terms of income and purchasing power, this is around £1.20–£3.80. Or, to set it more directly into the relative value of leisure activities: in 1929, sixpence was the price of a pint of beer.

and ballet companies remained commercial enterprises.⁵² Consequently, when a new body was discussed to support the arts, the museum sector was not included in the frame of thinking, while the major orchestras, opera and ballet companies and theatres certainly were. Indeed, as I will discuss later in this chapter, the major performing arts were of particular personal interest to one of the most influential figures in the shaping of the arts council, John Maynard Keynes. Thus, while the small-to-medium visual arts sector and visual arts touring were to become a part of the Art Council frame of reference, there was no visual arts equivalent to the major performing arts groups who were to eat up so large a slice of the fiscal pie and whose ‘essential national’ importance more or less guaranteed a bailout in the event of any misfortune.

Witts touches obliquely on another, closely related point. He suggests that the British perception of the arts was always in the form of “music and something” (perhaps especially when conceiving of a festival): The Edinburgh International Festival of Music and Drama, the Aldeburgh Festival of Music and the Arts, the Almeida International Festival of Contemporary Music and Performance and so on. He suggests that this is in no small part because music is “an immense business with considerable clout” (Witts 1998, 39). I would argue that it also relates to the nature of how amateur music is made and shared, in groups as part of communities. Visual arts (and literature) tend to be individual and even solitary activities, although shared studios and plein-air painting groups, writers’ circles and book clubs do offer a sense of community. The sense of community that derived from the great choral and band competitions of the interwar years carries over into the experience of attending performances distilled in the alembic of a festival.

52 The British Council was formed in 1933 and the British Film Institute in 1934, effectively removing the need for the new body to embrace international cultural diplomacy or filmmaking within its remit.

The Threat of the BBC

Meanwhile, a new perceived threat to the cultural life of Britain was born in 1922, when a private monopoly was granted sole rights to the country's public airwaves: the British Broadcasting Company. The BBC was of concern on a number of fronts: on the one hand, the threat to quality; on the other, the disincentivising of active participation. In 1925, with a sly dig at the aspirational temperament of the middle class, the satirical magazine *Punch* coined a fresh neologism to categorise the nascent broadcaster: "The BBC claims to have discovered a new type – 'the middlebrow'. It consists of people who are hoping that someday they will get used to the stuff that they ought to like" (McGee 2008, 106). In 1927 the BBC was established by Royal Charter as a quasi-autonomous public organisation, funded by government through the sale of wireless receiver licences, becoming the British Broadcasting Corporation (Crisell 2005).

More worrying, though, was the threat to widespread performance by amateurs and professionals. We tend to think it is a given that the arts are produced by professional specialists and consumed passively by audiences, but prior to broadcast and mass-produced recordings, this was not the case. As radio and the gramophone became popular many were concerned at just this shift from active to passive. In 1935, the League of Audiences was formed to lobby for government support for active enjoyment in art, especially music and drama. Writing three years later, J. H. Alden expressed urgent concern that "the agencies of gramophone and wireless have brought about a decline of the amateur – and the private teacher – through the ever-increasing-and-always-available music-making by professionals, singly or in combination" (Alden 1938, 79). This he saw not simply as a matter of cultural decline, but also of worker efficiency and social welfare. "There is ample evidence," he went on, "that the large employers of labour, education, the county and civic authorities and the social institutions concerned with welfare work are rapidly realising that some sort of expression of personality is as necessary to every individual as bodily health" (Alden 1938, 80).

The point made by the League of Audiences and its supporters was echoed some seventy years later by the James Irvine Foundation in its report on *Critical Issues Facing the Arts in California*, which argues that that “the millions of amateurs that enjoyed active engagement in the arts (and, for some, local celebrity for their talents) in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were eclipsed by a new cadre of arts professionals that standardised the acceptable canon and socialised audiences to become passive consumers” (James Irvine Foundation and AEA Consulting 2006, 17). As Bill Ivey, a former Chairman of the US National Endowment for the Arts, notes: “By the 1920s new arts companies offering new arts products were converting engagement in art into an act of consumption. The notion of participation was reshaped – its sense of *doing* replaced by passive activities like purchasing a recording or attending a concert or exhibition” (Ivey 2008, 10, emphasis in original).

Back in late-thirties Britain, the importance of active participation in the arts for the wellbeing of the country was argued in much the same terms as government support for games and sport at the time. The League of Audiences proposed and drafted a Music and Drama Bill to be considered as complementary to the recent Physical Training and Recreation Act of 1937. Funding might follow the pattern established by that act: £2.4 million at outset, with £170,000 annually after that. The idea had support. Writing in the *Sunday Times* in 1937, the columnist ‘Scrutator’ was of the view that “there was a danger that our democracy would become merely the passive recipients of manufactured pleasures, instead of being the artificers of their own joy” (quoted in Alden 1938, 83).

The Shadow of Black Tuesday

The protestations of the League of Audiences were not entirely selfless. They were driven by a concern in the music industry that the gramophone and the BBC was severely reducing the work available for musicians and so impacting upon the services that supported them with instruments, sheet music, rehearsal rooms and

so on. The situation had been exacerbated by the arrival of talkies and an end to live music in cinemas. But the biggest threat came with the 1929 Stock Market Crash.

In the economic depression that followed Black Tuesday, the disposable income with which audiences had paid for entry to the art pageants and festivals of music and drama dried up. Salvation came in the form of the Carnegie UK Trust. Established in 1913 by a former Scot who had moved to Pittsburgh and made a fortune in oil and steel, Carnegie mandated the Trust to support “the improvement of the well-being of the masses of the people of Great Britain and Ireland” (Kiger 2011, 27).

In 1934, the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) was in crisis due to the effects of the Depression. The ISM looked after the interests of professional composers, conductors and players who worked with amateur groups. Its head, William Giles Whittaker (1876–1944), set about courting the Carnegie (as it came to be known informally) for funds, his prime argument being the pressing need to “encourage people to perform for themselves instead of being content merely to listen” (Witts 1998, 23). The Trust agreed and announced a fund to support amateur music societies to the sum of thirty thousand pounds over the period 1936–1940. With money flowing into music societies, they could once again afford to pay for the services of ISM members.

The Trust proved egalitarian in its choices, subsidising tours by the Old Vic Theatre Company and British National Opera (rather than metropolitan productions) and, at the other end of the scale, it funded the Federation of Women’s Institutes to undertake music and drama ‘animateurism’ in rural areas (Witts 1998).

Animateurism, a term taken from the French, described activities and projects where professionals and amateurs undertook projects together to “mutually enhance creative skills” (Witts 1998, 23).⁵³ That relationship was quite

53 Witt introduces ‘animateurism’ to describe what the Carnegie Trustees chose to fund, while also indicating that they may well not have used – or even known of – this term themselves at that time; the word describes a concept or tendency ahead of the adoption of the term itself to describe it.

different from the current idea of professional groups working with school and community groups where the transfer of skills is seen as one-way (however much the professionals may get a sense of achievement or fulfilment from the activity). Rather, the amateur choirs, bands and drama groups were the ones in charge, hiring professionals when they needed them to help strengthen their performance (an activity known as 'stiffening'), to conduct or to orchestrate. They commissioned new work from composers and playwrights. Like a Scottish Kirk Session, it was the community representatives who selected and hired the professionals and not the other way around.

Animateurism was also an idea central to the establishment of the Banff Centre in the Canadian Rockies. Launched in 1933 with a grant from the US Carnegie Foundation, it trained amateur actors to a professional standard at a time when both economy and propriety deemed acting an inappropriate occupation for an adult, but where high quality theatre was nonetheless considered a worthwhile part of community life in the prairies (Hutchings, Leighton, and Harmon 2002).

The Carnegie was the first of its kind and, Witts concludes, "it was the Arts Council in all but name, privately endowed" (Witts 1998, 23). However, by the end of the decade Europe was again at war and even the Carnegie was unable to maintain the impetus of Britain's cultural life. Something had to be done.

War and the Metamorphosis of CEMA

With the outbreak of the Second World War both amateur and professional arts came to a near standstill. Thomas Jones, a retired civil servant and secretary to the newly formed Pilgrim Trust had a plan. He was "passionately devoted to adult education ... [and] recognised the need to involve the public more fully in creating their own culture" (Leventhal 1990, 316). In late 1939, he arranged a meeting between Lord De La Warr, president of the Board of Education, and Lord

Macmillan, the Trust's Chairman (Hewison 1995).⁵⁴ Like the Carnegie, the Pilgrim Trust had been set up by an American philanthropist; in this case Edward Harkness (1874–1940), who had made his fortune in railways.⁵⁵ The Trust had been established in 1930 with an endowment of just over two million pounds and a mission “to assist with social welfare projects, with preservation (of buildings and countryside) and with promoting art and learning” (Pilgrim Trust). Harkness did not seek to control how the money was used, leaving such decisions to the discretion of the trustees. The trustees, in turn, delegated much of the decision making to Jones. Jones was an enthusiastic advocate of adult education. During the Depression he had arranged the touring of exhibitions of art and amateurs of music and drama to some of the most distressed regions of the country.

In his memorandum of 22 December 1939 to Sir Alan Barlow at the Treasury, M. G. Holmes, Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education, made it clear that the board considered it essential “to show publicly and unmistakably that the Government cares about the cultural life of the country. ... It should be part of a national war policy to show that the Government is actively interested in these things” (quoted in Leventhal 1990, 293). Consequently, Lord De La Warr, in his initial correspondence with Jones, emphasised “the importance of keeping amateur activity alive” (quoted in Leventhal 1990, 291). At their meeting, finessed by Jones, the Lords Macmillan and De La Warr agreed that the Pilgrim Trust would put up twenty-five thousand pounds to establish a Committee for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), on the proviso that this amount would be matched by the government. Early in 1940, that government funding was confirmed. The Committee changed its name to Council while maintaining

54 Although many accounts of this meeting state that it was initiated by De La Warr, Mary Glasgow (who was to become the Secretary General of CEMA and subsequently the Arts Council) later claimed in an interview that “it was Tom Jones who had the first idea and instigated the whole thing” (Hutchison 1982, 57).

55 When *Forbes* magazine published its first ever US ‘Rich List’ in 1918, Edward Harkness was placed sixth; Carnegie was fourth.

the acronym; Lord Macmillan became its chairman, but Jones (in the role of Vice-Chairman) remained its guiding intelligence.⁵⁶

While this may be the story at the level of individual ‘actors’, Hewison argues that there was a larger dynamic in play. The blitz of 1940–41 had a profound effect on the British psyche. While it propelled the evacuation of over three million people from the larger cities, it also brought the people of Britain together. “It was, certainly after May 1940, a more politically united nation than at any other time in the twentieth century. It was better fed, more productive and less embittered between its social gradations” (Hennessy 1992, 52). It was a mood reflected in the government which saw Labour and the Liberals join the Conservatives in coalition. Hewison argues that there was, at this moment, a strong and widely held vision for a socially just postwar state (Hewison 1995). Research undertaken by Mass Observation in January 1941 found that the postwar trends which people anticipated and hoped for included “educational reforms”, “more state control” and “less class distinctions” (quoted in Harrison 1976, 314-15).⁵⁷ Thus, establishing CEMA as a means by which government could support the arts and culture of the nation – in a way that was egalitarian, participatory and educative in the best sense – was in harmony with the spirit of the times.

56 Lord Macmillan was in charge of the Ministry of Information and the business of national morale, so it was not hard for Lord De La Warr to make his case. And, given Lord Macmillan was not proving a success in his role at the Ministry, sidelining him to the chairmanship of CEMA came as a welcome additional benefit (Hewison 1995). According to Mary Glasgow, he was, as Chairman of CEMA, “quite useless” and gave “no direction of any kind”, preferring instead to delegate authority to Thomas Jones (Leventhal 1990, 303).

57 Mass Observation was a UK social research organisation that sought to apply anthropological methods to the understanding of domestic society. Founded in 1937, its findings were to influence a number of government decisions including the design of propaganda and changes in taxation policy. Research was undertaken through the analysis of diaries and questionnaires completed by around five hundred untrained volunteers, and by professional investigators who covertly recorded other people’s behaviour and conversations. While this ‘espionage’ approach fitted the wartime and immediate postwar sensibility, increasing criticism that it was an invasion of privacy saw the closure of Mass Observation in the mid-1960s.

They were, of course, times of great peril; danger being an effective focuser of the mind if also a prodigious generator of stress: the threat of bombing, the disorientation of evacuation, the newfound alliance of city- and country-folk, munitions factories running twenty-four-hours... In such a context, I would suggest, the aspirations of the middle classes and the perceived obscurantism of the intellectual elite would have seemed irrelevant, while the practical, self-sustaining spirit of adult education and the autodidact, and the coming together to make music, recite poetry, dance and sing helped build a sense of personal fortitude and community morale: 'We are in it together'.

Conceived within the frame of adult education, CEMA was established to ensure that ordinary people who found themselves living under the extraordinary conditions of war might be able to enjoy music and drama performed or facilitated by otherwise unemployed artists around the country (Witts 1998). But CEMA's approach was about more than just bringing artists to the people. Its aim was partnership, built on the kind of mutual relationship that professional and amateur singers and musicians had had in the bands, choirs and theatrical groups of the 1920s and, with the support of the Carnegie, much of the 1930s.

CEMA gave its first grant in January 1940 – to the National Federation of Women's Institutes. Later that year, when the UK Government was persuaded to co-fund the venture, the organisation became 'official' and the name changed to the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA: 1940–45). During its time the council funded travelling exhibitions, touring theatrical productions taken to factories and community halls and the Holidays at Home scheme, which saw open-air orchestral concerts performed in the heart of the blitzed cities.

Jones was a keen supporter of William Emrys Williams who, under the aegis of the British Institute for Adult Education, organised 'Art for the People' exhibitions, which had been touring to great effect throughout Britain since 1936, attracting new audiences to the visual arts. The popularity of these exhibitions "showed that there was in England a spontaneous interest in pictures, sculpture

and other forms of design among unexpected sections of the population” (Evans and Glasgow 1949, 16-17). Between 1940 and 1942, CEMA-funded ‘Art for the People’ exhibitions were visited by some 600,000 people across the nation (Skidelsky 2002).

But CEMA had, at its core, a conceptual conflict that came down to the poor wording of its original memorandum. It arose from the inchoate nature of this nascent structure, trying to leave its field of operation broad enough to manoeuvre while not fully grasping the implications of the internal contradictions enshrined within its four worthy aims. As stated in the ‘Memorandum in support of an Application to the Treasury for Financial Assistance’ dated 6 March 1940, these aims were:

- a) The preservation so far as possible of the highest standards in war-time of the arts of music, drama, and painting and design.
- b) The widespread provision of opportunities for hearing good music and for the enjoyment of the arts generally among people who, on account of war-time conditions, have been cut off from these things.
- c) The encouragement of music-making and play-acting by the people themselves.
- d) Through the above activities, the rendering of indirect assistance to professional singers and players who may be suffering from a war-time lack of demand for their work. (quoted in Leventhal 1990, 297)

This in turn led to a more complex conception of the implications of the terms ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’ since, as Mary Glasgow put it:

According to the professional attitude, all performances should, if possible, be self-supporting and it was assumed there was something wrong with entertainment, or at least its method of presentation, if it ran at a loss. The amateur attitude on the other hand, may be described as the missionary approach, which demanded music, plays and exhibitions for all who wanted them, regardless of the total number who attended, of their ability to pay or of the financial appearance of the balance sheets. (Evans and Glasgow 1949, 47)

This is an interesting set of definitions, given today's understanding of the terms amateur and professional, which see the amateur as unsupported by government, required to be self-sustaining, and the professional dependent, at least in part, on state subsidy to survive.⁵⁸ Thus there was, in the beginning, a somewhat inverted notion (by today's standards) of professionals maintaining standards but being economically self-sufficient and amateurs as being about participation but requiring continued public subsidy.

The belief that the arts should be both democratic and participatory was a strong current at the time. In a handbill promoting its work, the Council declared: "CEMA wants art to be a vigorous element everywhere enjoyed in public life, not just something set apart for the benefit of privileged people" (quoted in Leventhal 1990, 296). The Council adopted the slogan: "The best for the most".⁵⁹ It was a phrase coined by the writer and critic Ivor Brown who undertook a number of roles at CEMA before going on to become Editor of the *Observer* (1942–48) and, Leventhal notes, the slogan encapsulates (perhaps knowingly) the internal contradiction in the Council's aims (Leventhal 1990). The Council's emphasis on participation also raised the issue of balancing amateur and professional practice. While, on the one hand,

even those who applauded 'Art for the People' [the touring exhibitions organised by W. E. Williams] found traditional audience passivity repugnant, regarding participation as an essential component of arts appreciation. On the other hand, without the opportunity to experience the work of professional artists and musicians, audiences would be unable to measure creative achievement. (Leventhal 1990, 296)

58 That paradox has been echoed in the language subsequently used to describe the UK bodies supported by government (leaving aside the major performing arts companies). In the 1980s and 1990s, the joke was that the small-to-medium arts organisations supported by the Arts Councils were referred to as the 'independent sector', while what defined them was their continued *dependence* on government funds for survival.

59 Perhaps not surprisingly, given the strong pull of Utilitarianism in British politics, it bears a close resemblance to Bentham's principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number (Bentham 1776).

I would suggest that this was an issue that had, at least partially, been addressed in the compact between amateur and professional upon which amateurism was founded. However, with the destabilisation of war, such partnerships had become harder to develop and maintain.

The Blitz ended in May 1941 and the moment of national unity and social vision identified by Hewison began to wane. The wobbly tipping point began to slant in a new direction. Concerned that CEMA might be refocusing its attentions on the professional sector, Thomas Jones wrote on 29 September 1941 to Sir Robert Wood, Deputy Secretary of the Board of Education and the civil servant with responsibility for monitoring CEMA, to urgently remind the Board that “our moving away from the amateur field is against the original understanding with the Treasury who all along have stressed ‘making by the people themselves’” (quoted in Leventhal 1990, 304). In 1942, perhaps in response to this proposed move towards the professional, the Pilgrim Trust ceased funding CEMA and so the Chair fell vacant; Thomas Jones’ influence over the Council came to an end.

Nonetheless, in just 28 months, Jones had established CEMA as a national institution funding plays that were attended by 1.5 million people and staging some 8,000 concerts in factories and other venues across the country (Skidelsky 2002). Jones’ vision of an inclusive culture is given reprise in the following extract from a book by Ifor Evans and Mary Glasgow, dedicated “to Thomas Jones, C. H. [Order of the Companions of Honour] in affection and for reasons which the text will make obvious”.⁶⁰ They wrote:

The art of a people is one of the signs of its good health. So it has always been in the world’s history from Ancient Greece to France at the time of the Crusades, to Renaissance Italy and Elizabethan England. Each one of those earlier manifestations, whatever its excellence, was confined to a limited number of people, to the privileged and the elect. The new

⁶⁰ Ifor Evans (1899–1982) was an academic who later became Provost of University College London and was subsequently elevated to Baron Evans of Hungershall. Mary Glasgow was, as noted earlier, Secretary-General of CEMA and subsequently the Arts Council of Great Britain.

renaissance will inevitably be the emergence of the common man into the audience of art. He has always been part of that audience when he has had the opportunity. Now the opportunity must come in such a way that none is omitted and the result will be fresh vigour and self-confidence in the people as a whole. (Evans and Glasgow 1949, 19-20)

But, as the tipping point shifted unsteadily, it did so across a number of axes that arose from the competing visions of cultural production as participatory or professional, cultural value as assayed by creator, expert or consumer, and the question of whether culture itself grew from the ground up or flowed from the top down. Referring back to the original aims outlined by CEMA, Hewison identifies four unresolved issues that they raised (intentionally or not), which I have reformatted here as a list:

1. “the [competing] financial claims of professional and the amateur”;
2. “the interests of the artist, of whatever status, and the audience”;
3. “the problem of defining what constitutes ‘the highest standards’ in the arts”; and
4. the conflict between culture seen as “the best which has been thought and said in the world” and culture as “the common expression of a people, where values emerge from below”. (Hewison 1995, 34)

The man who replaced Thomas Jones in the chair was to bring a very different set of values and a radically different vision to the Council; a vision that saw in CEMA the foundations for a new kind of cultural structure to be built when the war was finally over.

Keynes

Richard Austen (Rab) Butler (President of the Board of Education from 1941–1944) was the minister responsible for CEMA. He respected its autonomy and protected it from government interference, recognising that this wartime expedient had the potential to transform into a permanent pillar of the British cultural edifice. It was he who proposed the economist and aesthete John

Maynard Keynes as CEMA's new Chairman. Keynes was a busy man in poor health, but he agreed because he recognised that this was a significant opportunity to shape future government cultural policy.⁶¹

Keynes was perhaps the most trusted economic advisor to the Treasury, a position that gave him considerable influence in terms of how the Council might evolve and, importantly, be funded. He was also a central figure of the Bloomsbury group and "unabashedly elitist" (Leventhal 1990, 317).⁶² He shared the group's libertarian attitudes to sex; he was openly bisexual (as far as one could be at the time) and deeply affected by a love affair with another member of the group, the painter and designer Duncan Grant (Skidelsky 1983). In 1921 he fell in love with the ballerina Lydia Lopokova, a star in Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (Moggridge 1992), though she was disapproved of by members of the Bloomsbury set for what they perceived as her humble lineage and unsophisticated manners (Hill and Keynes 1989).⁶³

The attitudes which Keynes brought to arts policymaking were in large part shaped by those of the Bloomsbury intellectuals. Roger Fry, who, according to Anna Upchurch was "the most prolific and specific of the policy writers" in the group (Upchurch 2004, 205), made the argument that life could be experienced on two levels: the actual and the imaginative. The imaginative life, which is accessed through an appropriate engagement with the arts, "is distinguished by

61 Among other wartime roles, Keynes served on the Court of Directors of the Bank of England, sat in the House of Lords and chaired the commission that established the Bretton Woods system of international monetary management, which led to the setting up of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

62 Bloomsbury Group describes a loose collective of writers, artists and intellectuals which took its name from the area within the London Borough of Camden where they lived and worked. They included in their number some significant intellectual figures of the first half of the twentieth century: the writer Virginia Woolf, and her husband, the political theorist, Leonard Woolf; the novelist E. M. Forster; the biographer Lytton Strachey; the critic Clive Bell and his wife, the artist and designer, Vanessa Bell; the artist and critic Roger Fry; the artist and designer Duncan Grant and the economist John Maynard Keynes.

63 In her 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, Wolfe based the character of 'un-English' Lucrezia Warren Smith on Lopokova (Hill and Keynes 1989).

the greater clearness of its perception, and the greater purity and freedom of its emotions” (Fry 1920, 17). The arts, then, are essential to a healthy imaginative life; however, he goes on to explain that artists are not like other workers, and they require special circumstances and considerations if they are to be truly creative. The artist must be truly independent, neither bound to the routine of the everyday worker, nor in the pay of the plutocrat (Fry 1920).⁶⁴ As Upchurch puts it, for a civilised society, Fry argued that there should be a leisured class from which nothing is required (except, presumably, that they make art) and that they should be sustained by an income that is not earned, but *granted* (Upchurch 2004).⁶⁵

Keynes shared with his Bloomsbury friends a disdain for the mass of the working people and, especially after his marriage to Lopokova, a passionate belief in the grand performative arts of the world’s great cultural capitals.⁶⁶ Indeed, in a broadcast made in 1945 promoting the new Arts Council of Great Britain he propounded his vision of London becoming “a great artistic metropolis” (Keynes 1945). He rejected both patronage and the market as appropriate ways by which

64 “It is impossible that the artist should work for the plutocrat; he must work for himself, because it is only by so doing that he can perform the function for which he exists; it is only by working for himself that he can work for mankind” (Fry 1920, 43).

65 The characterisations and relationships of the three protagonists in E. M. Forster’s *Howards End* neatly describe the idealised position of the intellectual of independent means that stood as an exemplar for the artist grant, while reflecting the relative financial security of the members of the Bloomsbury group themselves. The heroine, Margaret Schlegel, is, with her sister and brother, in receipt of a modest annuity that allows her to pursue the finer things in life, if not the luxuries. On either side in the economic hierarchy are: Henry Wilcox, a domineering capitalist bereft of subtlety; and the unfortunate Leonard Bast, a lower middle-class clerk haunted by the prospect of falling into poverty and, as described earlier in this chapter, pitied by Forster as being wrenched by modernity from his true place in the order of things, as a peasant. Thus, Forster personified Bloomsbury attitudes both to the plutocrat and to the lower orders attempting to improve themselves. It is significant that the author’s construction of Bast is one that is not founded on any reality, but on a confabulation conjured from the value judgements of his own group. When asked, many years later, if he had ever written about something of which he had no personal knowledge, Forster responded “The home-life of Leonard and Jacky in *Howards End* is one case. I knew nothing about that” (Dick 1972, 10).

66 In Mary Glasgow’s view, “Keynes had a strong predilection in favour of ballet: it could hardly have been otherwise for the husband of Lydia Lopokova and the founder of the Camargo Society” (Glasgow 1975, 264). The Camargo Society was a short-lived but highly influential organisation in London, which created and produced ballets from 1930–1933.

an artist might live, building on Fry's idea of an artist's income being a form of grant. "The exploitation and incidental destruction of the divine gift of the public entertainer by prostituting it to the purposes of financial gain is one of the worse crimes of present-day capitalism" (Keynes quoted in Dostaler 2007, 242). Yet it was also his view that, when the new Arts Council was created, it should be considered a temporary solution to the problem of rebuilding Britain's cultural fabric. Keynes' preferred model of funding was in the form of subsidy as a guarantee against loss. If the Arts Council was successful in helping arts organisations recover from the setbacks of war they should, he argued, become increasingly viable economically. Consequently, as Mary Glasgow reported, Keynes considered "that if a subsidising body were 100% successful it would end up by spending nothing at all, except on administration" (Glasgow 1975, 267). It was a point highlighted later by the free-market economist Alan Peacock, that Keynes intended that the Arts Council should, in time, "wither away" by essentially making itself redundant (Peacock 1993, 118).⁶⁷ Of course, quite the opposite was to prove the case.

Yet Keynes was adamant about the importance of the creative artist and foresaw a new era in which economics and politicians would give way to considerations of the intellect and emotions: "The day is not far off when the Economic Problem will take the back seat where it belongs, and the arena of the heart and head will be occupied, or reoccupied, by our real problems – the problems of life and of human relationships, of creation and behaviour and religion" (quoted in Glasgow 1975, 269).

67 Sir Alan Peacock later wrote: "the purpose of state support for the arts was to inform the public how they could spend their money wisely and well for their own benefit, and subsidies could then wither away. Keynes looked forward to the day when only a small amount of administrative expenditure by government on cultural propaganda was necessary. Keynes's view is obviously a counsel of perfection but it offers a goal, a star to follow, which, if never reached, is worth the attempt. My agreement with this view has always been whole-hearted. Keynes's view on the role of the body which he largely created was never adopted by the ACGB" (Peacock 1993, 118).

While the preferences of its new Chairman took CEMA away from the earlier vision of Thomas Jones, they also contained within them a level of internal contradiction. Three aspects that sit together uneasily, if not immiscibly, are:

1. his view, shared with his Bloomsbury friends, that the creative artist should live by independent means without strings;
2. his policy focus on institutions and buildings, especially those for opera and ballet, which, while they offered employment to artists, focused primarily upon interpreters and not creators;
3. his apparent belief that these institutions could be self-supporting (presumably within the free market) once they had recovered from the ravages of war.

These inconsistencies notwithstanding, Keynes immediately began conceiving of a postwar version of CEMA that would undertake this envisioned role. CEMA ceased to fund amateur activity and it was agreed that the Carnegie would support the amateurs, though it never extended that support to the visual arts (Evans and Glasgow 1949, 39). At his first meeting in April 1942, Keynes swept through a series of radical changes, extending the council's remit to include opera and ballet and bringing the entire Old Vic and Sadler's Wells organisation under the aegis of CEMA (Leventhal 1990). Keynes was focused on the arts of the metropolis and had little interest in the regions. While CEMA did continue to organise arts events in factory hostels, it was the opinion of Charles Lansdowne (who was in charge of this area of CEMA's work) that they "always approached them with the happy glow of an aristocratic lady going slumming" (Lansdowne 1953, 59).

Keynes' polar opposition to the vision of Thomas Jones was not simply about notions of excellence, but about an incisive division between producer and consumer that positioned audiences in a passive role in relation to cultural product rather than as active participants directly engaged in personal growth.

Indeed, his attitudes tended to veer away from anything educational.⁶⁸ He disapproved, for example, of the guided talks that W. E. Williams ran to accompany the 'Art for the People' exhibitions and tried hard to have them defunded (Hewison 1995). Keynes' brand of intellectualism was very different from that of F. R. Leavis, who considered the Bloomsbury set to be elitist dilettantes (Bell 1988). Leventhal points out that, while Keynes may have emphasised the professional over the amateur, he also emphasised entertainment over education (Leventhal 1990). The institutions he championed were those that presented large-scale productions of the classic repertoire – Shakespeare, nineteenth-century opera, ballet and drama – the cultural mainstays that, as Levine described it, the upwardly mobile middle classes corralled, tamed and took to themselves as an emblem of good taste.

As the tipping point made its wobbly realignment Keynes, nonetheless resolute and confident, set about reshaping CEMA in readiness for the end of the war when, as he wrote in a letter to Rab Butler on 14 January 1945, he saw "big opportunities" opening up.

The Arts Council of Great Britain

Following the Second World War, CEMA was renamed the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) and John Maynard Keynes became its first Chairman.⁶⁹ This was

68 In his 1945 broadcast he assured listeners: "We do not think of the Arts Council as a schoolmaster. Your enjoyment is our first aim" (quoted in Glasgow 1975, 265).

69 Keynes disliked the acronym CEMA and all it stood for, and was keen to find an alternative name. Various possibilities were suggested. Vaughan Williams suggested 'Council for the Development of the Arts', but both Keynes and Mary Glasgow vetoed this name concerned that it would make a rod for their backs by suggesting that the council might do something that could be measured, or for which it might be found wanting (Witts 1998). Finally, at the first meeting of the new body in February 1945, Sir Kenneth Clark proposed the name 'Arts Council of Great Britain' and this was adopted as adequately avoiding the worst of the pitfalls of nomenclature (Hewison 1995). Keynes was pleased to have an initialisation and not an acronym: "I hope not to turn our initials into a false, invented word. We have selected initials which we hope are unpronounceable" (quoted in Glasgow 1975, 268).

not, however, part of the vision of a new privilege-free Welfare State but one of the final acts of the caretaker Conservative government temporarily formed when Clement Attlee took Labour out of the coalition to force a general election. The mood in Britain was uncertain. As Kenneth Morgan puts it: “amidst the very euphoria of victory in 1945, the nation offered not a triumph of the will but a suspicion of change and the paralysis of self-doubt” (Morgan 1990, 28). Hewison argues that, while CEMA had been born into the extraordinary moment of shared national vision in 1940, it had since evolved into something of a compromise that would, as it transformed into the Arts Council, prove to be much more culturally conservative than might have been hoped five years earlier (Hewison 1995).

In Leventhal’s view, Keynes’ proposals for the new peace-time council “were a curious amalgam of Bloomsbury elitism and state provision on the Soviet model” (Leventhal 1990, 315).⁷⁰ They placed an emphasis on organisations over individuals and on buildings over practice (Witts 1998). And while he may have embraced the elitist attitudes of the Bloomsbury coterie, his approach owed much to the upper-middle class notion of good taste.⁷¹ The cultural critic, Raymond Williams, described the new council as catering to the cultural interests of an older upper-middle and middle class. As such, it was “a limited governmental initiative – a financial rather than a cultural or educational intervention” – which sustained the established arts and aimed to make them more accessible, but did nothing to invest in the contemporary creative culture of the day or encourage personal creative development in the citizen (Williams 1979, 163).

Nonetheless, issues of wartime morale behind it, the new Council’s focus of funding changed significantly under Keynes with the majority concentrated on

70 In his BBC radio talk on the policies and hopes for the new Arts Council, Keynes argued passionately for sufficient funds to repair existing cultural buildings and erect new ones, noting that “in Russia theatres and concert-halls are given a very high priority for building” (Keynes 1945).

71 Mary Glasgow recalled, during the planning of the new Covent Garden, in 1944, Keynes wrote: “Personally, I should like to add to the programme ... a three month’s season every year of Gilbert and Sullivan” (quoted in Glasgow 1975, 265).

central London. Organisations with which Keynes had close ties did particularly well. Such cosiness would today be considered a clear conflict of interest, but at the time, the fact that he was Chairman of the Arts Council making its largest grant to the re-establishing of the Convent Garden Opera House, of which he was also the Chairman, was, in Witts' words, "considered clever rather than venal" (Witts 1998, 141).

Keynes used his considerable influence with government to secure a high level of funding. He also ensured that the Arts Council reported directly to the Treasury rather than the Education Department, as had been the case with CEMA, and so established the principle of an 'arm's length' relationship between UK Arts policy and the government of the day.⁷² While this is generally seen as something of a coup by the respected economist, Hewison questions whether the arts council might not have fared better in its early years if it had remained under the Department of Education. The Department was, after all, a 'spending' arm of government; the role of treasury is always to curb expenditure (Hewison 1995). Indeed, Keynes himself initially favoured the Department of Education, since this would ensure a parliamentary spokesperson who was interested in their cultural activities and not just budgetary restraint (Leventhal 1990). I would also note that, had it remained under the Department of Education as had its predecessor CEMA, the aims of the Arts Council may well have remained closer to those of Thomas Jones' vision and in the tradition of the mechanics' institutes, autodidacts, and the amateur–animateur model that promoted active participation and not simply passive reception of the arts.⁷³

72 The term 'arm's length' was not coined until the 1970s as a way of describing the nature of this relationship to government. In legal terminology, it describes a transaction between two parties where neither controls the other, though there has been much speculation as to whether it is an accurate description of the relationship between government and an arts council. Prior to the 1970s, the 'consensus' politics of mid-twentieth-century Britain left such questions unexamined, perhaps strategically so (Hewison 1995).

73 Responsibility for the ACGB shifted from Treasury to the Department of Education and Science in 1964, under Harold Wilson's Labour government. Since then it has received its money from a series of departments that, depending upon the political complexion of the government in power at the (*this note continues at the foot of the next page...*)

The arm's length relationship should offer a degree of independence from the state and perhaps more generally the interests of the ruling class. However, as Raymond Williams pointed out following a term on the Council from 1967 to 1969, such 'intermediate' bodies remain closely aligned with the interests of power in the way they are constituted.

It would be naive to discuss the principles and problems of intermediate bodies without paying some attention to the character of the British State and its ruling class. Indeed, it can be argued that intermediate bodies of the kind we have known were made possible by this character. The British State has been able to delegate some of its official functions to a whole complex of semi-official or nominally independent bodies because it has been able to rely on an unusually compact and organic ruling class. Thus it can give Lord X or Lady Y both public money and apparent freedom of decision in some confidence, subject to normal procedures of report and accounting, that they will act as if they were indeed state officials. (Williams 1979, 165)

In the case of ACGB, he was of the view that the principle might better be described as "wrist's length" (Williams 1979, 159).



John Maynard Keynes died of a heart attack on 21 April 1946; four months before the Arts Council received its Royal Charter.

Much was achieved in the 1940s and Keynes' dynamism and influence played a significant role. As Janet Minihan notes "in a single decade, during and after the Second World War, the British Government did more to commit itself to supporting the arts than it had in the previous century and a half" (Minihan 1977, 215). Nonetheless, as Witts suggests and Hewison argues strongly, had the fledgling ACGB had a different inaugural chairman, it might have remained much

time, gathered up the arts within one or another grouping: heritage, sport, communications, media, tourism, leisure, creative industries, innovation, the Olympic and Paralympic Games...

closer to its roots in CEMA and the activities supported by the Carnegie and the Pilgrim Trust, in which case the shape of the contemporary arts in the United Kingdom (and in those countries that later copied or drew on this model of arts funding) might have been very different (Hewison 1995; Witts 1998; Carey 2005).

Indeed, Hewison, considering that moment of visionary unity that existed for a few months in 1940–41 while the Blitz stormed over Britain – a moment that spawned the birth of the Welfare State in the Beveridge Report of 1942 – sees ACGB as a significant lost opportunity:

The institutional framework that had been devised in 1945 missed opportunities that had existed in 1940 to define the arts so as to embrace a wider range of activities and to include a broader definition of the audience for them. It might even have encouraged those audiences to become active, rather than passive, in their participation. As one of the institutions that emerged from the 'revolutionary' consensus of 1940, and with the powerful weapons of cultural possibility and opportunity to hand, the Arts Council was in a position to maintain the momentum of change that had brought it into being. But it did not do so, falling back on older definitions of culture and conservative habits of thought. (Hewison 1995, 48)

Nonetheless, the ACGB, for better or worse, defined a new model for government support of the arts. The arms' length relationship to government avoided the perceived dangers of direct control through a Ministry of Culture, something by then associated with both the Reichs Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda of Nazi Germany and with the Socialist Realism rigidly enforced by Stalin in Soviet Russia.

Home and Abroad

This exploration of the development of public funding for the arts in Britain is of more interest than the local. Over the next quarter century, the ACGB model was to be adopted, with various modifications, by all the primary Anglophone western nations: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand and the United States. Each went

on to emulate not only its fiscal and bureaucratic structures but to absorb a number of its embedded values. In the following section I will briefly outline the nascence of each of the principle agencies.

The Arts Council of Ireland (1951)

The Arts Council of Ireland was formed in 1951, only three years after the Republic was finally declared, but over thirty since Sinn Féin established an independent parliament, Dáil Éireann. The intervening years had been turbulent and there was now concern for national identity and national culture. Patrick Little (1884–1963), Fianna Fáil Teachta Dála for Waterford County (who sat as a representative in the Dáil for twenty-six years), was appointed arts adviser to An Taoiseach (the head of government), Eamon de Valera. Little became increasingly concerned that the culture and language of Ireland were in danger of running to seed. In a letter of 27 November 1945 he urged that

even the language movement will suffer unless a widespread cultural renaissance is achieved, something that will stimulate and fill people's minds with interest in the treasures and possibilities of their own land. Such a revival might easily prove to be one of our best safeguards in time of national emergency, a way to future national unity and a very desirable and valuable invisible export. (quoted in Kennedy 1990, Chapter 4)⁷⁴

When Keynes announced his plans to evolve CEMA into the ACGB they provided a model by which such a renaissance might be achieved. It was agreed that the new Arts Council would be under the aegis of the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, a position held at that time by Little. Matters changed when elections in 1948 saw Fianna Fáil replaced in government by Fine Gael. Nonetheless, John A. Costello, the new Taoiseach, proved supportive of the initiative (while giving no

⁷⁴ The pages in Kennedy's *Dreams and Responsibilities* are unnumbered, so chapter number is given as the best available way to identify the location of quotations cited from this publication.

credit to Little for its planning) and the Arts Council was founded in 1951. Later that year, however, a further change of government returned Fianna Fáil to power and Eamon de Valera, now in his third term as Taoiseach, appointed Little to be the Arts Council's inaugural Director (Kennedy 1990, Chapter 4).

From the beginning the Arts Council was woefully underfunded, its annual appropriation being set as 'no more than £20,000', a figure which did not rise for ten years (Kennedy 1990, Chapter 6). The new Council also shared with the ACGB ambivalence as to focus – access and participation sitting uncomfortably alongside excellence and entertainment. In the first years the emphasis was on the former while not losing sight of the latter. Indeed, the smallness of its budget meant that the Council was constrained to modest undertakings. Even so, much was achieved in a quiet way and at a local level.

In December 1956, the writer Seán O Faoláin was appointed Director of the Arts Council. A ferocious fighter against censorship well-known for his antiauthoritarian attitude, he made an odd choice for the position, not least because he was, in his own words, "not at all sympathetic to the principles of State support for artists, except on [a] really grand scale" (Kennedy 1990, Chapter 7). At a meeting on 7 March 1957, Council approved a new standing order which read: "Future Policy, while not failing to encourage local enterprise, would insist on high standards" (Kennedy 1990, Chapter 7). That is, the weighting of emphasis was reversed. This new balance of values was maintained when the position of Director passed to Father Donal O'Sullivan, whose concern was firmly "with standards more than participation" (Kennedy 1990, Chapter 7). Fr. O'Sullivan was of the view that the Arts Council had been established primarily to support the visual arts (for which he had a personal passion). Analysis of spending at the time revealed that 53 per cent of the Council's funding was allocated to music and drama and only 13 per cent to the visual arts; it was proposed that over a five-year arc, spending on the visual arts be raised to 65 per cent of total annual funding. Meanwhile, towards the end of 1960, the Council agreed a policy to move away from the popular and traditional forms it had supported in its early

years. The Council's standing order was revised again to read "The Council's main function is to maintain and encourage high standards in the arts". It was a policy that took them further from the indigenous and popular arts associated with Irish language and towards the high arts associated with English. The Arts Council found itself out of step with the popular mood leading it, in Brian Kennedy's words, "into a cul-de-sac" (Kennedy 1990, Chapter 7). The Council also refused to support the Government's initiative to establish a state television company, considering it would vulgarise public taste by seeking to appeal to mass audiences. When *Telefís Éireann* was launched on New Year's Eve 1961, Council members were not invited.

By the late 1960s, initiatives were afoot out in the field that were to have a significant impact on the Arts Council. A three-week festival of drama, poetry, music and visual arts at the Gate Theatre in November 1966 led to the setting up of Project 67, which would later become Ireland's first multi-art-form space, Project Arts Centre. The festival was organised by Jim Fitzgerald and Colm O Briain. At twenty-three, O Briain was to prove a dynamic figure in Irish arts, becoming Chairman of the Project Gallery and lobbying the Arts Council to establish local and regional arts centres across the republic. In 1971 he complained "the Council represents a kind of social orientation which is not representative of the Irish people generally" (Briain 1971), arguing that "they should stop trying to put their money on the winning horse and promote art for all, not just for the ones that have made it" (McCarthy 1971). It was a sentiment that echoed Paddy Little's view that "art should be for the benefit of the community as a whole" (Kennedy 1990, Chapter 8).

Four years later, at the age of thirty-one, Colm O Briain became Director of the Arts Council. He proved a dynamic and media-savvy leader who reinvigorated and radically reoriented the organisation. According to the composer and long-term member of the Arts Council, Brian Boydell, "he was a natural human dynamo and used his socialist views to argue for arts for the masses, bringing art to all the

people. Colm O Briain was the right man at the right time. He shook the Council out of its complacency and gave it a new image” (quoted in Kennedy 1990, Chapter 9).

Attitudes were also changing in government and, in 1966, Charles Haughey was appointed Minister of Finance. Remarkably, given the Arts Council had always found it hard to persuade the Exchequer of their need for more money, the new Minister was highly supportive. So much so that An Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, put him in charge of the arts. While this was never ratified by a written Transfer of Functions Order, the Council, perhaps not surprisingly, took no issue with the Minister’s involvement in their affairs, given the increases in funding it portended, and no one seemed too worried that it might compromise the supposed arm’s length nature of Arts Council decision-making. Haughey duly increased the Arts Council funding from £40,000 to £60,000 in his first budget. Nevertheless, the autonomy of the Arts Council as an arm’s length organisation was to become an issue, which flared up in 1982 when Charles Haughey, who was now An Taoiseach, intervened because the Arts Council had threatened to terminate subsidy for a number of arts organisations due to lack of funds.⁷⁵ The dispute was resolved with an increase in funding to the Arts Council and an assurance of its continued independence. Such assurances notwithstanding, in December of that year, following another change of government, the new Fine Gael–Labour coalition appointed a Minister of State for the Arts (Kennedy 1990, Chapter 9).

In 2013, the Arts Council of Ireland / An Chomhairle Ealaíon has a budget of €59.9 million (equivalent to almost \$90 million AUD) a considerable increase from its initial £20,000 (equivalent to a little over \$1.1 million AUD at today’s values).

⁷⁵ Much of the information in this brief review of the establishment of the Arts Council of Ireland is drawn from Brian Kennedy’s book *Dreams and Responsibilities*, commissioned by the Council and published in 1990. While it has been much praised for its scholarly approach, its meticulous discussion of some aspects of the relationship between An Taoiseach and the Council were said to displease Charles Haughey and his arts advisor, Anthony Cronin (Woodworth 2012, 10). In 1991 Adrian Munnally, the then Director of the Arts Council, had the remaining two hundred copies destroyed (White 1997, 16). However, his successor, Patricia Quinn, who took over as Director four years after Haughey retired from politics, arranged for the book reprinted (White 1999) and it remains freely available from the Arts Council website.

Its functional values have tended to swing away from those of Little and later O Briain to a more conservative and corporate form. As defined in the 2003 Arts Act, the Council's focus is upon "improving standards", with questions of access restricted to stimulating "public interest" and to promoting the "knowledge, appreciation and practice of the arts" (Arts Council of Ireland 2014).

Canada Council (1957)

The Canada Council for the Encouragement of the Arts, Letters, Humanities and Social Sciences was established in 1957 and, as its original title suggests, it had a wide remit. The council was a recommendation of a Royal Commission, headed by the philanthropist and diplomat, Vincent Massey, and often referred to simply as the Massey Commission. Prior to the Commission, there had been a number of voluntary groups that had worked to advocate for government to become involved in the support of the cultural life of Canada though, in the view of Charles Acland, they "largely represented upper-class Anglo-Canadian society of the day" (Acland 1999, 247).⁷⁶ In many cases they were characterised by a concern about, and resistance to, the impact of US mass commercial culture and an anxiety that Canadian identity may be lost (Tippett 1990; Acland 1999). That said, much of the financial backing they received came from US philanthropic foundations (Acland 1999), in ways that were similar to the support for British culture, prior to the establishing of CEMA and ACGB, provided by the Carnegie and Pilgrim Trusts. That said, Carnegie and Pilgrim appear from the literature to have focused much more on egalitarian participatory arts practice than their counterparts operating in North America at the time.

The Federation of Canadian Artists (FCA) formed, following a conference in 1941 sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, to lobby government. Modelled on

⁷⁶ These organisations included the Canadian Association for Adult Education, The Canadian Institute of International Affairs, the Canadian Library Association, the Canadian Citizenship Council, the Canadian Radio League and the National Film Society (Acland 1999).

the American Federation of Artists, it was, according to Jeffrey Brison, “a small group of artists, art bureaucrats and their backers at the Carnegie Corporation” and their emphasis was on professionalisation and the bureaucratisation of Canadian culture (Brison 2005, 69; Upchurch 2007). Following representations made by the FCA to the Reconstruction Committee,⁷⁷ a coalition of sixteen artists’ organisations came together to form the Canadian Arts Council (CAC). This was not an arts council in the Keynesian model, but a voluntary advocacy association. Some commentators argue that CAC played an important role in stimulating serious discussion about the future government role in Canadian culture (Tippett 1990; Acland 1999). However, others consider CAC, and the community and volunteer sector in general, to have been relatively ineffectual, considering Massey to have been the predominant and most effective influence (Granatstein 1994; Upchurch 2007).

Vincent Massey was a lawyer and diplomat whose grandfather, Hart Almerrin Massey, a prominent and successful nineteenth-century industrialist, had made the family fortune; Vincent Massey would later become the country’s first Canadian-born Governor General. From 1935 to 1946 Massey was High Commissioner for Canada in London. During this time he played an active role in the metropolitan art scene serving on the Boards of both the National and Tate Galleries and forming close friendships with Kenneth Clark, Samuel Courtauld, Rab Butler and, significantly in terms of my discussion here, John Maynard Keynes. Anna Upchurch described the group as a “clique” of “privileged and powerful men” who, with their influential wives, sought to reform Britain’s cultural institutions and make permanent the new funding model developing at CEMA (Upchurch 2007, 244-245).

77 The House of Commons Special Committee on Reconstruction and Re-establishment (to give its full title) was established in 1942 to identify issues likely to face Canada following the end of the Second World War and propose solutions in the national interest.

When Massey returned to Canada, he undertook a national speaking tour to reacquaint himself with the country, and its citizens with him. He subsequently published a best-selling book – *On Being Canadian* – which played on themes of national identity while exploring alternatives to the tide of US mass commercial culture sweeping into the country (Upchurch 2007). In 1949 he accepted an invitation to head the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, which undertook two years of research and planning that would subsequently be considered exemplary in its management. The commission canvassed opinion across the length and breadth of the country, though it did not go so far as to seek the views of the general public (Litt 1992).

The Commission made its report and recommendation in 1951, but legal disputations between the federal government and the province of Quebec delayed its implementation for six years. Most commentators agree that the basic form owes much to the Keynesian model for the ACGB. As Brison notes, Massey (like Keynes) favoured a “centralised, ‘top-down’ structure for federal cultural programs”; a Commission proposal to establish community art centres in every major Canadian city was subsequently shelved in deference to this preference (Brison 2005, 146). However, there were differences. The Canadian Government received a tax windfall of \$100 million, half of which was used to create an endowment for Canada Council, insulating it in part from the vagaries of parliamentary appropriations.⁷⁸ Canada Council also diverged from the ACGB model in that it funded a wider range of practice than the grand performing arts that were the main focus of Keynes’ vision, and it had many more direct dealings with artists, assisting them through scholarships and grants (Litt 1992).

As with the multiple-axis tipping point that saw the formation of the ACGB, Canada Council carried within its conception some curious internal contradictions.

⁷⁸ The payment came in the form of inheritance tax on the estates of two Canadian millionaires: the financier Izaak Walton Killam, for a time the wealthiest man in Canada, and the industrialist Sir James Dunn, both noted philanthropists who negotiated the use of those taxes prior to their deaths (McDowall 1984; How 1986).

Much of the rhetoric surrounding the setting up of Canada Council was in terms of establishing a strong national culture that could withstand the onslaught of US commercialism yet, in the years that followed, it sought to demonstrate this not through the development of a distinctly Canadian aesthetic, but, as Anna Upchurch puts it, “in the mastery of a European one”. She goes on:

In my view, postwar cultural leaders including Massey, Keynes and Clark, sought to encourage a trans-national standard of aesthetic values grounded in classical and Western European traditions. Adopting the arts council model was one policy practice that furthered the transmission of these values in the postwar world of liberal democracies ... The process of peer review made more likely the adherence to international artistic ‘standards’. And the funding practice of supporting professional, rather than amateur, arts organisations ensured the establishment of these trans-national aesthetic values as norms in Canada. (Upchurch 2007, 251)

Thus, perhaps counterintuitively, the reliance upon peer groups drawn from around the country did not lead to a stronger inherently Canadian focus, but to a greater emphasis on the traditions of Europe, their professional sensibilities so influenced by a western European ‘internationalist’ view of art as to eclipse consideration of local production, or perhaps ‘cringe’ at any comparison. Upchurch notes that, in his history of the Massey Commission, Paul Litt concluded that the liberal humanists on the commission considered the best defence against the insidious effects of mass culture was to embed European artistic forms within Canadian life (Litt 1992; Upchurch 2007).

Jeffrey Brison argues that while the development of Canada Council was purported to symbolise Canadian resistance to US culture, it should more accurately be seen as a “grand collaboration” between a Canadian elite and American tycoon foundations. Indeed, the early Canada Council diverged from the model of ACGB in the way it adopted and adapted the flexible multifunctional model developed by US foundations (Brison 2005, 202; Upchurch 2007).

New Zealand Arts Council (1963)

In February 1963 Queen Elizabeth II visited New Zealand. “As the nation’s commemoration” of her visit the government established the Queen Elizabeth the Second Arts Council of New Zealand (QEIIACNZ – an unpronounceable initialisation of which Keyes would no doubt have approved) described in the founding legislation as “a gift” to the monarch (NZPD 20 August 1963). Following the model of ACGB it was to be an arm’s length body “to protect the arts from political interference and to insulate governments from the ill will arising from unpopular funding decisions” (Ministry of Cultural Affairs 1998, Appendix item 11).

The Council’s aim was to encourage the arts while maintaining public access to, and interest in, them; this would involve a shift from amateur to professional. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Leon Gotz, observed that in “the modern world there ... has been a change from dancing, from music and from acting for the sheer love of it, and now we have professional players ... artists ... dancers ... singers etc” (NZPD 2 October 1963). In Peter Skilling’s analysis, the citizen’s participation was to be “restricted to the role of educated spectator. Art, primarily, was something that was done to us; ideally, we should appreciate the experience. The goal for the mass of the population was not to create culture but to become cultured” (Skilling 2005, 23). The emphasis was on ‘high culture’.

This was to change in 1974 with the introduction of the Arts Council Act, which shifted emphasis from ‘high’ (imported) culture to the task of nation building. As such, it “represented a move from professionalism towards participation and from centralisation to regionalism” (Skilling 2005, 24) which included (in the words of the Act) recognition of the “multicultural structure of society in New Zealand”. In 1978, QEIIACNZ established the Council for Maori and South Pacific Arts and Culture placing a clear emphasis on Pacific cultures within the frame of a multicultural concern for nation building. However, the move to understand New Zealand as a bicultural nation did not occur until 1986 when Te Waka Toi was established as a specifically Maori cultural funding entity.

The Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa Act of 1994 (introduced in the same year that significant changes were made to the art councils in Australia and the United Kingdom) revised the Council's remit which, while it was still referred to as the Arts Council in the act, would now trade under the name Creative New Zealand. There was a new emphasis on accountability, the development of a clear strategic plan and transparent process for nominating Arts Council membership. While this promised openness of dealing, some saw that it came at a cost – bureaucratisation. Discontent began to brew, exploding a few years later into a public row between the writer's community and the council. Brian Easton, describing the rationalisation by which the bureaucracy sought to reform the production of literature, noted that it "involved concentration of power into the hands of some state-appointed generic managers, who seemed to know nothing about literature, but were earnestly imposing the commercialists' model" (Easton 1997, 254). The cultural critic and social historian, Gordon McLauchlan, was critical of the corporate jargon adopted by those bureaucrats, dismissing it as "off-English ... language which never quite says what it means, if it means anything at all" (quoted in Easton 1997, 254). For Easton, even the new name – Creative New Zealand – carried a disturbingly "Orwellian overtone" (Easton 1997, 254).

In 1999, Labour returned to power after a decade in opposition, launching a Cultural Recovery Package a few months later. On 21 December, in a speech laying out the new government's agenda, the Governor General, Sir Michael Hardie Boys, stated that the role of the arts must be understood in the context of globalised economics. Consequently, the government would "strongly support our professional, performing artists" through "investment, export development and promotion". These initiatives would include established artists as well as those who were emerging and those working in the community. However, the overall "aim is to expand job opportunities and wealth creation based on the arts as well as to promote New Zealand's identity" (NZPD 21 December 1999). By 2002, the 'New Labour' modified neoliberal rhetoric was in full sway and the Governor

General, Dame Silvia Cartwright, in her speech to parliament affirmed that the government considered “the creative industries as one of the three key sectors” for which it had identified special support. A “Creative Industries taskforce” had been established “to ensure that a strategic approach is taken to the development of the sector” which include assisting “artists to set up and develop their own businesses” (NZPD 27 August 2002).

The Chair of Creative New Zealand, Peter Biggs (the Managing Director of the Melbourne-based Clemenger BBDO advertising agency and acknowledged expert on branding, marketing, creativity and leadership), made it clear that the role of the creative arts was economic survival in an aggressively competitive globalised market.

This is the New Zealand of the future. And it is our only future ... because the world has an excess of everything – except big, creative ideas. Because a big, creative idea is the last remaining legal way to gain an unfair and lasting advantage over your competition. (Creative New Zealand 2002)

In terms of employment, this approach appears to have paid off. Between 2001 and 2006, New Zealand saw paid employment in the creative industries grow faster than total employment, whereas a fall was recorded in Australia for the same period. One significant factor in this rise was filmmaker Peter Jackson’s decision to base his blockbuster film projects in New Zealand (Madden 2011). For a country with a GDP of \$185 billion USD in 2014, single films such as *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* that gross over \$2.8 billion USD have a significant impact.⁷⁹ Although small in comparison with that of Australia Council, Creative New Zealand is relatively well funded through a combination of government grant and lottery funding. In the financial year 2013–14 Creative New Zealand income

⁷⁹ The other two *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the first two *Hobbit* movies all come well placed in the top forty grossing films of all time.

was over \$54 million NZD of which 29 per cent flowed as government grant and 69 per cent came from the Lottery Grants Board (Creative New Zealand 2014). In terms of funding per capita of population this is 20 per cent more than Australia Council (\$11.46 AUD per capita for Creative New Zealand compared to \$9.49 AUD per capita for Australia Council).

In 2014, the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa Act 1994, which had brought Creative New Zealand into being, was replaced by a new act which brought together the roles of the Arts Council, the Arts Board, Te Waka Toi (the Maori funding board) and the Pacific Arts Committee into a single Arts Council responsible for policy, strategy and funding allocation. In 2013–14 the Arts Council's four target outcomes are stated as:

1. New Zealanders participate in the arts
 2. High-quality New Zealand art is developed
 3. New Zealanders experience high-quality arts
 4. New Zealand arts gain international success
- (Creative New Zealand 2014, 4)

However, in the Annual Report for 2013–14, the Council reported that “a number of the forecast targets of impact measures in Outcome 1 have not been met” and therefore “all of these measures are being retired next year due to their limited coverage of the work we do” (Creative New Zealand 2014, 44). The number and quality of applications received was given as a principal reason. The remaining three outcome foci leave the arts with an emphasis on quality, consumption and export, but not active participation.

US National Endowment for the Arts (1965)

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was established in 1965 through the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act. The Act was formulated by a National Council on the Arts established one year earlier under Lynden B. Johnson's presidency to pick up on initiatives instigated by the late John F. Kennedy (Bauerlein and Grantham 2009). Moves for a national arts body had

begun as early as 1826 when John Trumbull, President of the Academy of Fine Arts, put forward his 'Plan of the Permanent Encouragement of the Fine Arts by the National Government'. It was unsuccessful, as were other proposals over the next hundred years, all of which Congress voted down.⁸⁰ At State level, Utah was the first to develop an arts council: the Utah Arts Institute, established in 1899 (Koostra and Donohue 2000).

Prior to the First World War, the development of arts structures in the United States was, for the most part, undertaken by what Paul DiMaggio has termed "organisation-forming status groups" (DiMaggio 1982, 45). DiMaggio, comparing his own research in America with that of Janet Wolff in the UK, concludes that the origins of high culture in America were more straightforward to understand than those in Britain, where wealth had a more complex and interconnected relationship with aristocracy and the bourgeoisie (DiMaggio 1982; Wolff 1982). It was the tycoons who established many of the US museums and theatres, and their descendants subsequently took leading positions on many of the arts-organisation Boards. In doing so, Bill Ivey (who chaired the NEA from 1998 to 2001) argues they "switched the fine arts onto their side of the track" to become status symbols and emblems of refinement (Ivey 2008, 16). As Lawrence Levine documented in the field of US theatre, the moneyed and upwardly mobile classes appropriated the fine arts to themselves, especially the 'international' arts, relegating the local and the amateur to the parochial and the hobbyist. As in Britain and Canada, the pursuit of particular notions of 'excellence' increasingly disenfranchised the local. Ivey sees this as symptomatic of both public and private sector bureaucracies carrying over into the ethos of the NEA: "Funders, like the NEA and major foundations, have employed the 'E-word', *excellence*, as a club with which to pummel any orchestra, dance company or museum that became

80 As an indication of the general hesitancy of successive US governments to become involved in the arts and culture, it took Congress ten years to accept a bequest of the late James Smithson to establish the Smithsonian Institution as the National Museum of American History (Ottesen 2011).

too identified with local art making. To be *local* was to be *provincial*, and to be provincial was not to be excellent and, inevitably, not to be funded” (Ivey 2008, 220, emphases in original).

But the arts also had a role to play in wider society. In 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt established Federal Project Number One under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration (Arnesen 2007). Part of Roosevelt’s New Deal, which adopted Keynesian economic strategies of counter-cyclical public spending (Skidelsky 2003), Federal Project Number One provided employment for some 40,000 artists during the worst of the Depression years. Artists were engaged in public works that included the creation of large murals in public buildings across the country (Koostra and Donohue 2000). Ironically, given the NEA was to be born in the middle years of the Cold War, many of these New-Deal murals thirty years earlier were, in style and content, not unlike Soviet depictions in the way they celebrated the worker as a type or an everyman rather than an individual.



Figure 9. Seymour Fogel *The Security of the People and The Wealth of the Nation* (1938) Commissioned under Federal Project Number One, Seymour Fogel’s mural was installed in 1942 in the Independence Avenue entrance lobby of the Wilbur J. Cohen Federal Building (formerly the Social Security Administration Building) at 330 Independence Avenue, Southwest, Washington, DC.

The NEA was envisioned to undertake two important roles. The first was to help build arts provision to cater to the rising demand across the US population. As August Heckscher, Kennedy's special consultant on the arts, noted in his report to the President: "Recent years have witnessed in the United States a rapidly developing interest in the arts. Attendance at museums and concerts has increased dramatically". This he ascribed to an "increasing amount of free time, not only in the working week, but in the life cycle as a whole" (US Government 1964, 1). But the purpose was to be about more than entertainment; government was to become involved in the arts to help empower Americans for what the future might bring. The Arts and Humanities Act includes in its Declaration of Purpose an assertion that "democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens", in a rapidly modernising world it must "foster and support a form of education designed to make men masters of their technology and not its unthinking servant" (US Government 2002, 868 §951).

The second role addressed America's temporal and spiritual responsibilities on a global scale: "the world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth and technology, but must be founded upon worldwide respect and admiration for the nation's high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and the spirit" (US Government 2002, 868 §951). This is in marked contrast to the motivations for the New Deal, which were a response to a serious problem; the NEA was conceptualised as a way of taking advantage of a significant opportunity. In President John F. Kennedy's words, "the life of the arts ... is very close to the centre of a nation's purpose ... and is a test of the quality of a nation's civilisation" (quoted in Dowie 2001, 170). That notion of civilisation had very particular meaning in the midst of the Cold War. With the abortive Bay of Pigs Invasion and erection of the Berlin Wall, the arts became an instrument of competitive diplomacy. The culture promoted by the NEA was to stand as the antithesis of the ideologically constrained Socialist Realism of Soviet Russia, with its authoritarian demand that artists produce works depicting and celebrating the proletarian struggle. Consequently, "a safeguard built into the

legislation that established the NEA ... [was] designed to prevent government regulation of artistic freedom or the creation of officially sanctioned styles” (Steiner 1995, 13). If Communist art was being defined by constraint and conformity, American art would be the very model of freedom and variety. That was the theory, anyway.

In practice it was not long before voices on the Republican right were questioning, with increasing vigour, the prudence of government giving artists money to do whatever they wanted. A program in 1968 offering discounted (that is, subsidised) tickets to allow those on lower incomes to attend contemporary theatre productions was considered stupidly wasteful. Frank Bow, a Republican representative for Ohio, pointed out that the United States was paying for the war in Vietnam and “we cannot have guns and butter. And this is guns with strawberry shortcake covered with whipped cream and a cherry on top” (Bauerlein and Grantham 2009, 28). Ronald Regan, on assuming the presidency in 1981, tried unsuccessfully to wind up the NEA. Later, concerns about profligacy were overtaken by even more anguished fears of blasphemy and moral turpitude in a series of controversies around NEA-funded art by those such as Andreas Serrano, Robert Mapplethorpe and Barbara DeGenevieve (1989); and the performance artists Karen Finley, John Fleck, Holly Hughes and Tim Miller, subsequently dubbed ‘the NEA Four’ (1990). In the mid-1990s, criticisms shifted to accusations of wastefulness and elitism, and in 2009 to political bias, when a member of NEA staff was alleged to have directed artists to create works that would promote President Obama’s domestic policies.

On the face of it, the NEA and the ACGB do not seem similar. After all, America in the mid-1960s was a very different place from Britain in the mid-1940s, caught in a long moment of postwar uncertainty. Even so, according to Michael Straight, the biographer of Nancy Hanks who was the NEA’s second chairperson (1969–1977), “the great precedent for the Arts Endowment was the British Arts Council” (Straight 1988, 391). One thing the NEA and ACGB did share was the important role played by philanthropists and tycoon foundations in the

period leading up to their initiation, with Carnegie and Harkness (through the Pilgrim Trust) introducing a prototype arts-council function to interbellum Britain and similar benefactors, most notably the Rockefeller family, doing much to establish the arts in the United States and to lobby for the government to engage more directly in the nation's cultural life.

Australia Council for the Arts (1975)

The Australia Council for the Arts was announced in 1967 by Prime Minister Harold Holt and created in 1968 by John Gorton's administration, but it was not until 1975 that it was established as a statutory authority, when the Australia Council Act was voted in by parliament under Gough Whitlam's third term, following the double dissolution election of 1974. Lianne Gibson, in her book *The Uses of Art: Constructing Australian Identities*, describes the development of the mechanics' Institutes (discussed earlier in this chapter) and the introduction of the first public museums in Australia in the middle of the nineteenth century. She argues that this "is a key moment in the development of the formation which continues to confirm contemporary arts policy" in Australia; one which understands art as "useful to the governance of populations, particularly where these populations are defined above all by their freedom ... [with] art programs targeted at a general population (in contrast to a population of 'experts')" (Gibson 2001, 7).

However, as in Britain, war proved a defining moment in bringing government into direct relation to art. During the First World War, the federal government commissioned artists to go to the front to depict the scenes of battle and the Australian men fighting there. The works produced proved popular with the public, doing much to affect "the construction of art as relevant to 'the people'" (Gibson 2001, 45). Indeed the program was so popular that it was maintained until 1930.

Towards the end of the Second World War, given the popularity of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts in Britain, a version of CEMA was established in New South Wales through the merger of the Country Art

Association and the Encouragement of Art Movement. The latter had been established in 1943, sponsored by the Communist Party and the Trade Union movement, though the council subsequently did what it could to dissociate itself from that Communist connection (Gibson 2001). When, in 1946, British CEMA changed its name to the Arts Council of Great Britain, the Australian body was renamed the Arts Council of Australia (ACA). However, ACA differed from ACGB in two important ways. First, it did not receive federal funding, and only in New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory did it receive state or territory monies. Second, it did not adopt the shift away from broad-based participatory and amateur arts to concentrate on the professional and high arts (Macdonnell 1997), nor as in Canada, did it seek to define Australia through its ability to master the cultural repertoires of Europe (Gibson 2001; Upchurch 2007).⁸¹ In the words of Dorothy Helmrich, who headed CEMA and ACA for the first twenty years: “[the] objectives of the CEMA were primarily to take the arts to the people – the country people – to encourage amateur groups – to provide a field in which artists could support themselves by their art and, perhaps the most important of all to take the live and fine arts into schools” (Helmrich 1969, 2).

By 1948 there were divisions in all states of Australia, operating more or less autonomously under the umbrella of the federal ACA. The Council can best be understood within the wider frame of reconstruction in Australia following the Second World War, in which there was a broad consensus on the direction the nation should take (Gibson 2001). It was a vision that saw art and culture as something of and for the people. CEMA’s stated purpose was:

81 Lisanne Gibson describes the isolationist approach adopted in Australia following the First World War. “Foreign influences were deemed corrupt, a theme reinforced by the impact of the Spanish influenza epidemic carried from Europe by soldiers returning from the war” (Gibson 2001, 46). One of the more extreme advocates of isolationism was James MacDonald (director of the National Gallery of New South Wales 1929–1937 and the National Gallery of Victoria 1937–1941), who frequently and vociferously denounced modern art as “the product of degenerates and perverts” (Williams 1995, 217).

To bring art, in all its forms, to the people, to encourage them, not only to cultivate an appreciation of all that is beautiful in music, painting, sculpture, drama, ballet and so forth, but also to express themselves in some one or other of the arts and crafts ... CEMA is based on the belief that art, in the widest sense of the word, is not a luxury for the few, but a necessity for all, in a community which aims to develop to the full the faculties of its citizens and so enable them to make the best of life. (Arts Council of Australia (NSW Division) 1947, 3)

This emphasis on citizen wellbeing, access, participation and self-expression was, however, eschewed when, in 1968, the Commonwealth Government established the Australia Council for the Arts without reference to the work of the Arts Council of Australia, which it had come to associate with regionalism and amateurism (Gibson 2001). This change of policy direction correlates with the escalation of the US art market that began in the late sixties, marking the start of a relentless focus on culture as an industry and art as luxury commodity (art as bullion, to paraphrase Robert Hughes).

In the period between 1968 and 1975, the Australia Council operated without being formally constituted by act of parliament. Its focus was firmly on 'excellence' and upon 'creative innovation' with the majority of funding flowing to a small number of large city-based companies. Any notion of access was interpreted as access to 'national excellence' (Gibson 2001; Craik 2007). However, a report published in 1976 by the Industry Assistance Commission rejected any "narrow or elitist definition of 'culture'" preferring instead to define culture as "the expression of a community's way of life" (Industries Assistance Commission 1976, 2).⁸² It also rejected any art-for-art's-sake justification of government funding, adopting an essentially instrumental approach and recommending that the Australia Council focus on improving education, encouraging innovation and

82 The report had been commissioned by the Whitlam administration, though it was finally delivered to the Fraser administration. IAC based its examination upon the public benefit accruing from government subsidy, concluding that the policy under which Australia Council funded the arts was "totally irrelevant to community involvement with the arts" (Gibson 2001, 100).

expanding dissemination. The report was rejected by the Australia Council and both government and opposition (Gibson 2001; Craik 2007).

Increasingly, the Australia Council would conceive its role within the paradigm of cultural industry and seek, through numerous reports, to demonstrate its own effectiveness in terms of metrics. Later, in 1994 following the publication of *Creative Nation* (the first formally developed cultural policy by an Australian federal government), the Council was directed “to turn its attention away from the ‘supply’ side of the arts equation to the creation of a higher level of demand from arts consumers” (Office for the Arts 1994, 13). While this saw the Council place increasing emphasis on maximising attendances and attracting new audiences, the assessment focus remained on numbers attending rather than the quality of experience or the level of active participation involved.

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In this chapter I have taken time to explore the context in which the arts council movement began. I have done so because the values at the heart of the concept of an art council stem from that moment of instigation and that moment was shaped by diverse ideas about art and by pressures on government and populace.

The early 1940s marked an unstable tipping point for the arts in Britain with at least four dynamics in play: the active community engagement of an increasingly educated and emancipated working class; the struggle to retain control of the nation’s cultural life by the intellectual elite; the aspirations of a stratifying and upwardly-mobile middle class; and a number of philanthropists who used their newly amassed fortunes to bring art into the public sphere and, in the shape of Carnegie and Harkness, to support the direct participation of the many in the cultural life of the nation. In the end, the decisive moment turned out to be one of hesitant indecision in which the influential and strong-willed Keynes was able to mould the nascent council to his personal vision. It was a vision that benefited greatly from his exceptional skills as an economist and his astute understating of the bureaucratic mindset. But it was also one that emphasised the

metropolitan centre at the expense of the regional. It was a model that drew a clear distinction between active professionals and passive audiences, rejecting both the amateur and the concord of amateur and professional manifest in amateurism. There was no room for learning by doing and certainly no forum for discussion of the nation's culture between the classes; no sense of culture growing from the free and open 'conversation' between all citizens. Rather, there was excellence as defined by an elite and the proper entertainment of the people as prescribed by their betters.⁸³

It was also an approach that abandoned resistance to the king tide of mass-mediation that was to inundate the shores of popular culture. As postwar production began rapidly to outstrip demand, the pressure to turn citizens into consumers was considerable. What the Arts Council and commercial culture shared was an implicit expectation that the audience be passive patrons and customers, indeed their business models required it. There would, later, be increasing resistance to such rigid definitions and, with the advent of the internet, a radical new means by which to circumvent – and make increasingly irrelevant – the guiding principles on which ACGB had been founded. The Arts Council did continue to evolve over the next half century but, despite several changes of spots and rhetoric, continued to have an uneasy relationship with the public whose taxes funded its programs. Many of those problems can be traced back to the years of its gestation and birth, which, like a corporate genome, shaped the council within the context of an environment that was becoming less tolerant of authority and a populace taking more control of its culture. Not just the Arts Council, but the arts it funded, were to face a crisis of legitimacy.

I will discuss that 'crisis' in the next chapter.

83 A similarly paternalistic approach was taken by Lord Reith, the first Director-General of the BBC, whose style of management was that of 'benevolent dictator' – a phrase that has darker resonances given Reith's private admiration for Hitler's ruthless suppression of resistance in the latter half of the 1930s (Paulu 1981).

CHAPTER 4

Communication, Collaboration and 'Crisis'

Fast forward to the first decade of the new millennium and the Arts Council England (ACE) is in the throes of the first truly public debate on the future of the arts, fuelled by think tanks and provocation papers that throw down the gauntlet to the arts establishment in no uncertain way.

While the ideas put forward by these think-tank groups cover a range of issues, the central debate is about the apparent mismatch of values facing the arts in a technologically empowered democracy when those arts which are receiving public funds have little relevance for, and often seem to actively exclude, the average citizen. In the words of John Holden: “the cultural system faces a crisis of legitimacy” (Holden 2006, 9).

Why this perceived crisis arises in the middle of the first decade of the new century is not immediately obvious. It comes towards the end of a period when the popularity of British art across the board had seemed to be riding high with

the ascendancy of the YBAs (Young British Artists),⁸⁴ the spin of Cool Britannia and Britpop's upbeat alternative to US grunge: an apparent cultural flourishing that echoed the heyday of Swinging London and the British Invasion of the 1960s, with a similarly youthful edge. At the same time, it predates the Global Financial Crisis of 2007–08 and the worst of the political fallout arising from British involvement in the Second Iraq War.

I will argue that what was changing was the way in which ideas were communicated and shared, which in turn precipitated a shift in attitude. It was born of a re-evaluation of the individual within society, and the many in relation to the elite, which it saw a significant swing in aspiration from passive consumer to active maker. It was certainly not that people undervalued the arts – polls showed that the majority of citizens felt the arts were important – but that this did not translate into attendances at the kind of events funded by ACE.⁸⁵ This was not the first time that the Arts Council – either ACGB or, later, Arts Council England (ACE) – had come under criticism. Indeed the Council had had a turbulent history in the latter half of the preceding century, which I will briefly review here before returning to the question of what was happening in the middle of the first decade of the new.

Plus Ça Change

With the death of John Maynard Keynes, the ACGB lost much of its initial momentum. The hesitancy that came in the aftermath of war enveloped the

84 'YBAs' describes a loose group of around forty British visual artists, many of whom graduated from Goldsmiths towards the end of the 1980s. A number are as famous for their market personas as for their art and have adopted a stance that is "both oppositional and entrepreneurial" (Bush 2004, 91). They include Christine Borland, Jake and Dinos Chapman, Adam Chodzko, Mat Collishaw, Tacita Dean, Tracey Emin, Liam Gillick, Douglas Gordon, Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Sam Taylor-Wood, Gillian Wearing and Rachel Whiteread.

85 Similar disparities have been recorded in USA. The National Arts Education Public Awareness Campaign Survey of 2001 reported that, "over 75 per cent of Americans agree that the arts 'are a positive experience in a troubled world', 'give you pure pleasure', and 'give you an uplift from every day experiences', and that they would miss the arts if they were no longer available in their communities" (Davidson and Michener 2001, 71).

council. A sixty-nine-year-old former Warden of Drapers, Sir Earnest Pooley, was appointed as Chairman. Sir Kenneth Clark noted sourly that “having no interest in the arts ... [Pooley] could be relied on not to press their claims too strongly” (Clark 1977, 129).

In the late 1940s, the Labour government initiated a significant number of social changes including nationalisation of the utilities and the introduction of welfare. But 1950s domestic policy was eclipsed by a series of conflicts overseas and the British arts establishment was characterised by “cultural introversion” unresponsive to wider “foreign influences” (Moore-Gilbert and Seed 2003, 5).⁸⁶ Labour lost the 1951 election and, for the first time since 1929, Britain had a wholly Conservative government. ACGB stagnated under Winston Churchill’s administration of 1951–55; what remained of the radical vision and consensus of 1940 faded from public consciousness.

The government of Harold Wilson (1964–70) saw something of a golden age; with Jennie Lee (the energetic widow of Aneurin Bevan, the popular Welsh politician who had championed the introduction of the National Health Service) becoming Britain’s first Arts Minister, albeit a junior position. Famously feisty, she had considerable support from the Prime Minister and during that time a number of important initiatives were set in train.⁸⁷ Lee played a critical role in the shaping and establishing of the Open University, which I would suggest shares with the nineteenth-century mechanics’ institutes a focus on the autodidact. The South Bank Centre in London was extended significantly, the Hayward Gallery opened (initially managed directly by the Arts Council) and a program of touring

86 Those overseas conflicts spanned the escalating Cold War; colonial disintegration including the Malayan National Liberation Army guerrilla war (1948–1960) and the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya (1952–1960); the Korean War (1950–1953) and the Iranian coup d’état (1953).

87 Lord Goodman, Chair of ACGB from 1965 to 1972, described the relationship thus: “Although Harold Wilson was an artistic Philistine, he was better than the later Philistines, since he recognised that the ambit of British culture could not be controlled by his own personal predilections, and he responded with speed and generosity to applications from Jennie Lee for better support for the arts” (Goodman 1993, 261).

exhibitions circulated nationally. Lee introduced Britain's first-ever White Paper on arts funding in 1965 and subsequently renewed the ACGB Charter in 1967 with significant increase in funding (forty-five per cent in 1966–67 and a further twenty-six per cent the following year). However, as Robert Hewison points out, while the White Paper acknowledged the increasing 'diffusion' of the fine and popular arts, it also retained an emphasis on the 'higher' forms, a strategy that lacked the radicalism increasingly demanded by Labour's New Left (Hewison 1995). Nor was there much change to the make-up of the Arts Council itself. John Harris found that, between 1946 and 1969, 21 of the 31 Labour appointees to the Council went to private schools and only 7 to state schools. This compares with 16 of the 26 Conservative appointees from private schools and 5 from state schools. In each case, 3 had received private tutoring (Harris 1969).⁸⁸ Nonetheless, this was a period of dynamic optimism, albeit with its critics.

It was not to last.

By the mid-1970s, Europe was facing growing financial and employment challenges and Britain was no exception. The Arts Council's Annual Report for 1973–74 warned "the effect of inflation on wages and other overheads now threatens the survival of many of our supported companies" (Arts Council of Great Britain 1974, 10). In the wider political arena, the Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, in a bid to rein in rampant inflation by capping public sector wages, came into direct conflict with the Trades Unions. The stand-off culminated in the 1978–79 'winter of discontent' in which record low temperatures and strikes by public sector workers created distress and consequent anger among the electorate. They voted Labour out the following May. When Margaret Thatcher took office in 1979, there was a tectonic shift in the political agenda in general and a deep suspicion of the funded arts in particular.

⁸⁸ Four Labour appointees and eight Conservatives have been omitted from these figures as no relevant data was available.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the ACGB had greatly expanded its portfolio of clients, including non-traditional and hybrid art forms, and 'community arts'. From the literature, community arts in the 1970s seem to have been a less disciplined and proficient area of activity than the amateurism of the interwar period. While some achieved high standards, most were amateur in the worst sense of the word ... and they were pugnacious with it.⁸⁹

While the amateurism of community-based arts of the 1920s and 1930s had, like sport, been framed as contest, with choirs, musicians and theatre groups performing competitively, there was a degree of consensus; a broadly shared sense of being 'in it together'. Indeed, a level of consensus on value is essential to such fair-minded competition since it is important to establish commonly agreed ground rules if the competition is to be seen to be fair and judgement transparent. In contrast, community arts of the 1970s grew out of the counterculture of the 1960s, and the struggle for equal rights for minority groups and the disenfranchised. Their concern was the right to be different within the larger social mosaic and the emphasis was on tolerance and mutual respect rather than unanimity. The expression of personal experience within the wider public sphere became a tool by which to undermine the entrenched constraints of the establishment. Bart Moore-Gilbert and John Seed argue that what the counterculture was challenging was

the institutionalised narrowness, both of what was conceived as public and of who was permitted to have access to it ... This privative and elitist (though 'public') institutionalisation of discourse also marginalised and de-politicised other areas of social experience and certain largely unquestioned facets of Britain's official self-image. (Moore-Gilbert and Seed 2003, 7)

⁸⁹ Richard Witts writes: "Vaughan Williams would have identified and applauded some endeavours where professionals and amateurs undertook projects to mutually enhance creative skills, which is not called amateurism but amateurism. But ... a number of worthwhile ventures were overshadowed by mediocre, clamorous artists exploiting community schemes to sustain their failed careers and validate puerile self-expression as legitimate artistry" (Witts 1998, 480–481).

In many cases the militancy of the community arts sector arose as much from an ingrained sense of social injustice as it did from any artistic critique.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, the focus of their ire was the Arts Council.

They met their match in Roy Shaw, secretary-general of ACGB from 1975 to 1983. Shaw had been a Workers' Education Association lecturer and, later, professor of adult education at the University of Keele. While he championed adult education he was, according to Hewison, a "cultural conservative". In 1979, ACGB announced that, given its resources were limited, the Council would in future focus its attention on the 'professional' arts and cease to fund 'amateur' activity. Two years later, community arts were devolved to the Regional Arts Associations, which "did not make the same distinction between amateur and professional made by the Arts Council, and had a more democratic tradition" (Hewison 1995, 254).

That distinction between 'amateur' and 'professional' was by no means fixed. As I noted in the previous chapter, Mary Glasgow had pointed to the earlier assumption that only amateurs required funding and professionals should, if they are any good, be commercially self-sufficient (Evans and Glasgow 1949).⁹¹ As the 1980s progressed, it became clear that 'professional' was a term now limited to organisations and the Arts Council gradually withdrew from funding individuals. Tacitly, the individual artist was lumped with the amateur; if not in terms of the quality of their output then because, as Hewison notes: "a choice between individuals was always harder to make and justify than one between organisations" (Hewison 1995, 251). Such an approach resonates with Keynes' preference for funding arts companies rather than directly supporting artists or performers.

90 I would note here that the community arts sector of the 1960s and 1970s was simply one manifestation of the much larger counterculture.

91 Kingsley Amis shared this view, contending that if a writer could not find an audience, he or she should seek another profession. Amis was an outspoken critic of arts council subsidy. "If you are paid in advance or have your losses underwritten, the temptation to self-indulgence is extreme." With a strongly market-driven view of authorship, he continues: "If you have to please to live, you'll do your best to please" (Amis 1990, 248).

I would argue that the approach of ACGB under the new Tory government was simply tapping into one of the values at the core of the arts council model that, as a bureaucracy, it is more comfortable to deal with regulated corporate entities, than idiosyncratic individuals. Under Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Government demanded that the arts be conducted in a businesslike manner, introducing performance indicators and requiring long-term planning by ACGB clients as a condition of funding. The arts were remodelled within the rhetoric of economic policy: they were now part of an 'enterprise culture'. They would be expected to deliver 'value for money' and to do so in a measurable way. Within the frame of economic instrumentalism, outcomes such as employment levels and increased tourism became the order of the day. The Arts Council duly adopted the jargon and, in 1985, the Chairman William Rees-Mogg delivered a lecture entitled (significantly) 'The Political Economy of Art' in which he assured his audience that "the Arts Council gives the best value for money in job creation of any part of the state system". Neatly encapsulating the new value system, he went on: "the arts are to British tourism what the sun is to Spain" (Rees-Mogg 1985, 3). When it came to the arts, Margaret Thatcher's preference was for preserving heritage. If the Iberian sunshine was a natural resource, Britain's heritage was a cultural one. But, art or heritage, the legitimate means for paying for it were, in her view, commercial. This, she averred, would ensure efficiency and guard against bias. In her memoir, she wrote:

I was not convinced that the state should play Maecenas. Artistic talent – let alone artistic genius – is unplanned, unpredictable, eccentrically individual. Regimented, subsidised, owned and determined by the state, it withers. Moreover the 'state' in these cases comes to mean the vested interests of the arts lobby. I wanted to see the private sector raising the money and bringing business acumen and efficiency to bear on the administration of cultural institutions. (Thatcher 1993, 632)

I would question whether businesses are anything other than self-interested, given the profit motive, and one wonders just how economically efficient they are. In business, people operating with the level of responsibility

and workload of their counterparts in the arts would expect considerably higher salaries. Indeed, in 1985, Thatcher's own Arts Minister, Lord Gowrie, resigned complaining that the ministerial salary of thirty-three thousand pounds (equivalent to £92,650 at 2014 values) was insufficient income on which to live (Gowrie 1985). However, the Tories did not play fair, even in the area of economics. While government funding was said to be on standstill in real terms, the way in which inflation was calculated was changed from the Retail Price Index (RPI) to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) deflator, a metric used in macroeconomic calculations. The deflator was consistently lower than the RPI, while the RPI was a much more realistic measure of actual cost increases for arts companies; economic jargon employed to obfuscate fiscal sleight of hand.

Thatcher's argument plays the neoliberal gambit of appealing to the individual as though this rhetorical figure were democratic, while arguing for greater corporate control via a 'free market' that accrues ever-increasing privilege to the few at the cost of the many. The idea of individuals working together as a community – "the collectivist mentality of the sixties and seventies", according to Richard Luce, Arts Minister from 1985 to 1990 – was dismissed as "out of date" (Luce 1987).

Tory condemnation of the cultural and social mores of the 1960s and early 1970s was often outspoken. Norman Tebbit berated "the insufferable, smug, sanctimonious, naive, guilt-ridden, wet, pink orthodoxy of that ... third-rate decade, the nineteen-sixties" (Tebbit 1990). However, as Moore-Gilbert and Seed argue, it was the very understanding of the interconnectedness of art, politics and the establishment that arose in the 1960s which shaped the Tory cultural agenda:

It is, ironically, precisely a recognition of this dynamic and politically charged intersection of art, institutional structures and the culture of everyday life that was registered in Thatcherite interventions in the sphere of culture throughout the 1980s – whether in pressure on, and sometimes outright censorship of, the BBC and other television companies; in systematic attacks on higher education, and especially some of the more critical sectors of the academy; in stereotyping of 'the chattering classes'; or in the encouragement of private patronage of the arts in preference to state support. This, and the anathemas that pour

forth on the 1960s from the likes of [Norman] Tebbit, [Mary] Whitehouse, [Bernard] Levin and other pundits, testifies to the increased politicisation of the cultural sphere since the 1960s. (Moore-Gilbert and Seed 2003, 8–9)

Among the subtler of the interventions identified by Moore-Gilbert and Seed was the “selective distribution of government subsidy by the Arts Council ... [which] served to deflect or undermine elements of the cultural opposition, filtering out what was deemed disruptive” (Moore-Gilbert and Seed 2003, 6).

In 1981, as ACGB washed its hands of the troublesome ‘community arts’ sector, the Greater London Council (GLC) established an Arts and Recreation Committee, chaired by a high-flying Trades Union official who would later become Labour Arts Minister, Tony Banks. He set up sub-committees for community arts, ethnic arts and sport with a view to greater support for ethnic minorities, women’s groups, gay and lesbian groups, unemployed youth, the elderly and the disabled (Hewison 1995).

GLC did much to raise standards and widen the field of publicly funded arts to deal head-on with social and political issues. Under its leader, Ken Livingston, it sought to empower the citizen within a collectivist funding structure, “in marked contrast to the privatising, individualistic approach of Thatcherism, where the freedom of the market masked the increasing authoritarianism of the state” (Hewison 1995, 242). The Conservative government introduced the Local Government Act 1985 and, after some parliamentary tussles, pushed it through in 1986, abolishing the GLC and ridding Thatcher of the turbulent councillor.

In the same year, the Arts Council published a strategy for the coming decade. With the seemingly benign title of ‘The Glory of the Garden’, it proved to confirm Sam Llewellyn’s observation that “in gardens, beauty is a by-product. The main business is sex and death” (Llewellyn 1999).⁹² In penitent (if metaphorically

92 It was a very English metaphor that drew its title from a poem by Rudyard Kipling, from which the strategy document quoted the following two lines: “Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made / By singing ‘Oh, how beautiful’, and sitting in the shade” (Arts Council of Great Britain *(this note continues at the foot of the next page...)*)

mixed) mode, ACGB admitted that “for some years the Council has been stuck in a groove” but, as the new secretary-general Luke Rittner had made clear in an earlier press release, the new strategy “will help the Council thin out the seed-bed to give more room ... for new seeds to be planted” (Rittner 1983; Arts Council of Great Britain 1985).⁹³

‘The Glory of the Garden’ made radical proposals in terms of cultural devolution and weeding out to free up fiscal ground for new growth. The plan provided for six million pounds to be taken from the metropolitan budget and redirected to the regions, with forty-four of ACGB’s clients reassigned to the Regional Arts Associations (RAAs) and one of the four London-based orchestras ‘encouraged’ to relocate to the east of England; ten theatres and five touring companies would be defunded and Royal Court Theatre put on notice of future grant termination. Provision for arts centres and training were to be reduced, and the ‘housing the arts’ capital fund and the literature department wound up.

Whether or not these were the right places to thin out and transplant, I would agree that in an ever-changing culture, some things must end in order that others can begin. If this does not happen then, in periods of largess, new companies form that remain tenaciously ensconced regardless of whether they continue to fulfil current needs, while blocking funds for other, newer and perhaps more apposite initiatives. But the Arts Council model is deeply inertial in its devotion to the status quo. It is perhaps a function of the bureaucracy that even its progenitor Keynes could not dislodge. His vision of a contingent, temporary body that helped arts companies become commercially viable soon began sedimenting, after his untimely death, to form another stratum of the establishment. Even the belligerent

1985, iii). Hewison notes that the quote “combined a hierarchical version of the pastoral myth with a hint of enterprise culture” (Hewison 1995, 254).

93 I am tempted to suggest that, in its dismissal of the socio-cultural thrust of the 1960s and early 1970s, the nineteenth-century metaphor of the garden created through honest toil was a sideswipe at Flower Power and the Hippie movement that rejected mainstream culture while essentially living off its surpluses.

Thatcher regime failed to push through many of the proposed changes. In the end, five of the six million pounds was raised by cutting regional companies, not metropolitan ones; several ‘condemned’ companies were given a reprieve and all four orchestras resolutely remained in the capital.

Plus C’est La Même Chose

Nineteen ninety-four marked what was supposed to be something of a turning point for the Arts Council in Britain. (It was a similarly significant year in Australia, as I will discuss a little further down.) Midway through Prime Minister John Major’s only full-term in office, two significant changes were made to ACGB: one actual, one aspirational. What happened in actuality was that ACGB was broken up into autonomous arts councils serving England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, fully devolving power to what had previously been regional offices. The second was that the ACE was charged with turning its attention away from supply, to demand. Under the new directive, ACE was to:

1. develop and improve the knowledge, understanding, and practice of the arts;
2. to increase the accessibility of the arts to the public;
3. to advise and cooperate with departments of government, local authorities... and other bodies on matters concerned, whether directly or indirectly, with the foregoing objects.
(Arts Council England 2004)

As Sutherland and Gosling note, as these aims are stated, “the focus is not primarily directed toward improving artistic standards or infrastructure, though arguably this remains implicit, but toward increasing the accessibility of the arts to the public in general, and importantly, toward increasing the public’s knowledge and understanding/appreciation of the arts across the social spectrum” (Sutherland and Gosling 2010, 11).

The Council’s Chairman, Lord Palumbo and its Secretary General, Anthony Everitt, stepped down to make way for new brooms (who were to be Lord Gowrie and Mary Allen, respectively). It seemed that this would mark the end of what Everitt,

writing in the *Guardian* on 18 February that year, described as “Maynard Keynes’s idiosyncratic creation, a neo-Bloomsbury, free-standing, mini-ministry of culture, led not by politicians but by practitioners and lovers of the arts” (Everitt 1994).

In Australia, under what would appear to be very different political circumstances (a dynamic, big-picture Labor government as opposed to a fading ‘grey’ Conservative one, mired in scandal), a similar refocusing of attention was proposed in the Creative Nation federal cultural policy. In its assessment of the Australia Council, the government report made clear that in the twenty years since its statutory formation, there were three times as many artists and four times as many organisations that had, by then, come to rely on the Council for their continued existence. While recognising that this required greater stability of funding, the report went on to make it clear that “as a matter of some urgency” the Council “has to turn its attention away from the ‘supply’ side of the arts equation to the creation of a higher level of demand from arts consumers” (Office for the Arts 1994, 'Australia Council').⁹⁴

While, in both countries, this led to an increased focus on marketing, it did not mark a radical shift in the way things were done in either council. Marketing focused on two main areas: increasing the frequency of visitation by those already engaging with the funded arts and strategies aimed at drawing in new audiences from those not in the habit of attending. Neither council, however, gave serious attention to finding out what it was that the wider public valued in the arts and whether what was funded should change. Marketing remained firmly in the economic paradigm of consumer metrics (‘bums on seats’) rather than the more fundamental questions of public perception or audience experience, let alone active participation. In that sense, the “neo-Bloomsbury” arrangement described by Anthony Everitt, remained doggedly in place. The peer groups of professionals sitting on the Arts Council panels continued to ensure the flow of funding to those

94 This electronic version of ‘Creative Nation’ held on the NLA web archive does not include page numbers. Therefore, to aid referencing, the section title has been provided.

areas of the arts that best suited audiences who were well educated and well heeled (Ploeg 2002).

In the United States, pressure to articulate public value of the arts and justify public spending on the work of artists grew from the so-called 'culture wars' between conservatism and radicalism (McCarthy et al. 2004). As such, that situation might be construed as a 'crisis of morality', although the underlying criticism of Republicans remained: that funding the arts was symptomatic of the larger malaise of 'Big Government'.

Post-Millennial Blues

I began this chapter by questioning why a 'crisis of legitimacy' might arise so soon after a period of cultural optimism and before the seismic shocks of the global financial crisis. I would suggest that the answers lies, in part at least, in the unstable nature of another tipping point around technological development which had seen, on the one hand, the bursting of the dot-com bubble in 2000 and, on the other, the increasing shift to active online citizen engagement as a function of what has become known as 'Web 2.0'.

In the last years of the preceding century, governmental approaches to the arts in Britain – which had variously been understood through the prism of education, heritage and leisure and as affiliated with media, communications and sport – were swept into the larger and newer concept of the creative industries. As such, the arts were defined by innovation and justified by instrumentalism. For some, this marked a radical dumbing down of art which, they felt, now had to fit an economic model that favoured either mass markets (Britpop, Cool Britannia), high-roller luxury markets (YBAs) or uses that directly addressed (and so reduced the cost of) social provisions that drew on the budgets of other government departments (defensive instrumentalism) (Gray 2002, 2008; Belfiore 2012).

The notion of the Creative Industries was in large part an invention of UK New Labour policymaking. It differed from the earlier concept of Cultural Industries in its specific focus on monetisation, where the previous definition had

taken a wider purview that included non-fiscal benefits such as cultural and social value. As the Department of Culture, Media and Sport made clear in their 2001 Mapping Document, Creatives Industries encompasses “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (Department for Culture Media & Sport 2001, 5). Yet, while the term has enjoyed widespread usage, the concept itself remains somewhat insubstantial, lacking a fully articulated thesis or clear delineation from what had gone before. It has been developed as a brand rather than an intellectual concept. As Justin O’Connor noted,

there was nothing new about New Labour’s identification of the increased economic importance of culture or the tendencies to convergence brought about by digitalisation – these were already well rehearsed in the cultural industries literature of the 1980s and 1990s. What was important was the brand value of the term ‘creative industries’ when embraced by a high profile government and successfully (if unexpectedly) exported around the globe. (O’Connor 2012, 391)

But if the concept was sketchy, the loosely corralled sector it sought to describe was certainly proving to be effective within the limited fiscal frame of measurement. The ‘brand’ was bolstered by some impressive statistics; the number of people employed in the industries formerly known as ‘cultural’ was reported to rise from 648,900 in 1991 (O’Brien and Feist 1995) to 1.3 million in 2001 for the new creative industries, with the estimated income from the sector amounting to five per cent of GDP (some £112.5 billion) (Department for Culture Media & Sport 1998, 10; 2001). However, as John Heartfield and others have pointed out, much of this growth can be accounted for in changes in the framing of what was now included in the Creative Industries. The new catchment had been expanded beyond what were previously defined as the arts and cultural industries. Most notably, the new figures included the UK software sector, which employed over half a million people and earned £36.4 billion (Department for

Culture Media & Sport 2001; Heartfield 2005). Indeed the 2001 *Mapping Document* included caveats to use extreme caution in attempting to draw conclusions from comparison of the figures,⁹⁵ but this did little to temper the political rhetoric at the time.

However, these figures could also be read as a critique of public funding, since the figures for attendance at the kind of events that were funded by the Arts Council remained low, paling even as the creative industries appeared to shine ever brighter. My own analysis of the figures given in the DCMS mapping document of 2001 shows that the sector comprising ‘art and antiques’,⁹⁶ crafts and the performing arts accounted for less than four per cent of revenue; with software, computer and interactive industries bringing in thirty-three per cent; publishing, music, film, video, television and radio accounting for a further thirty-four per cent; and the remainder generated by design, architecture and advertising.

Yet, of the ‘art and antiques’ sub-sector, each person employed was claimed to be generating an average of £94,595, while for the performing arts it was only £6,757. Meanwhile, the proportion of the Arts Council’s funding going to the performing arts was 85 per cent (£115 million), while subsidy for the visual arts was only 5 per cent (£6.4 million). Indeed, Arts Council funding to the visual arts as a whole was only one third of the annual ACE funding to a single performing arts venue – Keynes’ beloved Royal Opera House, Covent Garden – which had also received over the preceding three-year period an additional £78.5 million in redevelopment grants from the National Lottery fund. To give some sense of just how much Keynes weighted the funding equation by bringing the

95 “A direct comparison with the 1998 Mapping Document is largely inappropriate since the many sources drawn upon can differ widely between the two documents” (Department for Culture Media & Sport 2001, 5). “We suggest that extreme caution is used when attempting to draw conclusions from the data” (Department for Culture Media & Sport 2001, Appendix 2).

96 Somewhat bizarrely, art and antiques were taken as a single segment, which did not allow for any detailed analysis of the economic impact of contemporary visual art, funded or otherwise.

major performing arts into the frame of government subsidy: the seven major companies (the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, the South Bank Centre, English National Opera, the Royal National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, Birmingham Royal Ballet and English National Ballet) accounted for over sixty per cent of the total funds distributed by ACE in 2001 (£81 million).⁹⁷

To further set this in context, data published by the UK Office of National Statistics (ONS) in 2010 indicate that attendances for a number of art forms fell in the five-year period from 2005–06 to 2009–10. The number of people who attended a ballet performance at least once in the year fell from 3.9 per cent to 3.6 per cent; for opera and operetta combined, 4.4 per cent to 4.3 per cent; for classical music concerts, 8.3 per cent to 7.6 per cent; for visual arts exhibitions 21.8 per cent to 18.7 per cent; and for theatrical drama 22.7 per cent to 21.4 per cent (Office for National Statistics 2010). I would note that these are the art forms which receive the majority of the support available from ACE. While comparable data for the preceding decade are not available from ONS, a report in the *Guardian* newspaper in 2004, noted that “public attendance at ‘high’ cultural institutions has fallen nationally by 20 per cent in ten years [1994–2004]” (Vulliamy 2004). The article did not define where the cut off between high and popular art exactly lay in this analysis. However, the evidence does suggest a downward drift in attendances for the kind of events funded by the Arts Council.

Nor was this an isolated British trend. In the United States, a report published by Americans for the Arts describes the trends in arts attendances from 2003 to 2011. In the field of popular arts, attendances at Broadway shows had risen 10 per cent, while at popular music concerts they had risen 12 per cent. This compares with falls in attendance at art museums by 8 per cent and for classical concerts, dance, opera and theatre combined by 10 per cent. Breaking the last figure down: classical concert attendances fell by only 4 per cent (though they had

⁹⁷ I have calculated these figures from the Arts Council England Annual Financial Statement for 2001 (Arts Council England 2001).

fallen 18 per cent since 2000), while opera continued to fall dramatically after the recession ending 27 percentage points lower than in 2003. Indeed between 2000 and 2011, opera attendance fell more than 50 percentage points.⁹⁸ The authors note the effect of the 2008–09 recession. This had a marked impact on the overall National Arts Index which rose 3 per cent from 2003 to 2007, before falling 5.4 per cent over the next two years. However, while that trend levelled off, the overall index continued to fall slightly over the remaining two years (Kushner and Cohen 2013).

These figures did not mark a waning of public interest in the arts. Far from it. There may have been a decline in interest in those arts supported by Arts Council mechanisms in many Anglophone countries, but that did not mean there was any less interest in the arts per se, rather that there was a growing demand to engage in a different way – actively, as a participant.

The first decade of the twenty-first century saw a marked rise in the number of people engaging in the visual arts at a pro-am level; that is, at a professional skill level but not as paid work and not simply as a hobby. People were no longer content to be passive spectators. The clearest measure of this can be found not in the United Kingdom but in Australia where, due to a prescient approach to data collection (whether by accident or design) the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) had been collecting data that captured measures of pro-am activity even before the term had been coined or the phenomenon become widespread. This allows for some of the only available longitudinal data comparison of pro-am activity in the Anglophone artworld.

ABS published its most recent analysis of those who work, paid or unpaid, in the culture and leisure industries in 2007.⁹⁹ In the context of this report, ‘work’

98 Only some data sets published by Americans for the Arts cover the period 2000–2002.

99 Subsequent data was published for the year 2011, but this looked only at paid employees and focused on the applied areas of the cultural industries (publishing, radio, television and cinema, architecture and so on) with a single aggregated figure for ‘creative artists, musicians, writers and performers’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012).

included that undertaken for free or with very little payment, but not pastimes undertaken purely for the individual's own enjoyment or for that of their family and friends; these were defined as hobbies and excluded from the data sets. Thus, unusually for such statistical analysis, ABS captured the pro-ams as well as the paid professionals. Furthermore, similar research undertaken by ABS in 1993, 1997, 2001 and 2004 allowed for trend analysis of data (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007). Sadly, no compatible data were published subsequent to 2007 and, in 2014, ABS announced that it would no longer collect and analyse data relating to culture and sport due to funding cuts by the Commonwealth Government (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014; Fairley 2014).

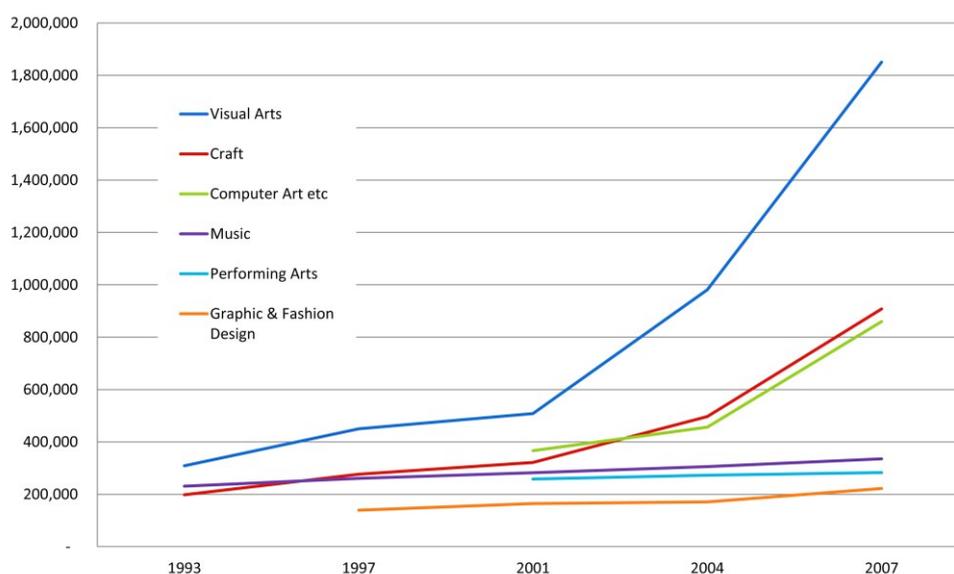


Figure 10. Adult Australians Involved in Artform Areas 1993–2007
Involvement in the twelve months prior to survey, excluding hobbyists
Based on data in ABS 6281.0 (2007)

The 2007 ABS data set showed a six-fold rise in the number of adult Australians involved in the visual arts (drawing, painting, sculpture, photography and printmaking) between 1993 and 2007 (which had by then risen to some 1.85 million people). When the creation of artworks using a computer and sundry other

forms of visual art were added the figure rose to 2.5 million. The number of adult Australians involved in craft-making had risen four-and-half-fold in the same period to 0.9 million. Once sundry craft activities not measured in earlier data sets were added, the total number of people involved in the visual arts and craft at pro-am or professional level amounted to 3.6 million or 23 per cent of the adult population.

The great majority of these were pro-ams: during the twelve months prior to interview, 81 per cent of visual arts practice and 84 per cent of craft practice was undertaken without any income. If one extends the pro-am range to include income of no more than \$5,000 AUD per year, then the figures rise to 90 per cent for visual arts and 94 per cent for craft. Again, to reiterate, this excludes hobbyists.

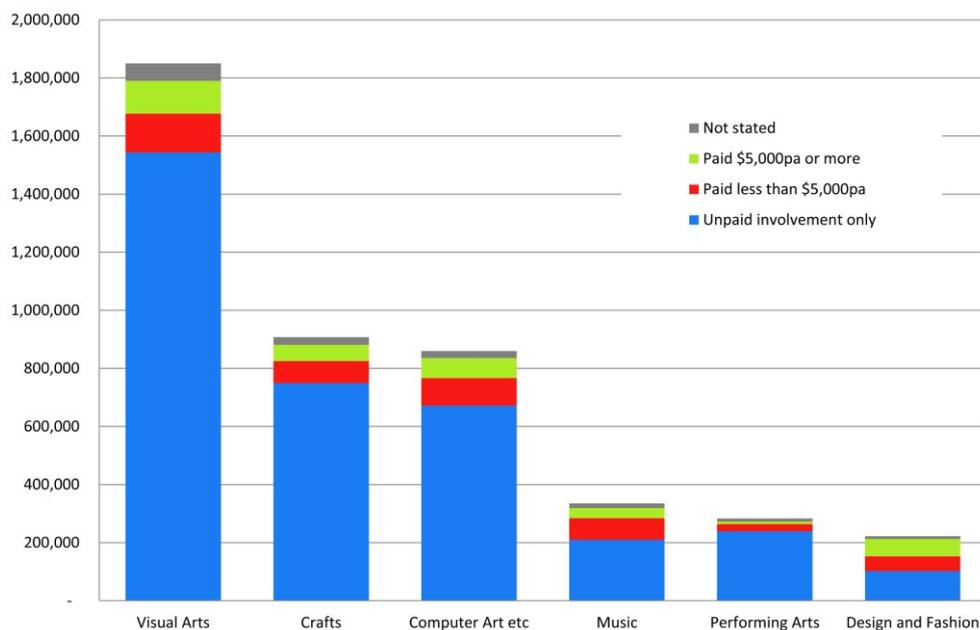


Figure 11. Adult Australians Involved in Artform Areas by Annual Art Income 2007
Income from art activity in the twelve months prior to survey, excluding hobbyists.
Based on data in ABS 6281.0 (2007)

Set in the context of a Creative Industries ethos, where monetisation is the fundamental driver, this seems counterintuitive. Why should so many people want to spend so much time developing skills that did not bring financial reward?

And, in the longer arc of the Arts Council ethos, why were so many individuals who 'ought' to be audiences working so hard to become producers. Thomas Jones, Ralph Vaughan Williams and William Giles Whittaker would have known why, of course...

Before the twentieth century and the advent of mass media, the arts were primarily participatory and the most common art experiences involved the individual as an active participant. Bill Ivey (a former head of the NEA and a folklorist by profession) and Steven Tepper (a cultural policy academic) contrast the centralisation of notions of excellence in twentieth-century US culture, whereby recording and broadcast technologies "allowed previously fleeting art and entertainment to be 'captured' and thereby produced and distributed on a mass scale", with what was lost in the process:

local and vernacular art and entertainment were eclipsed by a culture that was increasingly defined by the tastes of a national elite at Columbia Records, or Universal Studios, or nonprofit arts organisations. [Meanwhile], the amateurs at home were overshadowed by the new class of creative 'professionals', and audiences were increasingly socialised to be passive consumers, awaiting their favourite radio broadcasts or sitting in darkened theatres and concert halls, applauding on cue. (Ivey and Tepper 2006, B7)

If mass mediation was the last great transformation in US culture, Ivey and Tepper identify the next as a reengagement with participation facilitated by cheap, available mass communication which is releasing the drive to make by freeing up the means to participate and not simply consume.

Since 2000, spurred by the empowering technologies of internet connectivity but by no means limited to these communication networks, there has been a steep rise in the number of people actively engaging in art. Indeed, such active engagement was strikingly present outside the virtuality of the internet and the digital constructs of the computer, especially in lower-income communities.

Research undertaken in the Inland Empire, one of the poorest regions in California, investigated a diverse range of arts from music, dance and theatre to

visual art and writing. In order to “gain a more nuanced understanding of cultural engagement” within the “cultural ecology of the community” the research took a much wider view of the arts than that addressed by traditional not-for-profit arts organisations (Brown, Novak, and Kitchener 2008, 5 and 7).¹⁰⁰ The results, based on input from over five thousand individual respondents, indicated that half actively engaged in art making of some form, with a similar number indicating that they collected and decorated (‘curated’) their homes with art, yet only one third regularly visited art galleries. Art was important to them but actively making, collecting and curating art into their lives was at its core. This was particularly true for those with lower educational qualifications. Regular gallery going only rose above the mean for respondents with tertiary qualifications (Brown, Novak, and Kitchener 2008).

The preference for active engagement is hardly surprising. As François Matarasso pointed out “it is in the act of creativity that empowerment lies”. In my view, a public institution should have at its heart a concern for the creative expression of the many, not the few. For, as Matarasso goes on to say, it is “through sharing creativity that understanding and social inclusiveness are promoted” (Matarasso 1997, 79). It is an assessment shared by the Australian psychologist and social researcher, Hugh MacKay, who is of the opinion that:

in deciding which artists and organisations should receive government funding, we are in danger of overlooking a crucial point. The greatest public value of the arts is through participation in them, rather than merely being exposed to them as spectators. The most intense benefits of the arts flow from creating and performing, so why aren’t we using public money to extend those benefits more widely? (Mackay 2008, 433 emphasis in original)

100 This more inclusive set of measurement tools was developed from work previously undertaken by the cultural researchers Carole Rosenstein (Rosenstein 2005) and Tom Borrup and Heidi Wagner (Borrup and Wagner 2007).

This is not to argue narrowly that one must first sing to appreciate choral music or paint before one can enjoy visual art. Rather it is to suggest that becoming active in an area of the arts places the individual in a different relationship to the culture of the community as a whole; one of being a co-producer and not simply a consumer. It is important to avoid the supposition that an audience with little knowledge of art is a cognitively empty vessel that should be filled by a person of expertise through the transfer of knowledge. The Brazilian educationalist, Paulo Freire, described this approach through an analogy with banking, whereby “those who consider themselves knowledgeable” deposit information in the minds of “those whom they consider to know nothing” as one might deposit money in an empty bank account (Freire 1970, 53). Freire argues that this sets up a dangerous oppositional relationship which oppresses the learner in order to maintain the inequalities of the status quo by denying the learner’s ability to intervene in the world and so become a transformer of that world. “The capability of banking education to minimise or annul the student’s creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have a world revealed nor to see it transformed” (Freire 1970, 54). This is not an approach limited to academic learning or industrial training, it is also an approach adopted by the mass media who deliver news, information and entertainment in a form that requires they be passively absorbed as a sponge soaks up liquid. In order to liberate the learner, the educator and learner must be partners engaged in an *active* and *creative* process driven by the learner – a process which, I would note, echoes that of amateurism. This takes a degree of good faith and goodwill, for the process

must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, [the educators] must be partners of the students in their relations with them ... Liberation education consists of acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. (Freire 1970, 56 and 60)

Importantly, this approach does not make an assumption that the learner’s mind is empty, but rather that it is already furnished with a range of prior

experience that is both the foundation of, and stimulation for, further learning. Commenting on Freire's analogy and method, Laurie Field emphasises the way in which the approach described in the banking analogy seriously underestimates people's "natural tendency to learn actively in the context of what they already know ... A better way to view learners would be as active investors who already have existing 'funds' (i.e. knowledge) which they are interested in expanding" (Field 2000, 159).

This is essentially a constructivist theory of learning, which proposes "that humans are *active* in making sense of their world" (Billett 2001, 30, my emphasis). Such active and creative extending of experience is complex and holistic, feeding and informing other experiences, and does not remain tightly siloed within externally defined ontological containers. The experience of bodily movement can inform our understanding of the energy caught within the brushwork of a painting; the experience of colour can enrich our sense of musical harmony and discord; our experience of narrative form can feed our sense of melodic progression as a process of anticipation, suspense, surprise and resolution. While the banking approach to learning sees information as hard currency accrued in a purely accumulative process, the liberating approach described by Freire and others promoting experience-based learning, is one of ongoing "transformation of experience" (Andresen, Boud, and Cohen 2000, 226).

While I am using educational theory to describe this process, I would not want to suggest that such active participation is simply didactic. Rather, I am drawing on theories of learning which take a much broader view of how experience is transformed into insight and then employing those expanded understandings to illuminate one aspect of the more complex question of art as experience; an experience which both extends and deepens our sense of ourselves, the world and ourselves in the world. In terms of Ellen Dissanayake's concept we come to understand not simply that an object or an action has been 'made special', but the human intervention by which that symbolic value was so created. And in this lies the possibility of empathy – of a deep, somatic connection realised through action.

This is why Mackay's observation is important. It is not simply about finding less academic ways by which audiences might come to the arts, but that those active and participatory approaches hold the possibility of quite different, richer and more deeply integrated experiences of interconnection and agency.

I think it is a view with which Thomas Jones would have agreed and one that, through the private funding of the Pilgrim Trust and the public funding of CEMA, he did much to realise. While John Maynard Keynes saw 'high art' as a form of elevated entertainment that signalled personal good taste and demonstrated metropolitan excellence, one might see Jones' concern with active participation and adult education as a form of resistance to the dulling effects of mass mediation; of culture as consumer goods and services rather than the expression of communities and the people themselves.

Returning to Holden's 'crisis', I would argue that the roots lay less in how value is ascribed to artworks than who is involved in their creation. Holden argued that the problem lay in arts organisations focusing too much on the instrumental interests of government and not sufficiently on what he saw as the intrinsic qualities of art he believed to be of principal value for the public. I think this construction is problematic in a number of ways, of which I will speak of two. The first is that while he identified arts organisations with the institutional value system, he did not address the vested interest that such organisations have in being the arbiters of artistic value. As such, they are inherently predisposed to maintaining notions of institutional value.

Second, I think the intrinsic notion of value is not an accurate description of the broader public relationship to art. (That said, I recognise that the 'public' is anything but a homogenous group and encompasses many perspectives.) The term intrinsic is remarkably flexible, if not downright slippery. At one end of the spectrum, it can be the self-justifying rationale of 'art for art's sake' – that is, an artist made it and consequently it is imbued with its own reflexive value. At the other, it can describe a kind of irreducible value that inheres within the art object or performance to be tapped into by the audience. In the latter case, the level of

intrinsic worth would be additional to the simple fact that the artefact or performance was created by an artist; it may arise from the artist's skill or insight, but is not a simple function of the fact that an artist made it. That is, unless one defines an artist, not as a self-nomination, but as a judgement in terms of ability to create intrinsic value; in which case the term 'artist' shifts from a generic description (a "candidate", to use George Dickie's term) to a qualitative assessment (are this person's skills good, bad or indifferent).

I would argue that neither adequately describes a response one might reasonably attribute to the 'public'. Rather, I think what matters is whether each member of the public finds an art experience cogently engaging – does it first attract her or his attention and, if it does, is the subsequent experience of personal value emotionally and/or cognitively. Such value does not inhere within the object or performance, but in the relationship *between* the object or performance and the individual engaged in attending to it. The 'public' valuation exists only in terms of an aggregation of those individual responses or their lack.

Setting this into the discussion of the mid-decade 'crisis of legitimacy', I suggest that one can begin to see a shift in sensibility facilitated by direct participation in the process of change. Tony Blair's New Labour, with its thinly veiled neoliberal ethos, had focused on celebrity and GDP. Britpop was delivered via conventional media of CD, radio, MTV and, latterly, paid download, and retained a firmly defined gulf between star and fan; still a rigid transaction of consumer and producer. The rocketing price tags on YBA art had attracted speculative corporate investment that eclipsed intimate personal interpretation with the spectacle of avarice. Creative industries tried on art's mantle and, finding the emperor's new clothes a comfortable fit, marginalised the arts while accruing status and coherence for a highly disparate array of services and skills. In each case, value was understood to inhere within the created object or the ability to monetise a novel idea. The role of the public was to purchase and to consume, nothing more.

Meanwhile, no one appeared to notice that increasing numbers of the public were quietly rejecting the straightjacket of consumerist conformity. If this

was a revolution then it was not one of open aggression or vocal protest, but an unobtrusive shift of focus as creative wings were silently outstretched and the earthbound consumer caught the updraught of change.

Network Communications

The internet has, of course, had a substantive impact on the way in which individuals have come to access, aggregate and, indeed, understand information. It was not a sudden change; rather, it was rapid but gradual. Much initial internet activity followed a modified but essentially traditional 'broadcast' mode, with content supplied by 'specialists' becoming increasingly accessible as search engines developed novel ways in which to find the factoid needle in the ever-expanding informational haystack. Information became the new industry with Charles Leadbeater (a British strategic consultant who worked with the UK Labour government and also advises a number of American foundations) promoting the idea that the new resource-lite, knowledge-driven economy was the equivalent to "living on thin air" (Leadbeater 2000).

In the final four or five years of the preceding century, overly enthusiastic speculative investment in internet start-ups had led to the dot.com boom. This tech-investment bubble had been pumped up by the availability of the new, inexpensive means of communication and the appetite for instantly accessible information that it had encouraged. The revolution here was in the volume and accessibility of the information. Costs were relatively low, demand perceived as almost infinite. How could it fail? But, as with all revolutions, once begun, the accelerating technologies of communication, and more particularly the way they were used, took an unanticipated tangent.

As I hypothesised in Chapter 1, I believe we are witnessing a reformation of the arts that shares some similarities to the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century: it is facilitated by the introduction of a means of communication that widens the distribution of ideas and the range of those able

to so disperse them. And, just as the Protestant Reformation led to a new social, commercial and religious order that Luther and his followers could not have imagined (and would probably not have desired), so the current re-forming of the contemporary social and cultural landscape is, so far, proving to be beyond the control of any one group or powerbase (though there is certainly much effort being put into reining the networked world back under the oligarchy of the 'free' market and the aegis of 'democratic' government).

When investor confidence plummeted in 2000, bursting the dot.com bubble, it coincided with the development of what many have hailed as a second phase of the internet, the so-called 'Web 2.0'. As much of the investment air was sucked out of the internet, the vacuum was filled by a rapid expansion in user-created online content, the larger part of which is made available online for free.

'Web 2.0': Virtual Revolution?

The term Web 2.0 was coined by Darcy DiNucci in 1999 to describe an apparent echelon leap in network technologies that was changing the way people used the internet (DiNucci 1999). The term came to describe what was perceived as a radical reconfiguration of the relationship between producer and consumer, which, for all its virtuality, it was considered 'Web 1.0' had done little to change. There were certainly continuing technical developments. Previously, aside from email, most internet content was in the form of static pages with limited areas for interaction (such as separately located 'guest books' for feedback), whereas what followed involved the dynamic construction of pages in real time, offering extended flexibility and interconnectivity. This not only allowed for much greater intercommunication but for the creation of content collectively through processes such as folksonomy, whereby content is categorised and catalogued using collaborative tagging (Flew and Smith 2001).¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Folksonomy is a portmanteau word blending 'folk' and 'taxonomy', coined in 2004 by the information architect, Thomas Vander Wal, to describe user-generated ontologies in contrast to more traditional forms of professionally created categorisations.

Not everyone sees this as a sharp distinction. Tim Berners-Lee, credited as the inventor of the worldwide web, dismisses Web 2.0 as jargon.

If Web 2.0 for you is blogs and wikis, then that is people to people ... but the idea of the Web as interaction between people is really what the Web is. That was what it was designed to be ... a collaborative space where people can interact ... I think there will be a whole lot more things like that to come – different sorts of ways in which people will be able to work together. (Berners-Lee 2006)

So, according to this view, while there were a number of technological developments that facilitated new and more flexible ways of interacting online, the changes at the beginning of the new century might better be understood as an ongoing drive toward the multilateral modes of people-to-people activity, as opposed to more traditional late-twentieth-century modes of producer-to-consumer. In such a view, many of the formats and applications that subsequently came online were driven by the force of that people-to-people demand as much as by any distinct technical watershed; they were driven by human behaviours facilitated by technological tools.

Meanwhile, peer-to-peer file sharing had begun to circumvent the recording companies and create an atmosphere in which music was seen as common property to be pooled and not intellectual property for which payment was due. The nature of digital formats and the flexibility of the newer internet platforms supported by a dizzying range of software tools, plug-ins and applications, greatly increased the ease of circulation and the potential to rip and mash (see page 191 et seq).

What exactly drove the shift from broadcast to person-to-person communication? Was it simply that a new technology came along and the technology shaped the habits and desires of the citizen? Clay Shirky argues not. In his view “social tools don’t create new motivations as much as amplify existing

ones". He points out that "sociability is one of our core capabilities"; that "our social life is literally primal" (Shirky 2009, 294, 14 and 15 respectively).¹⁰² Changes take place in society when people change their behaviour. In Shirky's view, when this happens as a result of a technological innovation, that technology is not shaping us anew, but rather removing impediments to existing desires and motivations (Shirky 2009). I would take this a little further and suggest that in changing behaviours we also modify, refine (or degrade) the values that underpin our behaviours and the philosophical concepts through which they are abstracted.

Then again, there are other cases where an innovation may be created with no clear understanding of how it might best be used. In such cases the preferred application is identified and harnessed by the broad mass of users once they have the opportunity to explore and play with the device. It arises in the collective process of active participation and not on the drawing board of its creator. When SMS was introduced on mobile phones in 1993, it was seen as a peripheral addition that might be useful in case of emergency or to allow companies to remind customers to pay their bills. But, in the hands of the users, it became huge. Twenty years on, SMS is a major slice of the mobile telephony pie with, according to UK-based Portio Research, some 8.6 trillion messages sent each year (Kelly 2012; Sarkar 2012).

People-to-people networks can be a powerful instrument for change. They can disrupt conventional economics and they can create new markets. But people are diverse and while, sometimes, people-to-people can effect shifts through a kind of flocking of activity, they rarely generate widespread unanimity.

The Tribe and the Agora

The increasing facilitation of people-to-people interaction online not only opened up greater opportunity to be a producer as well as a consumer, but to *share* the

¹⁰² This is an area I will discuss in more detail in Part Two.

process of production in acts of collaboration and to build new ways of collecting, recontextualising and interpreting information; of gaining new experiences. As Graham Cormode and Balachander Krishnamurthy point out, the “democratic nature” of these new online modes of collaboration is “exemplified by creations of a large number of niche groups ... who can exchange content of any kind ... and tag, comment and link to both intra-group and extra-group ‘pages’” (Cormode and Krishnamurthy 2008, §1).

And exchange, tag, link, group and share we did...

More than six billion hours of video are watched on YouTube every month. Sixty million photographs are uploaded to Instagram each day. Twitter broadcasts over one thousand tweets per second.¹⁰³ There are two hundred million bloggers using Tumblr and seventy-five million using WordPress, just two of a range of such publishing platforms. But although this sounds impressive, the number of bloggers is surprisingly low when compared to the 1.3 billion users on Facebook who upload 500 terabytes of data every day. After all, blogs have been around since the 1990s, Facebook only since 2004, YouTube since 2005 and Instagram since 2010. Victor Keegan, writing in the (UK) *Guardian* newspaper, speculated that the relative popularity of social network sites over blogs is due to the way in which the former communicate within a more focused group. He concluded:

Far better to communicate through a peer group in a social networking environment where shared interests will guarantee you an audience, rather than propel your thoughts into the blogosphere where often they will be read by no one unless you have managed to build up a ‘brand’.
(Keegan 2007)

103 These statistics and those that follow were gathered on 7 October 2014. Since, in all cases, the information is supplied by the company itself, one should be aware that there is a level of vested interest in the delivery of such data. However, the general trends it reveals and the comparative scales it suggest can, I believe, be relied upon as broadly indicative. One reason for this is that digital technologies are now so interwoven and detailed, that any gross misstatement of data would be quickly challenged.

This suggests to me that, given the opportunity, individuals are more confident communicating in a 'conversational' style with people they feel they know, than declaiming to all and sundry – at least initially. Nonetheless, for some at least, this may simply be a stage in the process of gaining confidence with the new tools, leading in time to blogging and other broadcast formats. Even so, audiences for such blogs tend to be smaller and more specialised than those for the traditional mass media of the preceding century. The internet may, in theory, be capable of putting your information before a vast number of people, but the reality tends towards smaller groups with shared interests or tastes (albeit scattered over distance – communities are no longer geographically constrained). In effect, we are not witnessing a shift of power in mass-mediation so much as a shift of focus in communication *from* mass-mediation to network mediation in which sub-groups form distinct nodes *within* a complex set of interrelations.

While such a shift has the benefit of avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach and the suppression of diversity through hegemonic normalisation, it is not without its own challenges. The search engines through which we find information continually assess our choices and feed the information into their algorithms so that each new set of results more precisely matches one's specific tastes (and prejudices). In terms of marketing, this makes sense. Expose the potential customer to goods and services which are most closely aligned with their established interests and desires.

Social media similarly operates in ways that tend to bring together like-minded individuals, or at least socially miscible ones. Networks are extended by contact with others who share similar tastes and views. This does allow for a degree of variety as lines of network meander out from the original social 'core'. But networks are strongest where they interconnect most; lines of connection that extend too far from the main network – those that have too few interconnections with others in the group – will tend to peter out. Again, in terms of social ease, hanging out with 'people like us' is a comfortable (and comforting)

thing to do. We reinforce each other's views (and prejudices); conflict is minimal, mutual admiration the currency of choice.

The danger here is that we have escaped the oppression of a large-scale normalised view of the world defined by authority to dwell within the gilded cage of group normalisation, increasingly insulated from difference or dissent. True, such groups are no longer geographically isolated, but can link with like-minded peers anywhere where there is an internet connection. Nonetheless, the virtual public space is constituted by a network of special interest groups that operate like tribes (Adams and Smith 2008).

I recently placed an order with an online bookstore. Even before the book arrived and for a month following, adverts for other titles by the same author popped up every time I went on to read the *Guardian* online, or check Facebook or visit a host of other sites supported by advertising. Not a problem in itself: I form a tacit contract when I enter a 'free' site that being the target of advertising is simply the 'payment' I am due to make. That said, why offer me more of the same? Might it not be better for me to read an opposing view, to get some critical depth on one author by learning the views of another? In terms of informed citizenry, that would seem to be the case. But market forces follow tribal lines. Commercial space is not the same as public space.

What of cultural space? Can and does a larger cultural space exist in which different habits, tropes and perspectives meet, share, exchange and grow? The Greek agora and the Roman forum established the concept of a public space – 'a meeting place for strangers' – although, of course, the democratic access to these spaces was limited to one stratum of society (male nationals who owned property). Today we have a notion of equality that is served to an extent by the parliamentary system with its model of political representation, but increasingly our lives and our environment are shaped not by politics but by markets. We have an expectation of democratic access while we act, for the most part, through markets that are stratified by gradations of privilege.

But then the agora was a place not just of public discourse but of commercial business. The word derives from two Greek verbs *agoreúō* (ἀγορεύω) meaning 'I speak publicly' and *agorázō* (ἀγοράζω) meaning 'I shop'. Presumably those commercial interests that maintained their place in the agora did so because they sold more than those that had to move on. To that extent, the focusing effects of the market could be seen as playing a role in the complexion of the 'strangers' who met there. And there is another aspect of trade that should be borne in mind. Trade tends to breed tolerance, if for no other reason that it is unwise to alienate a potential customer just because you disagree with, or feel uncomfortable about, the way they look or behave. While tolerance is certainly not empathy, it is better than violent hostility.

The agora then was, as is the hybrid real-virtual world of digital communications, a complex place; neither wholly good nor bad, but in continuing negotiation with forces not all of which are openly discernible. Even so, the idea (perhaps one should say the ideal) of the agora is a powerful one: that there might be a place in which the multiplicity of human diversity may mingle; where difference might converse.

Back in the 1960s, when the implications of mass inter-communication were just becoming apparent, if not yet realised, Marshall McLuhan predicted that the instantaneous and ubiquitous nature of communication technologies of the future would create a global village, one he saw as being riven by disagreement (McLuhan 1964).¹⁰⁴ In fact the villagers have shown a marked tendency to stay at home, if not lock themselves in their room with their mates, with few beyond the denizens of the blogosphere and a handful of trolls venturing into the wider digital space. Indeed, even in our physical-world public spaces, we spend increasing amounts of time locked into our social networks through a range

104 Later, McLuhan evolved the term 'global theatre' which laid greater emphasis on the individual as actor (combining role and action; a doer, but one with a particular characterisation) (McLuhan and Nevitt 1972).

of mobile communication devices. In a contemporary, multicultural, multivalent democracy we needed to re-imagine cultural public space. What, as Julia Rowntree has asked, is the role of the arts in ‘convening citizens’?¹⁰⁵ And *where* are they to be located?

The virtual space is not “a place of pleasurable jostling, where citizens’ bodies, words, actions and produce were all literally on mutual display, and where judgments, decisions and bargains were made”, to quote John Hartley’s (somewhat romantic) description of the Greek agora (Hartley 1992, 29-30). The physical space of a cultural institution cannot be replaced by the virtual space of the internet (though it can certainly be valuably augmented by it). Equally, a cultural institution adhering to notions of exclusivity or the high/low divide will tend to attract like-minded people of privilege while effectively exclude many others.

The more ‘public’ field of online broadcast, while less popular than that of social media, is relatively diverse and, in principle at least, addressed to anyone and everyone who wishes to engage. The realm of art broadcast might be understood to encompass online galleries (personal and institutional), online performance, artists’ websites, online art criticism, art-news aggregators and other writing about art including art history and theory. In some cases, projects arise as hybrids of the social-media and collectively created broadcast formats. This involves the negotiation of collective aims and means that extend beyond the simpler modes of social group sharing. As Shirky notes, “cooperating is harder than simply sharing, because it involves changing your behaviour to synchronise with people who are changing their behaviour to synchronise with you.” But, while this takes effort and good will, it brings its own benefits because “unlike sharing, where the group is mainly an aggregate of participants, cooperating creates group identity – you know who you are cooperating with” (Shirky 2009, 49-50).

105 Julia Rowntree (art consultant) speaking at ‘Steady State’, a series of peer-to-peer events run by MMM (UK) and ERA21 in London, Edinburgh and Newcastle, November 2009.

As an example, the American composer Eric Whitacre has established a large, ad hoc Virtual Choir that ‘performs’ a variety of his works in videos available on YouTube and Vimeo. It is worth looking at the way in which this project began, because it demonstrates some interesting points about inspiration, professional training, collectivity and the dissolving of distance.

The idea for a Virtual Choir came to Eric Whitacre when a young girl named Britlin Losee sent him a video she had made singing one of his compositions.¹⁰⁶ He contacted Scott Haines, a twenty-two-year-old warehouse worker whom he had met at a concert the previous year. Scott was not only a fan of Whitacre’s music but interested in video editing and while Whitacre had only intended to find out what Haines thought of the idea, Haines persuaded him to let him take on the digital compilation of the performance. A video was shot of Whitacre silently conducting his piece ‘Lux Aurumque’ and this, along with the sheet music, was made available online for free download. In all, 424 singers recorded their particular part on a webcam and sent in their video. The individual videos were then edited together using Adobe After Effects CS4, a software program that Haines had not used before, but taught himself using an inexpensive online video tutoring service at Lynda.com (Niccum 2010; radmegan 2010).¹⁰⁷

The finished production has the singers’ videos arranged in serried ranks as with a choir on the risers. Facing them across the virtual space is a screen showing the original video of Whitacre conducting. The music, which is polyphonic a cappella, has a remarkably rich quality given the large number of voices involved. The video attracted 430,000 views on YouTube within the first two weeks and (as at 14 October 2014) stands at over four and half million. While this pales in

106 This video was uploaded to YouTube on May 14, 2009 and can be viewed here: <http://youtu.be/3xGBWhWgydw> [accessed: 14 October 2014]

107 Founded by the self-taught digital media instructor Lynda Weinman (1955–), Lynda.com grew out of a free resource for her students, established in 1995. By 2014 it has become a large-scale provider of online learning tools in the form of a virtual knowledge library, which can be accessed on a monthly or annual fee basis (as at 15 October 2014: \$25 USD per month for basic access; \$250 USD per year) (information sourced from www.lynda.com).

comparison to the video of Susan Boyle's audition on *Britain's Got Talent* (158 million views) or Psy singing 'Gangnam Style' (over two billion views), it is a fair achievement for a contemporary classical work.

In 2011, the Virtual Choir presented another Whitacre work entitled 'Sleep', this time involving 2,000 singers from 58 countries.¹⁰⁸ The Virtual Choir's most recent project 'Fly to Paradise', a spectacular fusion of polyphony and manga, was funded by \$100,000 USD raised through the crowd-funding platform Kickstarter, and involved 8,409 videos and 5,905 singers (a number singing more than one part) from 101 countries.¹⁰⁹ The master tracks for that production (which include the choral tracks, soloists and instrumentation) have since been made available for download so that anyone who wishes to can create their own non-commercial remix.¹¹⁰

What the Virtual Choir demonstrates is that individuals can connect without geographic proximity or even direct contact, but through the shared experience of participation. In this it bears some relation to the choirs prevalent in the United Kingdom between the wars. It also points to an autodidact (Haines) rapidly learning and applying a skill in order to be involved in an art project with a professional artist he admired.¹¹¹

There are many types of activity online: social, collective, participatory, broadcast... According to Metcalfe's Law, the value of a network grows with the square of its users. That value is a potential, in that not all types of use will depend on maximising the number of connections. Social groups, for example, require only a few linkages, but a large network is more likely to ensure that all desired links will be available. On the other hand, broadcast modes have no such

108 'Sleep' can be viewed at: <http://youtu.be/6WhWDCw3Mng> [accessed 20 November 2014].

109 'Fly to Paradise' can be viewed at: <http://youtu.be/Y8oDnUga0JU> [accessed 20 November 2014].

110 See: <http://ericwhitacre.com/the-virtual-choir/remix> [accessed 30 November 2014].

111 Whitacre's project has since inspired others, including the Central Highlands Virtual Choir in regional Victoria, Australia (see: www.artsatlas.com.au/projects/the-virtual-choir-project/).

limit. The internet is a massive network within which small social-sharing groups, larger collective-action groups and broadcasters all coexist. It is an 'ecosystem' that supports many species of human interconnection, each of which is also interconnected. Thus, a social group can share a broadcast link or form a subset of a larger collective action group. Similarly commercial, not-for-profit and volunteer organisations and professional, pro-am and amateur all coexist.

All of this activity sits on top of software developed on a continuing basis by open-source developers. The non-proprietary nature of this software has helped to ensure that commercial applications remain interoperable and there is not a schism of mutually incompatible systems or that any one commercial interest comes to dominate the whole. The internet and its systems remain open (Comer 2007).

Openness and the Hacker Ethic

The young Finnish philosopher, Pekka Himanen, explored the shift in values held by the burgeoning (and transnational) community of online open-source developers. In his book, *The Hacker Ethic*, he compares these with the Protestant ethic, which he sees as similarly founded on a network model, though differently motivated (Himanen 2001).¹¹²

The Protestant ethic famously divided activity into work and leisure, valorising the former and mistrusting the latter as weak and self-indulgent, if not downright sinful. The 'elect' (those predestined to go to heaven) might be recognised by their hard work and frugal lifestyle, and by its fruits: material wealth and social standing (Weber 1905). As such, it was the inverse of the leisure class described by Thorsten Veblen, whereby social status was measured by how little practical work an individual was required to undertake, "the life of leisure

112 It is important to note here that Himanen is using the term 'hacker' as it refers to the subculture focused on modifying and improving software in the largely playful pursuit of excellence. With an emphasis on doing something that is both exciting and meaningful, the main purpose is to prove it can be done. They should not be confused with those who gain criminal access to other people's computers by exploiting software weaknesses, known popularly as hackers. Within the hacker use of language, such individuals are called 'crackers' (Himanen 2001; Stallman and Vadén 2002).

[being] beautiful and ennobling in all civilised men's eyes" (Veblen 1899, 29). Contrasting these two extremes, Himanen describes a third value system which, in his view, is adopted by hackers.

Hackers do not feel that leisure time is automatically any more meaningful than work time. The desirability of both depends on how they are realised. From the point of view of a meaningful life, the entire work/leisure duality must be abandoned ... Meaning cannot be found in work or leisure but has to arise out of the nature of the activity itself. Out of passion. Social Value. Creativity. (Himanen 2001, 151)

Himanen does not go so far as to set the Protestant and hacker value systems in direct comparison, although he describes their relations in detail. However, I have set out these two sets of contrasting values in the table below along with his broader ethical categories of work, value and attitude to networks or, as he calls it, 'nethic'. To this I have added, in the left-hand column, my own classifications of the type of value in each case, which draw on ideas Himanen puts forward in his book.

TYPE OF VALUE	PROTESTANT ETHIC	HACKER ETHIC	HIMANEN'S GROUPINGS
motivator	money	passion	work ethic
'currency'	work	freedom	
value	optimality	social worth	value ethic
mode	flexibility	openness	
aim	stability	activity	'nethic' – attitude to networks
motivation	determinacy	caring	
status	impact	creativity	the 'heroic' value

Table 2. Pekka Himanen's Seven Values of the Hacker Ethic compared with seven values of the network society and the Protestant ethic

Himanen points to another difference in how value is estimated, that "the relative importance of a node does not stem from its specific features but from its

ability to contribute valuable information to the network” (Himanen 2001, 167). That is, value does not inhere within the individual or their works per se, but in the relationship *between* the individual and the works within the wider network.

If this analysis of the hacker ethic is correct, then it heralds, in this field at least, a very marked change in economic motivation. Not only that, but the emphasis on creativity seems to be more for its own sake than, say, the fiscal or instrumental benefit associated with Richard Florida’s rising Creative Class (Florida 2004) or UK New Labour’s creative industries. Since software development is a key component of both, it is important here to differentiate between hackers and commercial software developers. For the hacker, it is not the ethic of a particular type of work, but of a particular type of *relationship* to that work. In my view, it represents one significant aspect of the larger pro-am phenomenon with its strong motivation to do something well and creatively, without the aim of making money from it.

Ripping, Mashing and Giving It Away

The practice of taking bits of existing content (ripping) and putting them together to create a new work (mashing) is not itself new. Collage, compendia, musical medley and the hybrid approach to staging Shakespearean theatre in nineteenth-century America are earlier forms of the same process. But digital media have radically accelerated the speed and ease with which this can be done, and the internet has created a virtually cost-free means of disseminating what is produced. Mashing extends beyond the practice of gathering, reforming and publishing, to include the creation of live connections which link dispersed data in real time at the moment of viewing and in the context defined by the viewer.¹¹³ Thus the web becomes not simply a way to source and to disperse material, but

113 A simple example might be the linking of a semi-structured database that includes street addresses with a database of interactive maps on another server perhaps thousands of kilometres away, bringing them together in the viewer’s browser to present the address and a visualisation of its location in a single coherent display.

the environment in which dynamic, multi-creator experiences can be enabled in specific viewer contexts.

The philosopher and curator, Nicolas Bourriaud, calls this practice of creating works on the basis of other pre-existing works ‘postproduction’ and argues that it leads “to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work”. Whereas the Duchampian ‘readymade’ sought to question authorship and the institutions of art, ‘postproduction’, in Bourriaud’s coining, seeks to imbue existing cultural material with new meanings; to create “objects already *informed* by other objects” (Bourriaud 2002, 13 emphasis in original). The practitioner who makes use of data by imagining the links between them, Bourriaud terms a ‘semionaut’; an individual involved in a contingent process in which “the artwork functions as the temporary terminal of a network of interconnected elements” (Bourriaud 2002, 19).

On a pragmatic level, ripping and mashing avoid the need to create something new from scratch, a process that may require a very specific set of skills, and yet allows the masher to engage directly in the act of making.¹¹⁴ It is a creative and perhaps liberating process. For those whose earlier creations become the raw materials of the new work this can, of course, be problematic. Some see the dissolution of their work and the creation of something new as part

114 While this may sound like a retrograde step in terms of art, one should remember that all artists build on the work of those who have gone before. Absolute originality would be incomprehensible, since we can only understand the new in terms of what we already know. For example, Robert Weisberg argues in his book *Creativity: Beyond the Myth of Genius* that Pablo Picasso’s seminal painting *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* marked not a sudden inspired innovation but the amalgamation of a number of ideas and visual elements taken from the art of the recent past and of more ‘primitive’ cultures. “*Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* developed out of a confluence of several streams: Picasso’s Iberian period; a subject matter common among artists of the day [that of ‘women of sexual license’]; Picasso’s fear of venereal disease and conflicted feelings towards women; and the influence of earlier generations of artists, as well as of his contemporaries. In addition, there were several discontinuities: the movement away from the Iberian style (triggered by Matisse’s painting and the antique head) and the ‘primitive’ distortions (triggered by Picasso’s exposure to primitive art)” (Weisberg 1993, 200; for his argument in full see pages 192-201). One might speculate that such a description comes close (in spirit at least) to that of mashing.

of a creative evolutionary cycle, like the mixing of genes from generation to generation, or, more simply, the passing of ideas in conversation from one to another. For others it is an abuse of their intellectual property; an assault on their creation and what it stands for. While it is true that, in the digital age of infinite copies, a work is not destroyed the way a painting would be if it were cut up and used in a collage, a sense of violation still carries over and holds fast for many in the arts.

Ripping and mashing present both an opportunity and a threat, and need to be considered with care. At both extremes, there is a strong sense of fundamental right: the freedom demanded by the masher; the protection sought by the intellectual property owner. However, not all creators seek to protect all versions of their work and some actively encourage others to continue the creative process by dissolving and reforming what they have previously made. When *Wired* magazine circulated the music CD *Rip, Sample, Mash, Share* in 2004 under the new Creative Commons licence they stated: “These musicians are saying that true creativity needs to be open, fluid and alive. When it comes to copyright, they are pro-choice. Here are sixteen songs that encourage people to play *with* their tunes, not just play them.” The emphasis was on creativity with the demand that “the new work must be ‘highly transformative’ of the original” (Goetz 2004, my emphasis).¹¹⁵

Ripping and mashing grow from the philosophical reorientation of ‘openness’ that lies at the heart of the hacker ethic, in which the primary motivation is towards creativity rather than monetisation. In that sense it

115 Collage art pioneers Negativland first took the idea of a virtually copyright-free music CD to Creative Commons. With their guidance, and the pro bono legal advice of Cooley Godward and Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, the necessary licenses were created to provide the freedom to interact with the musical tracks. The music is free to use for non-commercial and commercial sampling, only advertising uses are restricted. The musicians who provided tracks are: Beastie Boys, David Byrne, Zap Mama, My Morning Jacket, Spoon, Gilberto Gil, Dan the Automator, Thievery Corporation, Le Tigre, Paul Westerberg, Chuck D with Fine Arts Militia, The Rapture, Cornelius, Danger Mouse & Jemini, DJ Dolores and Matmos. *Rip, Sample, Mash, Share* was distributed free with the November 2004 edition of *Wired*. In 2005, the magazine ran a competition for the best mashups from the CD.

fractures the conceptual core of the Creative Industries, positioning value creation in the act of making rather than the process of commercialisation. In its fullest sense, openness is a radical idea since it is achieved by abandoning the right to profit from one's creative efforts and may go further to dissolve the umbilical of attribution by which a work (or its components) are acknowledged as the creation of a single author. However, within the current legal framework, copyright subsists until it is relinquished, and the Creative Commons protocols include a spectrum of liberties granted and rights withheld.¹¹⁶

Openness in the arts involves, among other things, extending the availability of cultural materials to the consumer, not just to enjoy as they are, but to use as the raw materials of new cultural production. In a 2005–06 trial, the BBC made five hundred pieces of historic program content available through the Creative Licence Archive Group website, similar to some Creative Commons licences though more constrained than Copyleft (Pager and Candeub 2012).¹¹⁷ At the end of the trial period the project underwent a public benefit review. In a report to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee of the House of Commons, the British Screen Advisory Council described the initiative as “brave” and welcomed it as “a natural and logical way of the BBC making its program archive materials either more easily available or, in many cases, available for the first time to the public”. The Design and Artists Copyright Society acknowledged the creative potential in re-using existing works. However, other groups disagreed.

116 The variables in Creative Commons licences include whether or not a work can be altered (tweaked, modified or mashed); whether use is limited to non-commercial purposes; and whether any new work must be licenced with the same level of freedom and restriction as the current one. To date, all Creative Commons licences require attribution, and so are not fully ‘open’. Given the cascade of use and reuse involved in multiple mashings, attribution can become onerous. Another issue arises when one wants to combine works with different permutations of licence. So far, according to the Creative Commons website, this is not always feasible. Creative Commons therefore sits someway between rigid copyright and total openness (Creative Commons 2014).

117 While artists and teachers were encouraged to use the content to create works of their own, the terms of the licence were not without restrictions. Use of material for commercial or defamatory purposes was forbidden, and any derivative works must be released under the same terms of use. Content was geographically restricted and could only be accessed within the UK.

Phonographic Performance Ltd considered the concept muddled, confusing the release of archive materials with creative process, and the Creators' Rights Alliance went on to assert that "cutting and pasting content electronically was neither original nor creative and could not be a substitute of self-expression" (all quotes from House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee 2007, 15-17).¹¹⁸ While the material had been paid for by the public and was, therefore, effectively in the public domain, the concern was that releasing it might convey a message about copyright that would prove detrimental to commercial interests operating in the same field. The freedom of the public to access and use what the public had paid for was to be constrained by the creative industry model that considers the only legitimate outcome of creativity to be monetisable (and ownable) commodities. The BBC Creative Archive was not maintained.

While some are enthusiastic about the potential of digital media and communications networks to expand the field of creativity and self-expression, others are by no means persuaded. In his book *The Cult of the Amateur*, the British writer and new media entrepreneur, Andrew Keen, suggests (perhaps surprisingly given his background and the fact he runs his own blog) that the internet is "killing our culture and assaulting our economy" (Keen 2007). Keen's argument is that the world is divided into experts and the rest (amateurs); experts sell things, the rest buy them. Consequently, it is important not to allow amateurs too much influence or to create any financial disincentive to experts. "The knowledge of the expert, in fact, does trump the collective 'wisdom' of amateurs ... fully democratic open-source networks inevitably get corrupted by loonies" (Keen 2007, 186). He points to a number of initiatives that take on internet interactivity but apply it in a carefully orchestrated way that maintains firm control by experts. He puts forward *Citizendium* as a more appropriate form of online encyclopaedia than *Wikipedia*. *Citizendium* was developed by the co-

118 I have selected these few opinions to exemplify the wide range of input considered by the Culture Media and Sport Committee.

founder of *Wikipedia*, Larry Sanger, who, according to Keen, left the partnership because he had learned “that the democratisation of information can quickly degenerate into an intellectually corrosive radical egalitarianism” (Keen 2007, 186). *Citizendium* uses expert editors to check and approve entries to a level that might be reliably cited. According to their own data, in their eight years of operation to date (as at 15 October 2014) out of the 16,810 articles currently available on *Citizendium*, only 159 are so far in citable, expert-approved versions. (This compares with 4,659,964 articles in English alone on *Wikipedia*, as at 30 November 2014.) Meanwhile, donations barely cover the cost of maintaining the *Citizendium* server.¹¹⁹

Keen supports his argument for the maintenance of “the all-important division between content creators and content consumers” by endorsing the work of user-pay services such as Joost and Brightcove, two companies established to present videos in the manner of YouTube, but professionally made (Keen 2007, 188). He was writing in 2007; subsequent events tell their own story. After a series of company restructures and sales, Joost suspended its services in 2012 (Santos 2014). Brightcove has evolved into a wholly user-pay service for the distributing of cable network content, closing its Brightcove.tv service in 2008 and subsequently diversifying into the apps industry (Gannes 2008; Hardawar 2011).

I would argue that the flaw in Keen’s argument is the assertion of a clear distinction between creator and consumer. In his description of *Wikipedia*, all articles are written and edited by amateurs (non-experts). But the writers and editors of *Wikipedia* encompass a wide variety from amateur and enthusiast through pro-am to professional and academic: the one does not exclude the other; only the ‘expert’ group is (or seeks to be) exclusive. Similarly, while there is a wide range of material on YouTube, it would be impossible to draw a clear line

119 According to the accounts published on the Citizendium site, since October 2013 the cost of maintaining the servers has effectively been paid by one person, Darren Duncan, while he looks for cheaper server options (http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/CZ:Financial_report [accessed 15.10.14]).

between that which is made 'professionally' and that which is made by 'amateurs' (as for example, the collaboration between a professional composer, amateur singers and a pro-am digital editor involved in the Virtual Choir described above). Keen overstates the issue as a take-over of expertise by the amateur rather than, as I would suggest is the case, a radical integration of professional, pro-am and amateur.

Looking more closely at the model of the 'expert' (*Citizendium*) and the 'amateur' (*Wikipedia*) encyclopaedia cited by Keen, they represent, on the one hand, the traditional edit-then-publish model and, on the other, that of publish-then-edit. Both have their benefits and their dangers. The former gives some assurance to the reader that checks have been made and that the information given is relatively stable, but it also promotes (overtly or by inference) the idea that the information may be taken as gospel, with no need to question or test it further. The latter process has the drawback that at any moment one cannot be sure that the information is accurate or complete, but this in itself, once grasped, is a benefit in that it reminds one to bring a level of scepticism to what is read; to check for corroboration and to be proactive in the process of judging veracity. Indeed, in *Wikipedia*, one only has to click on the discussion tab to see the debate that has led to the current version. The danger of print forms such as *Encyclopedia Britannica* is that they can be taken as incontrovertible, rather than expert but fallible, and they give no insight into the discourse of their editing.¹²⁰

In my view, both forms are subject to the threat of bias: the printed encyclopaedia of the normative bias of hegemonic power (reading an encyclopaedia from the early twentieth century would give a very different view

120 A now famous article in the journal *Nature* published in 2005 compared 42 science articles from *Encyclopedia Britannica* and their equivalents in *Wikipedia*. In all, they found eight serious errors, four in each source. Beyond that, "the average science entry in *Wikipedia* contained around four inaccuracies; *Britannica*, about three". In the article, the information scientist, Michael Twidale, warns that "print encyclopaedias are often set up as the gold standards of information quality against which the failings of faster or cheaper resources can be compared. These findings remind us that we have an 18-carat standard, not a 24-carat one" (Giles 2005, 901).

of, say, colonialism or the role of women in society, from one today), while the online collectively created resource is constantly prey to extremist and malevolent editors wishing to promote their views and suppress those of others. However, as Clay Shirky contends, while the provisional nature of *Wikipedia* leaves it open to bias, misinformation and the vandalism of internet trolls, this is more than balanced by the watchfulness of thousands, if not millions, of readers/editors who can rectify errors immediately. “The articles grow not from harmonious thought but from constant scrutiny and emendation” (Shirky 2009, 139).

A printed encyclopaedia is concrete; an open, online encyclopaedia is virtual and contingent. Print has the drawback that, as information changes and new discoveries are made, one must wait for updates. It is also limited by size and therefore what it can and cannot include. That said, it has a degree of longevity – as Shirky points out, if no more *Britannicas* were to be published, the last edition would remain useful for some time before it began to date. In contrast, an open, online encyclopaedia has the potential for more or less limitless shelf space and can be updated immediately as situations change. However, the quality of many of its articles, especially those on controversial subjects, such as climate change or religious belief, is a matter of constant vigilance as attempts to bias or vandalise such articles are addressed on an ongoing basis. Those that keep watch do so because they feel passionately about the outcome. Shirky calls this ‘love’, which, of course, is simply to acknowledge the motivation of the true amateur. But if that passion fades, “if the people who love *Wikipedia* all lost interest at the same time ... it would vanish almost instantly” as the bigots, trolls and vandals tore it apart. As such, “*Wikipedia* ... exists not as an edifice but as an act of love” (Shirky 2009, 141). It is a process whose outputs are provisional, rather than an artefact that is itself the output. It arises from and is sustained by more than just a new technology but, as Shirky emphasises, a change in behaviour; “as with every fusion of group and tool, this defence against vandalism is the result not of a novel technology alone but of a novel technology *combined* with a novel social strategy” (Shirky 2009, 137 my emphasis).

It is here that I think one can begin to see the potential insights an information-based initiative like *Wikipedia* can bring to an understanding of the changes in art practice and art participation facilitated by the new online resources and digital technologies. The kinds of artwork created online with digital tools, by individuals and by groups, live as processes rather than artefacts. As such, they lay increasing emphasis on the adaptive act of engaging, rather than the rigid nature of the object. The changes in behaviour arising from the application of digital and online tools in the wider social and intellectual field can also facilitate the processes of engaging art that I postulated in Chapter 1: *the nature of art is vested not in the object but in the experience of the object*.

To experience imaginatively – that is, individually rather than simply through a repertoire of acquired tastes or learned facts – is a creative process. The structures, civil and commercial, through which many of the opportunities to learn, grow and engage are made available in a modern democracy, arose out of an industrial age and a Protestant ethic. As Pekka Himanen points out, “Creativity does not feature prominently in the Protestant ethic, the typical creations of which are government agency and the monasterylike business enterprise. Neither of them encourages the individual to engage in creative activity” (Himanen 2001, 144). That is something Andrew Keen would warn against, believing creativity is best left in the hands of the few, lest our industries be destroyed, our morals “corrupted” and our culture “wither and die” (Keen 2007, 140, 163 and 117 respectively). “One chilling reality in this brave new digital epoch,” he writes, “is the blurring, obfuscation and even disappearance of truth” (Keen 2007, 16). But then Keen holds up newspapers as one of the traditional pillars of this truth. In a country like Australia, where 14 state and territory, 8 city/regional, 102 local newspapers and the only national daily are all owned by a single, ideologically driven publisher – News Corp – one would have to question whether truth in Keen’s meaning is anything more than the chosen prejudices of a powerful economic elite.



The crisis of legitimacy facing the UK's cultural institutions in the middle of the first decade of the current century was simply a part – perhaps not even a large part – of a much broader shift in the fundamental nature of contemporary society: the way we organise. In the politics of the recent past, the Left and Right have each had their preferences: the socialist Left for bureaucratic state structures with leaders selected on merit, a model now slipping towards a market-focused 'New Left'; the fading conservative Right on aristocratic principles, now all-but eclipsed by the neoliberal Right who contend the fairest equilibrium is maintained by a free market in which privilege is equated with native virtue. These are, of course, highly idealised images, if not simply propagandist clichés. But as long as choice is rigidly set as a binary opposition, as long as arguments are always either/or, we are unlikely to look for other options. That was then, this is now. Clay Shirky puts it this way:

For the last hundred years the big organisational question has been whether any given task was best taken on by the state, directing the effort in a planned way, or by businesses competing in a market. This debate was based on the universal and spoken supposition that people couldn't simply self-assemble; the choice between markets and managed effort assumed that there was no third alternative. Now there is. (Shirky 2009, 47)

So then, are we moving towards anarchy or a new concept of democracy? Is creativity a special gift or a human endowment? What is so wrong with the principle of the best people for the job and how could the rich diversity of humanity ever be expected to work together collectively and effectively? This, I will discuss in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

The Elite and the Many

The parables of Christ as reported in the New Testament are frequently open to interpretation. The parable of the talents, for example, has been construed in a number of ways. A wealthy man about to go on a journey leaves varying amounts of money with three servants. On his return sometime later, he finds that the two servants who were given the largest amounts have invested them and made a significant profit, for which they are praised. The third, who received least, hid his money and returned it in exactly the same amount, for which he is punished. What are we to take from this story?

A metaphorical interpretation might suggest that monetary talents stand for natural abilities given by God; the moral being that we should use such gifts to the fullest (Hultgren 2002). A theological view might be that those who have discovered the enlightenment of the word of God should share it with others and not keep it to themselves. More specifically, some have seen the parable as a critique of the temple scribes who did just that (Jeremias 2003). William Herzog casts the third servant as a hero who resists his master's exploitation of others for his own profit. In this interpretation, the third servant is understood as a whistleblower and the parable as illustrating the importance of solidarity when faced

with injustice (Herzog 1994). By far the most common interpretation, especially within Protestant traditions and now within neoliberal ideology, construes wealth as the product of hard work and frugal living, and thus an emblem of virtue.

The sociologist, Robert Merton, drawing on extensive research by Harriet Zuckerman, identified a similar phenomenon in terms of scientific reputation and attribution which led to “the accruing of greater increments of recognition for particular scientific contributions to scientists of considerable repute and the withholding of such recognition from scientists who have not yet made their mark” (Merton 1968, 58). He described the phenomenon as ‘the Matthew effect’ in reference to the version of the parable recounted in the Gospel According to Saint Matthew and, in particular, the lines: “For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.” (Matt. 26:29 [King James Version])

The Saint Matthew Effect

Who benefits from the arts? If money collected from the community through taxes is to be spent supporting the presentation of a select range of art products and activities, who is taking advantage of the opportunity? Perhaps, in these days of hard evidence, it is easier to ask who attends. Thanks to the detailed work of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), we have some clear insight in the Australian context. These data suggest that education and income play a significant role.

The graph on the following page shows the percentage of people who have attended at least one art event in the previous year (2009–10). The types of art attendance are divided between various places and forms of cultural consumption: art in galleries; plays in theatres; musicals and operas; and classical music concerts. Individuals are segmented by their highest educational attainment across eight levels. The percentage of attendances is an expression of the number attending as a proportion of the total number of Australians in that given education segment. The comparison was calculated using the best available

ABS data sets: data on arts attendance from ABS 4114.0 (for year 2009–10); and data on percentage of population in each ‘highest educational attainment’ segment was drawn from ABS 6227.0 (as at May 2013) and applied to the total population figure for 2009–10.

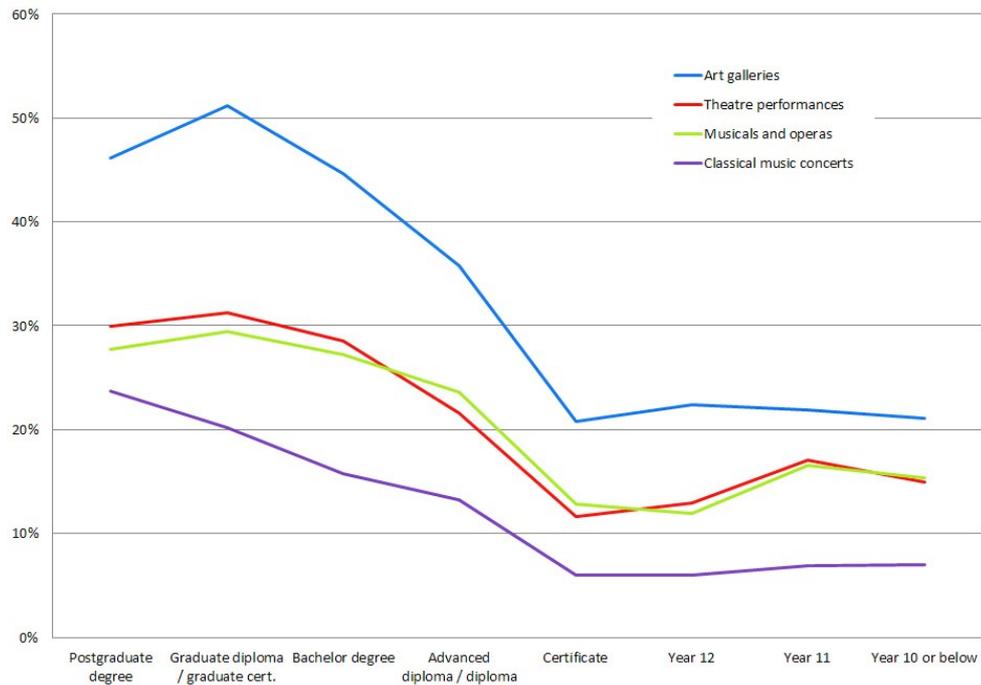


Figure 12. Adult Australian Arts Attendance by Educational Attainment
Segmented as a percentage of level of highest educational attainment
Based on data in ABS 4114.0 (2009–10)

The overall picture is one that shows the proportion of attendances rises with educational attainment. However, there are some small anomalies worth noting.

For example, postgraduates appear to attend less than those with a graduate diploma or graduate certificate. This may be because the latter constitute the smallest and newest educational segment, thus providing the least stable data and perhaps weighted by specific age-related tendencies. Without access to the raw ABS data to cross tabulate such queries, it is not possible to

draw any firm conclusions on this, except to point to such analysis as a useful area for further research in the future.

There is also a small uplift in attendances by those who left school before Year 12. Again it would require further comparison of the raw data to ascertain why this might be, but I would speculate that there is a weighting by age in this group, since tertiary education is much more widespread now than it was thirty or forty years ago. The data do suggest that people in the 55–64 age range and its shoulders, are those most likely to attend art galleries, theatres, and musicals and operas, while for classical music concerts the peak is a little older (65–74).

If the same kind of analysis is undertaken for those art forms analysed this time by household income, then the results (shown in the graph below) demonstrate a similar weighting towards the higher income households.

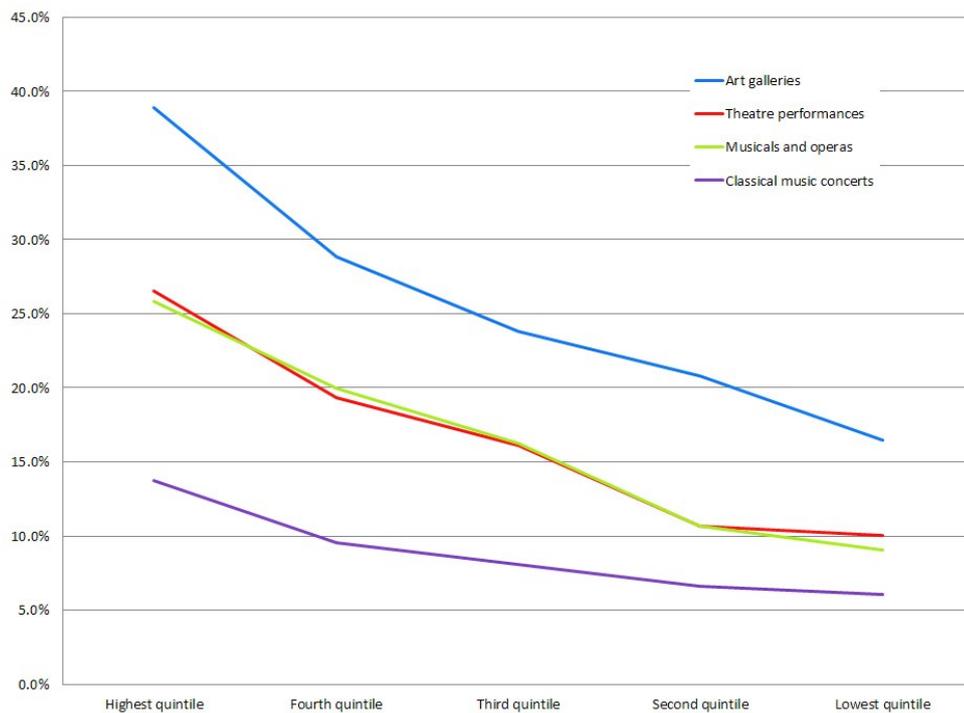


Figure 13. Adult Australian Attendance at Arts Events by Household Income Segment
Based on data in ABS 4114.0 (2009–10)

The lowest quintile represents a disposable household income of less than \$615 per week; the highest of more than \$2,264 per week (at 2011–12 values).

It is interesting that the steepest fall is for art galleries, for which entry is, for the most part, free in Australia. That is, these data suggest that it is not simply lack of money that inhibits attendance by those in lower-income households.¹²¹

It would appear that the arts-council model of funding exhibits the Matthew effect, providing subsidy for art forms preferred by the educated and well off; using money raised through taxation of the community to reduce the cost of attendance at events preferred by those with a greater ability to pay the market rate. It is, of course, important that the cost of attending these art forms does not become prohibitively expensive for those with lower incomes. But why fund the company to sell tickets below market rate to everyone, rather than subsidise the lower-income audience through targeted discounting; perhaps a voucher system?

Meanwhile, the popular arts remain firmly within the commercial arena, with tickets selling at the full market rate. Here the data describe a very similar pattern of attendance to those of the subsidised arts. One might speculate that either the cost is a barrier to those with less income (which seems likely in both cases) or that those with lower incomes are simply less interested in the arts, be they of a refined or popular stripe. This would make a useful area for more detailed statistical research, bringing qualitative and quantitative data together.

121 In a number of other Anglophone countries, the overall attendance at subsidised art museums is reported to be falling: US art museum attendances fell by 8 per cent between 2005 and 2011 (Kushner and Cohen 2013); Art Gallery of Ontario attendances fell by 30 per cent in 2010–11 compared with the previous year (Adams 2011); falling attendances at the National Gallery of Canada (around 900,000 in 1988 down to under 250,000 in 2013–14) constitute an “urgent” problem according to its Director, Marc Meyer (Simpson 2010); in the Republic of Ireland comparison of the percentage of the population who had attended an art event in 2006 (the most recent year for which date is available) and 1994 showed a general fall in attendance for subsidised art events and an increase in attendance for commercially presented arts, with the proportion attending at least one subsidised art exhibition in the year falling from 23 per cent in 1994 to 19 per cent in 2006 (Drury 2006). While these figures do not segment the data by demographic profile they do suggest a decline in interest, though whether interest is weighted to those with higher income and educational attainment remains unclear.

What does seem clear is that subsidy in its current form is not making any marked difference to outcome as far as audience diversity along economic and educational lines is concerned.

Looked at from another perspective, perhaps it is just that the educated are more talented all round. They consequently earn more money and appreciate the finer things in life. Perhaps, as was the lament of Thomas Hardy towards the end of the nineteenth century, the mass of people are simply “mentally unquickened, mechanical, soulless ... clay” (Millgate 1971, 192). Or perhaps, as F. R. Leavis argued four decades later, the mass media has brought standards tumbling down through the “exploitation of the cheapest emotional responses ... offering satisfaction at its lowest level” (Leavis 1930, 3). After all, much of what reaches us through the mass media, the means by which the majority of people are entertained, is bland and uninspiring.

The Mathew effect, as with the parable to which it alludes, can be interpreted in a number of ways. Is it that the emphasis is on the individual citizen; that it is up to each of us to make use of our talents through our own efforts, as best we can? Alternatively, do those who have experienced the benefits of engaging with the arts have a responsibility to do all they can to encourage others who have yet to enjoy such experiences? Then again, should we interpret this inequality as a critique of a system of exploitation by which taxes gathered from everyone are spent on the luxuries of the elite? Is it fair that more is given to those who already have much just because they are the ones who can appreciate it? It is certainly something neoliberal ideology emphasises, with its reward for privilege and penalty for poverty.

The Parable of the Baked Bean

Baked beans are one of the most ubiquitous mass-market foods in the United Kingdom and the most popular brand is Heinz, with over seventy per cent of the market share (Derbyshire 2006) amounting, the company claims, to the contents of one million tins consumed by 2.3 million Britons every day (Thring 2011). They

are sweet and bland and mildly nutritious. So what do baked beans say about the taste of the masses?

Baked beans were first canned in the United States when the product included chunks of fatty salt pork for flavour. They were not imported into the United Kingdom until 1886, when Fortnum and Mason began selling them as a luxury item (Fortnum & Mason 2014). There are many theories as to their antecedence before the canning of baked beans began in the 1860s, around the time of the American Civil War. One theory is that the seventeenth-century colonists learned a technique of clay baking beans with bear fat and maple syrup from local Native Americans, which they adapted using pig fat and molasses. Another theory is that the dish was a version of *skanah*, a North African Spanish–Jewish recipe, brought to New England by sailors. Yet another describes its origins in cassoulet, a French dish introduced to Quebec (Albala 2007). Indeed, there are many stewed- or baked-bean recipes from which they may have evolved, including Portuguese *feijoada*, Greek *gigandes plaki*, Spanish *cocido montañés* and the Balkan dish of *prebranac*. It seems most likely, as is the way in multi-ethnic colonisation, that a number of imported and regional traditions came together in the early recipes for the canned product.

What is clear is that when beans were first tinned for mass consumption the spices and flavours were dramatically reduced to ensure they were inoffensive enough to satisfy the widest market. The process of modifying a recipe for a mass market involves the removal of those things which some segments of the market may not like. The result is bland. This does not mean that any individual within the ‘mass’ prefers bland to a given tastier version, but that, since the mass is in reality a population of varied tastes, bland is the inevitable common denominator.

There is something else to be learned from baked beans: bland as they are, it would appear that consumer choices are by no means always made on taste preference. Heinz is the top-selling brand of baked beans in the UK, yet when the consumer magazine *Which* undertook blind tastings their product came fourth

(Which 2010) and the *Guardian* reported that an in-house taste testing placed Heinz last of six (Thring 2011). It would appear that Heinz sells less on the taste and quality of the product than on the power of its advertising and brand recognition.

So it is with the mass media: content is bland because of what is taken out so as to be inoffensive to the widest market. Take popular music, for example. In order to maximise sales, a recording company carefully reshapes the idiosyncrasies of a musician or band to ensure they are marketable to a wide range of customers. Meanwhile, they turn the artist into a carefully orchestrated brand in the hope that, once hooked, audiences will find them habit-forming.

We should not judge either the audience or the artists involved in mass markets, as both are distorted by the market itself; a market in which economic forces require universal standardisation of lowest-common-denominator goods if prices are to be kept down (and profits up). Minority tastes inevitably push prices up. As Chris Anderson has pointed out, “many of our assumptions about popular taste are actually artefacts of poor supply-and-demand matching – a market response to inefficient distribution” (Anderson 2004, 4).

The internet has been changing this situation quite radically. Back in 2001, the musician Moby, writing in a special edition of the *Economist*, spelled out some of the developments that were by then already overtaking his industry across the board, from creation to consumption. Getting your music to a wide audience at a level of quality that audience would want was once a very costly business involving recording studios, session musicians and technicians, as well as the manufacture, distribution and promotion of the disks, with huge potential losses if the disks didn't sell. Already, he argued, it was possible to compose and record a perfectly acceptable piece of popular music using an ordinary laptop and some inexpensive software, assuming you also had some talent. In digital form the new work can then be uploaded to the internet and accessed by anyone, anywhere. The whole edifice of the recording industry was built upon studio real estate, technological capital, and the manufacture and distribution of pre-recorded disks.

Do away with the studios, the disks and the distribution logistics, and the industry becomes somewhat redundant. It is not as though there was a deep underlying affinity between musicians and corporations; as Moby pointed out, “there is, traditionally, a great deal of antipathy between artists and record companies” (Moby 2001, 63).

That antipathy had found particularly vocal form a year earlier when the singer–songwriter, Courtney Love, took on the recording companies in what became known as the Love Manifesto. “What is piracy?” she asks. “Piracy is the act of stealing an artist’s work without any intention of paying for it. I’m not talking about Napster-type software. I’m talking about major label recording contracts” (Love 2000). Both artists and audiences are diverse and neither has much to gain these days from top-heavy, profit-driven intermediary industries.

The masses do not exist as and of themselves, but as a convenient conceptual aggregate. As John Carey put it: “the ‘mass’ is an imaginary construct, displacing the unknowable multiplicity of human life, it can be reshaped at will, in accordance with the wishes of the imaginer” (Carey 1992, 23). For the marketer it is a convenient way to conceive of a large-scale, economically viable consumer group, while it allows the elite to turn its back on those among whom it arose and was intended to serve, by neutralising and amalgamating them into a grey lumpen ‘other’. The “essential function” of such constructs, Carey concludes, “is to deprive the mass of human status. Humanity is to be found elsewhere – in the exceptional individuals” celebrated by writers such as Nietzsche (Carey 1992, 24).

Elites operate in many spheres, according to one’s perspective. Contemporary neoliberal elite form a highly educated and privileged set shaping the political agenda in their own image. With little experience of want, they mistrust of need; with the security of money and position, they believe in freedom of commercial choice. Taking another perspective, Chris Anderson considers the decisions that are made for us by major retail chains in terms of what is and is not made available. “As egalitarian as Wal-Mart may seem,” he writes, “it is actually extraordinarily elitist.” It is an elitism born of an economic

reality. For example: a Walmart store “must sell at least 100,000 copies of a CD to cover its retail overhead and make a sufficient profit; less than one per cent of CDs [titles] do that kind of volume. What about the 60,000 people who would like to buy the latest Fountains of Wayne or Crystal Method album, or any other nonmainstream fare? They have to go somewhere else” (Anderson 2004, 10). Elites, while they all tend to occupy positions of power and influence over the many, are themselves shaped by context: the limits of their own experience, their insulation from alternative views, the drive to maximise profits, an overweening ambition inculcated from birth... are just some of the influences that shape their perspectives. If the masses are an imaginary construct deployed to avoid the complexity of a society of individuals, elites are as much a product of their circumstance.

Meritorious or Meretricious?

Who are these elite and how did they become so? For the arts council of Keynes, they were an establishment clique (Upchurch 2007) – as suggested by John Harris’ research revealing the high level of private school educated appointees to the ACGB by both Labour and the Conservatives prior to 1970 (Harris 1969). Keynes presided over the Council; below this were the artform panels. Keynes loaded the panels with those who shared his views and padded it with the ineffectual. He included Duncan Grant, his former lover from the Bloomsbury Set. The panels were not empowered to make decisions but simply ‘recommendations’ to Council.¹²² Keynes’ approach can be summed up in a comment he had made back in 1940 when he first became involved in the idea of an arts council: “it would save everyone a lot of trouble if an announcement were made that no outsiders need apply” (quoted in Witts 1998, 99).

122 Initially, Keynes had intended to chair all the artform panels. When it proved impossible to allocate this amount of time, “he decided that if he couldn’t be there at the table they couldn’t have power” (Witts 1998, 414).

In the more contemporary arts council model, the panels were constituted of ‘peers’; that is, they were presented to be the equals of those applying for grants. In effect, however, they were those considered to have special merit; not just to be equals but to excel at what they do. It is from this perspective of superior skill that they are considered most able to assess that touchstone of arts council: ‘excellence’. They do not, in any real sense, represent or seek to represent the audience. The apologia for such cosiness is bureaucratic ‘necessity’. The panels review a very large number of applications in a short space of time; decisions have to be reached quickly. Richard Witts notes: “As it stands, the panel system can’t afford to be compromised by any unworldliness or fundamental questioning from its members as to its role or its biases – it hasn’t the time or the structural mechanisms to cope” (Witts 1998, 423).

Over the years, not all arts councils have retained the peer assessment model. In England, the process is now wholly bureaucratic with recommendations made by ACE staff and final decisions by the Arts Council Management Committee. By the time it closed in 2010, the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) had already ceased using peer panel review in the funding decision process; however they did use external assessors who, after training, were sent to report on arts events and activities on the ground. When SAC was dissolved to make way for Creative Scotland, the new body phased out assessors and now relies wholly upon in-house decision making by officers.¹²³ The Creative New Zealand staff work with both external experts and assessment panels in the decision-making process. The US National Endowment for the Arts employs a cascading system of selection that starts with staff assessment, then panel review after which the National Council makes its recommendations, though the final decision rests with the Chair alone.

123 Creative Scotland was formed in 2010 to take over the roles of the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen, and to embrace a range of creative industries not previously served by those former bodies. It had a tempestuous first two years ending with the departure of its CEO, Andrew Dixon, and is currently said to be developing a new, less autocratic approach to its work and to the creative communities it serves.

Canada Council and Australia Council retain the most thorough panel systems – Canada Council selects panels through community consultation while Australia Council draws on a ‘pool of peers’ who are self-nominated, with selection made by Council staff. Both Councils expressly work to ensure, among other things, a balance of gender, age, cultural diversity, art-form alliance and expertise, and national spread.¹²⁴

While diverse in their approaches, all the councils rely on the opinions of elites, be they bureaucrats or experts from the field. None involves the audience – the wider public – in the process. Those elites are understood to be such on merit; they are seen as the peak of their particular profession and consequently best placed to decide upon what should and should not receive the support of public money. The many pay, the elite spend.

Difference and Mobility

Setting this division in a new perspective, Christopher Hayes explores the failure of meritocracy in his book *Twilight of the Elites*. In identifying such failure, he casts the net wide over politics (for example, United States’ involvement in the second Iraqi War); finance (for example, the Global Financial Crisis), religion (for example, child-abuse cover-ups in Roman Catholic Church); sport (for example, the endemic corruption within big-league sport) and so on. He draws on the theoretical writing of the sociologist, Robert Michels, who had studied political parties and bureaucracies concluding that “it is organisation that gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandatories over the mandatory, of the delegates over the delegators.” This had led him to propose the Iron Law of Oligarchy, which states: “who says organisation says oligarchy” (Michels 1911, 365).

124 It is perhaps indicative of the emphasis placed upon the transparency of decision-making by the various arts councils that the number of words used to describe the process on their respective websites shows considerable variation: Canada Council, 5,168 words; US National Endowment for the Arts, 1,039 words; Australia Council, 574 words; Creative New Zealand, 243 words; Creative Scotland, 133 words (buried in FAQ); Arts Council England, 39 words. [Information accessed online 7 November 2014]

Hayes evolves this argument to address the notion of meritocracy. He begins by describing two principles upon which a meritocratic system is based. The first is the Principle of Difference, that

there is vast differentiation among people in their ability, and that we should embrace this natural hierarchy and set ourselves the task of matching the hardest working and most talented to the most difficult, important and remunerative tasks. (Hayes 2012, 56-57)

The second is the Principle of Mobility, that:

over time, there must be some continuous competitive selection process that ensures that performance is rewarded and failure punished. That is, the delegation of duties cannot be simply made once and then fixed in place over a career or between generations. People must be able to rise and fall along with their accomplishments and failures. (Hayes 2012, 57)

The theory is that, in the cliché phrase, ‘the cream will rise to the top’.¹²⁵

However, Hayes argues, once a grouping pulls away to form an elite – it becomes focused on the maintenance of its own existence and not on the needs of those it was imagined it would serve. It turns to self-justification and self-promotion, resisting any test that might lead to demotion. In Hayes’ description, the elite look inward and identify what it is that constitutes ‘people like us’. Having climbed the ladder of success, they pull the ladder up behind them, letting it down selectively to cronies and kin, to ‘people like us’. A kind of ‘unnatural selection’ ensues in which those who display less of the elite’s self-imagined characteristics are not replaced if and when they do reach the end of their tenure

125 This analogy is given a new and acerbic spin by Seth Price, a multi-disciplinary post-conceptual artist whose concerns include critiquing the way art is produced, dispersed and circulated while himself applying strategies that circumvent the institutions of art. In considering the audiences for high art forms such as opera, he suggests that “it is possible that cultured people are merely the glittering scum that floats upon a deep river of production” (Price 2007, 79).

or slip from grace, while those who are most similar are invited in whether or not they deserve it.

Adapting Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy, Hayes proposed the 'Iron Law of Meritocracy':

Eventually the inequality produced by a meritocratic system will grow large enough to subvert the mechanisms of mobility. Unequal outcomes make equal opportunity impossible. The Principle of Difference will come to overwhelm the Principle of Mobility ... Whoever says meritocracy says oligarchy. (Hayes 2012, 57)

Here I would say that the problem is not, of course, that people have merit, but that such merit should be seen as a reason to *remove* them from society and create in them a 'race apart'. It is the forming of an elite that has a tendency to lead to the kind of negative qualities described by Hayes, not the recognition of individual merit in terms of fitness to purpose.

The notion of elites is a slippery one that requires careful handling in terms of both definition and context, not least the context of political ideology. The Left and Right both have a love-hate relationship with elites. For the progressive Left, the perspective from which Hayes is writing, the elites are the powerful and privileged of both the establishment (for example: the church, the government) and the neoliberal free market (for example: Wall Street, commercialised sport). Each generation is groomed for the mantle of power through selective educational streaming that not only teaches them skills but inculcates an attitude of mind in which they become "drunk on their own sense of worthiness" (Dahlgren 2013, 282). Thus intoxicated, they drive the institution (be it church, state, financial sector, sport or whatever) in an increasingly self-serving and reckless way that Hayes argues eventually, almost inevitably, ends in calamity.

For Hayes the problem lies in the way elite formation leads to a dislocation from the community the elite is supposed to serve. In contrast, David Brooks, while agreeing that the contemporary elites identified by Hayes have lost the public trust (in his view they are "brats"), considers the problem lies not in their

formation as a distinct and separate elite, but in their failure to accept that they *are* an elite, which, in his view, would require them to recognise they have responsibilities. Rather, he believes, they wish to see themselves as “countercultural rebels, insurgents against the true establishment, which is always somewhere else.” By associating privilege with merit, the pursuit of merit has become an end in itself. “The language of meritocracy (how to succeed) has eclipsed the language of morality (how to be virtuous).” It is a conservative paternalistic perspective that remains turbid in its underlying ambivalence, for Brooks admits that while “the best of the WASP elites had a stewardship mentality ... [believing] in restraint, reticence and service” they constituted a “racist, sexist and anti-Semitic old boys’ network” (Brooks 2012).

(Un)Populism and the 99%

For the conservative Right, the elite is an aristocracy whose gravitas derives from lineage (ancestral and traditional) who offer the kind of stability Hobbes sought from his Leviathan. But for the neoliberal Right, true worthiness is assessed in a value-system derived from the Protestant ethic that understands wealth (as the fruits of hard work and frugality) to be the badge of those chosen to ascend to paradise. However, within neoliberal rhetoric, the term ‘elite’ is reserved for what Tony Abbott has called a “left-liberal intellectual hegemony” (Pearce 2004, 71; Flint 2003). Abbott was writing in the foreword to a book by the Australian legal academic, David Flint, which, ironically, bears the same title as Hayes’ book written nine years later in the United States: *The Twilight of the Elites*. However, the elite identified by Flint are very different from those defined by Hayes. In assessing the merits of Flint’s book, R. M. Pearce declared that

these elite groups have a privilege as against the generality of the population: the ABC is an influential purveyor of opinions, but without responsibility; academics and teachers have tenured independence; journalists form an influential coterie; ... the social welfare lobby is protected by increasing government subsidies; and so on. (Pearce 2004, 70)

This kind of argument was dubbed “market populism” by the historian and political analyst, Thomas Frank (Frank 2000a, 2000b). Within the rhetorical frame of market populism, big business is cast in the role of hero and protector of the ‘ordinary people’ against the “so-called elites and special interests responsible for maintaining a large welfare state at taxpayers’ expense” (Sawer and Laycock 2009, 134). This is achieved by arguing that businesses operate within a market and “by their very nature markets confer democratic legitimacy, markets bring down the pompous and the snooty, markets look out for the interests of the little guy, markets give us what we want” (Frank 2000b). Frank is, of course, being ironic, but those who deploy these arguments – with some degree of success – are not (though whether they believe it to be true, rather than simply expedient, is a moot point). In demonising these ‘elites’, market populism seeks to set ‘ordinary people’ against them (Canovan 2002) creating a smokescreen behind which rampant inequality may flourish (Sawer and Laycock 2009).

The question of elites then becomes a rhetorical tug of war in which Left and Right, while agreeing that elites suck, identify the culprits from among their chosen ideological Aunt Sallys. A second, problematic issue arises as the external pressure creates an opposing internal force of argument. Thus the elites of the Right seek to further bolster their omniscient self-image while the elites of the Left dismiss criticism as populist ‘dumbing down’, which they resist by removing themselves to a moral high ground of their own making and so, potentially, they isolate themselves further from ‘ordinary people’. Such responses are characterised by large populations where the group attacked or defended is so vast and so distant as to be beyond individual personal experience.

Margaret Canovan sees populism as the “shadow” of democracy, an inevitable and inescapable concomitant (Canovan 1999). In building her argument she draws on the work of the conservative political philosopher, Michael Oakeshott, who described two distinct political styles that have evolved over the past five hundred years of European history: “the politics of faith” and “the politics of scepticism”. The former is aspirational, mobilising popular enthusiasm

in a belief that 'salvation' is achievable; the latter remains suspicious of enthusiasm and believes governments are intrinsically limited in what they can achieve beyond maintaining order, and that consequently governmental powers should be circumscribed. While these two styles remain in tension, the one with the other, he argues that they are nonetheless unavoidable in modern politics (Oakeshott 1996). Canovan, seeking to extend these ideas beyond their conservative antecedence, coins two alternative terms: 'redemptive' and 'pragmatic' politics. Populism, she argues, arises in the space between the motivational but frequently unachievable promise of something better and the unavoidable need for rules, constraint and the institutionalisation of power. It is never possible for democracy to survive in solely pragmatic terms, since the motivation of those who sustain it relies on the promise it offers. That what is promised in politics is rarely matched by what is achieved in government, is patent. Canova argues that, in a democratic system, it is within the inevitable tension between these two inescapable political styles that populism can, and always will, arise (Canovan 1999).

The problem of elites is that they become dislocated from the rest of society. It is a weakness that opens them up to the tactics of market populism because they are no longer seen as being a part of the wider citizenry; they become – or can be portrayed as becoming – 'other'. It is in the nature of 'otherness' that those who perceive it feel no necessity to examine empirical fact, indeed the less actually known about an individual or group considered as 'other' the stronger the antipathy may be. Meanwhile, within such a removed elite group an innate sense superiority becomes entrenched as a line of defence, creating a dangerous belief in their own omniscience which encourages an assumption that self-interest is somehow congruent with public interest.

In the cultural field it is, in my view, healthier if artists remain part of the community, recognising that while their skillset is highly developed it is not unique. Of course, the way an individual artist *applies* that skillset is unique, just as any action by an individual differs, if sometimes only slightly, from that of

others. However, the ability to make marks, sounds, movements, arrangements, narratives is something we all share, unless some specific disability prevents it. When artists have the opportunity to work with and listen to those who engage with (and on occasion pay for) their work, there is a possibility that they may learn much and engage many. Such engagement opens up an opportunity to understand where incomprehension arises from poor communication rather than an intellectual or emotional failing in the audience. Indeed, I believe it would in many cases open up the possibility of creative partnership and collaboration, just as it did in interwar Britain, but not by any means limited to those particular artforms and social structures. Artists may also come to recognise that those who have traditionally claimed an enlightened understanding of elite art may be caught up in the obsequiousness that befalls individuals hoping to acquire status in the separation of cultural sheep from goats. These things are not black and white, but in a culture founded on a shared investment and wide appreciation, albeit at different levels of effort and skill, the danger of such polarisation might be reduced and the cultural capital of the community enlarged. The wider the cultural 'conversation' extends, the more people it engages and the wider the support for the arts will become, simply because the benefits will be personally experienced and increasingly self-evident.

This idea is not new. Indeed, it is the separation of art from the wider culture of a society that is only very recent. "In pre-modern cultures," Brett Cooke writes, "everyone engages in artful activity, and art is such an everyday behaviour that there is often no word for it" (Cooke and Turner 1999, 9). In the field of music, John Blacking argues that musicality may well be inherent in the majority of us, but "capitalist dogma tells [one] that only a chosen few are musical" (Blacking 1973, 9). For him the more important question is why so much potential is stifled for "it may well be that the social and cultural inhibitions that prevent the flowering of musical genius are more significant than any individual ability that may seem to promote it" (Blacking 1973, 7). It is a view exemplified in the partnerships between skilled amateur and paid professional that flourished for a

while in the amateurism of the interwar choirs, bands and theatre groups described in Chapter 4.

Another move to embed the creative arts within the community arose in partnership with the trade union movement in the 1970s and 1980s in Australia, with a significant expansion of both what was considered to be art and what was considered to be the appropriate purpose for art. The Australian artist, Ian Milliss, following remarkable success in the gallery system while still in his teens, moved through and beyond authorised forms of art activity to engage the more pressing issues of how a creative culture might address the inequalities and ecological threats at large in society. “I think people have to face up to the fact that the world is in a mess and that therefore all creative activity should be centred on resolving real problems, we can’t afford people that spend their lives mucking around with things that have no result, that just sit there and look nice, I don’t think that’s good enough” (Milliss 1972). In this view, the practices of art became a means for social change, a means that rested not in the hands of the talented few, but of the many. “Almost everyone is an artist” Milliss wrote, emphasising the role of art to facilitate practical interpersonal communication (Milliss 1973). Ten years later, writing in *Caper* (a magazine published by the Community Arts Board between 1979 and 1988), Milliss and co-author, Ian Burn, wrote of the wider benefits they saw deriving from the process of creative community participation promoted by the Arts and Working Life Program,¹²⁶ stating “These amateur activities can encourage other levels of communication among people in their workplaces. They can also encourage ‘communities of interest’ to develop around particular cultural activities” (Milliss and Burn 1983, 11). John Blacking

126 The Arts and Working Life Program was a joint initiative of the Australia Council for the Arts and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), established in 1982 “to encourage art practice and policy which is informed by the concerns and issues affecting worker’s own lives” (Australia Council 1990, 3). A decade later, its director, Deborah Mills, explained that it was seeking a way to respond to Australia’s expanding cultural diversity: “It needed to come up with cultural perspectives and programs which at least recognised different cultural perspectives based on ethnicity, race, class and gender” (Australia Council 1990, 5). The Arts and Working Life Program ended in the mid-1990s.

echoes this analysis, concerned that one “mistakes the means of culture for the end, and so lives *for* culture and not *beyond* culture” (Blacking 1973, 7, emphasis in original).

That idea of art transcending the realm of the gallery and museum is echoed some forty years later in the Occupy movement. Molly Crabapple, an artist and designer of the now famous ‘Fight the Vampire Squid’ graphic, puts it this way: “I think what Occupy did to my generation is it took us outside of ourselves. Outside of the gallery system, outside this very arid, self-referential way of working and it made us engage with real people, and the outside world” (Mason 2012).¹²⁷

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, there are growing concerns that the era of ‘Contemporary Art’ may be coming to an end. Here the term Contemporary Art is not simply used to describe art made in the present, but a particular kind of product generated within a particular kind of art system. Just as Modernism came to describe a period and approach to art which proved to have a sell-by date so, it is suggested, does Contemporary Art. This is not just a criticism from the fringes of the artworld and the more revolutionary struggle for social change, it is one increasingly voiced *within* the artworld through the greatly expanded conversation made possible by cheap online publishing.

Suhail Malik (a writer and co-director of the MFA Fine Art at Goldsmiths, University of London) argues that there is an urgent necessity for “art to exit from Contemporary Art”. This is not a paradox, but a clear differentiation between what he considers art must become and the neoliberal system that in his view is defined by the term Contemporary Art. As such, Contemporary Art describes the dominant

127 Molly Crabapple designed the image of an octopus with the words ‘Fight the Vampire Squid’ emblazoned across it and put it online. The image echoed Matt Taibbi’s description of the multinational investment banking company Goldman Sachs as “a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money” (Taibbi 2010). Subsequently, Crabapple’s graphic was downloaded and used on Occupy protest placards all over the United States. She later followed up with a second graphic: ‘Starve The Vampire Squid: Move Your Money to a Local Credit Union’.

system of art and not simply art made in the present time.¹²⁸ Malik is not alone. Even key players within the Contemporary artworld are despairing of the malaise that has overtaken it. In 2014, the art critic, Dave Hickey, a long-term advocate of art in a free market economy, announced he had had enough and was quitting an artworld he is reported to have described as “calcified, self-reverential and a hostage to rich collectors”. “It’s nasty and it’s stupid,” he said, “Art editors and critics – people like me – have become a courtier class. All we do is wander around the palace and advise very rich people” (Helmore and Gallagher 2012).

Steven Zevitas, the curator, writer and gallerist who founded the journal *New American Paintings*, wrote of his concern that the art market, which should be a subordinate sub-section of the larger artworld, had so come to dominate it that art value and monetary value were now synonymous. “I don’t think there is any way to overstate the exclusion that this narrative creates. It moves art closer to commodity status in the collective consciousness and in doing so, effectively tells the 99% that there is no point in thinking about the artworld, or art itself for that matter. The message is clear: If art equals money, and you are not wealthy, then art is not for you” (Zevitas 2014).¹²⁹ The BBC’s arts editor, Will Gompertz, agrees that “money and celebrity has cast a shadow over the Artworld which is prohibiting ideas and debate from coming to the fore.” In his view, what is needed most is for “artists to work outside the establishment and start looking at the world in a different way – to start challenging preconceptions instead of reinforcing them” (Helmore and Gallagher 2012).

128 Suhail Malik explores these ideas in detail in a forthcoming book, due to be published by Urbanomic in April 2015.

129 Writing in his blog, the musician and artist, David Byrne, questioned whether he cared about contemporary art anymore, concluding that he probably did not. He finds the Contemporary Art now showing in the galleries he used to frequent with such eager pleasure caters exclusively to the 1%. “I go into a gallery now and – rightly or wrongly – immediately think, ‘inoffensive tchotchkes for billionaires and the museums they fund’,” he wrote. “I can’t see the work or any ideas behind most of it anymore – if there even are any. ... The market and the disparity of wealth taints everything” (Byrne 2014).

However, while Contemporary Art as a neoliberal system of luxury commodity markets may be descending into an exclusive and excluding kind of decadence, it is not to say that art as a whole is going down with it. The field of art is wider, extending to those creative practices which have cleaved to the value of the community rather than the price of the market and the pronouncements of the gatekeepers. The 1% may have eclipsed the 99% in the field of Contemporary Art, but in other areas there is movement that presages change. This movement is at once on the margins of art and yet also at the heart of public life as a social experience.

Christopher Kulendran Thomas, an artist, theorist and curator working within the Occupy movement considers that the nature of art is on the cusp of change, but with no clear sense of what may come next.

Contemporary Art faces a potentially terminal crisis. Contemporary Art has sold itself as a non-specific, expanding, universal non-genre, much as neo-liberalism passed itself off as the natural state of things. The realisation that Contemporary Art is in fact a time-limited historical period, that can end, is a radical moment. But it's an idea that's gathering momentum. I can't see what will emerge afterwards, any more than I can see what the world economy might look like after Western dominance, but Occupy art can be seen as foreshadowing what replaces Contemporary Art. (Mason 2012)

One thing that is clear is that this kind of art activity has little to do with either celebrity or wealth; those who perform, create and disseminate this work do so unpaid and largely unacknowledged. The artist, James McAnally, speaking at a conference presented by Queens Museum, New York, in May, 2014 spoke of his search for something "I can't define or declare completely. It eludes me. [But] this indeterminacy is important because I am not sure we know our way out of this situation yet." His search is for "an art whose residue remains with a social and political life beyond the act" and in order to achieve this "it is perhaps our careers that must be eclipsed" (McAnally 2014). Taking as his starting point Claes Oldenburg's phrase "I am for an artist who vanishes" (see Stiles and Selz 1996,

335),¹³⁰ McAnally proposed a series of aphorisms to encapsulate these new attitudes, including “I am for an art without an artist, an act that does not need to be captured and valued as art” and “I am for an artist who vanishes into an action, a value that comes to live within and among people. An act of adoption, dispersion and transformation” (McAnally 2014).

As I write this, Deborah Solomon, the art critic of New York’s public radio station WNYC, in choosing her pick for the best art made in 2014, has selected images of protests coordinated through, and then disseminated via, Twitter. Specifically, these are the ‘die in’ performances staged by ordinary citizens and recorded by ordinary citizens who circulate the images through social media. It is a form of protest that has been adopted for a number of years, but most recently in the wake of the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri on 9 August, 2014.

While this is art as a means to dissent, it is not the loud and aggressive confrontation we might associate with protest; rather the ‘die in’ strategy reminds us that we are all, in our way, victims. It is an action that seeks to engender empathy. Writing in 1973, Ian Milliss argued that it is important for the community as a whole to understand its collective creative potential and to see the art experience as something shared: a means to social change.

Once the monopoly of ‘artists’ over ‘creativity’ and ‘culture’ is broken, it becomes possible for people to create real history and real change from their own personal experience. This is what ‘art’ really is, and for obvious reasons it cannot be found in ‘art’ galleries nor in exhibitions nor in books; only by discarding the concept altogether and then, acting on our

130 This list of ‘I am for...’ statements was first published in 1961 in a catalogue for an exhibition entitled *Environments, Situations, Spaces* at Martha Jackson Gallery. While it is sometimes referred to as a manifesto, it is in Oldenburg’s words a “slightly satirical ode or paean to the possibilities of using anything in one’s surroundings (mostly urban) as a starting point for art”. Oldenburg said later of the list that “I don’t necessarily believe all those things. But I, at some point, might believe them” (Oldenburg 2013). However, in building his own list, McAnally is clear that he is struggling towards a much more direct truth and not simply playing a word game.

own awareness, changing our lives, does the concept gain meaning.
(Milliss 1973)

But, if art makers and art consumers become one and the same, what of quality and value? The art market is founded on rarity and authorised evaluation, its very essence is elitist. If art is to abandon the institutionalised luxury market – to ‘exit Contemporary Art’ – how is it to survive? How can a more democratic approach to the arts, albeit desirable, be sustained?

The Long Tail and the Phoenix

Without elites, where do we find new ideas and innovation? Who will lead our culture? Who will arbitrate the arts?

Perhaps no one. A number of analysts in different countries have identified the growth of collaborative creative communities driven by similar motivations to those described in the Hacker Ethic. The British author and consultant, Charles Leadbeater, has written extensively on this subject. In his book *We-Think: Mass Innovation, Not Mass Production* he draws on Descartes’ famous proposition, extending it to the new collective attitude.

In the twentieth century we grew accustomed to the notion that ideas came from specially gifted people, working in special places: the writer in the garret, the artist in the studio, the boffin in the lab. Yet ... ideas are emerging from a mass of creative interactions among a wide range of people who combine different but potentially complementary insights. Our capacity for collaborative creativity will become ever more powerful because the opportunities to engage with others in creative interaction are expanding. The generations who grow up with these ways of thinking will have as their motto ‘we think, therefore we are’.
(Leadbeater 2009, 20)

In the United States, a report by the James Irvine Foundation came to a similar conclusion with specific reference to the arts and culture. In this case they speculate as to whether the phenomenon of mass participation is less a departure

from the norm than a return to more established popular cultural practices following a temporary aberration in the twentieth century.

Dramatic increases in people's interest in actively participating in the arts and pursuing personal creativity are occurring simultaneously with declines in their appetite for traditional forms of nonprofit arts presentation and interpretation ... Some argue that the late twentieth-century mode of art creation and consumption was, in fact, an exception, and that we are returning to an earlier, more popularist way of experiencing culture that was common in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. For most of history, people's cultural experiences were live and often participatory. (James Irvine Foundation and AEA Consulting 2006, 9)

This has a more wide-reaching implication than simply who is involved and how many. While the art market obsesses over the correlation between price and cultural capital through the fetishism of cultural objects as the reification of status, the kinds of cultural output generated by large groups tends to be less commoditisable. In that sense, I would argue, such collective creative processes move closer to, and not further from, the nature of art as experience described in Chapter 1. As Sutherland and Gosling note, "Culture is a resource for doing, thinking and feeling, where culture in and of itself does not do anything or make anything happen but acts as a dynamic resource for activity based on the way agents respond and orient themselves, i.e., how they appropriate culture" (Sutherland and Gosling 2010, 21).

Such collaborative groups are not without expertise or impact. Leadbeater writes: "in field after field large groups of committed and knowledgeable contributors, often amateurs, many working without pay and collaborating with little hierarchy, are mobilising resources on a scale to match the biggest corporations in the world" (Leadbeater 2009, 90). They are able to exploit the economy of numbers. It is not that any one individual involved in the collaborations is supremely expert or prodigiously productive, but that together they can draw on a collective resource of knowledge exceeding that of any individual: no one is smarter than everyone. I do not believe that people have

suddenly changed. As Clay Shirky notes, technologies do not change people but they can facilitate changes in behaviour.

Social tools don't create collective action – they merely remove the obstacles to it. Those obstacles have been so significant and pervasive, however, that as they are being removed, the world is becoming a different place. This is why many of the significant changes are based not on the fanciest, newest bits of technology but on simple, easy-to-use tools like email, mobile phones and websites, because those are the tools most people have access to and, critically, are comfortable using in their daily lives. Revolution doesn't happen when society adopts new technologies – it happens when society adopts new behaviours. (Shirky 2009, 159-160)

It is those changes in behaviour and the agency afforded by technology that offer us new possibilities. As Jay Rosen says, “the people formerly known as the audience are simply the public made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable” (Rosen 2012, 15).

That unpredictability will be messy. While the public may become more able, that ability will be scattered across a very much wider field than it is for a narrow band of professionals. If tastes are not shaped by and for a mass market, how will the economic and logistical machinery by which things reach people be managed? Andrew Keen argues that there is in fact a scarcity of talent in the world; that what there is requires capital investment to reach fruition. His concern is that all things put out on the internet have (and maintain) equal value. “Today, on the Web where everyone has an equal voice,” he writes, “the words of the wise man count for no more than the mutterings of a fool” (Keen 2007, 50).

But is there a scarcity of talent? And why does a writer who wishes to uphold the existing free market have so little confidence in the choices of the consumer? The arguments that promote the free market as the most democratic route to economic optimisation rest on the assertion that consumers do *not* take all things as equal, but vote with their wallet. In my view, the large corporations Keen seeks to defend are not so much in pursuit of excellence as saleability. And the nature of their baked-bean-like approach, necessitated by the cost of

maintaining the corporation, manufacturing and distributing its goods and fiercely defending company control over the means of production and the means of dissemination, inevitably draws content to a low common denominator. Keen criticises the internet for its flattening effect on quality yet, in my view, it has been the growth of the multinational corporation and the enforced passivity of audiences that has seen the continued dulling down of mass media culture. It does, however, seem likely that with many more producers and less centralised control, cultural goods and services will become very much more diverse. The sense of collective experience that was created – for example, in the 1950s and 1960s when a nation watched the same television programs in real time – has already gone. How can a heterogeneous culture with myriad producers and scattered content sustain itself?

Scant and Surplus

One of the outcomes of involving more people in the production of art is that it will tend to further diversify the range of what is produced, as more and more cultural goods are created that suit smaller and smaller markets scattered evermore thinly. This is a challenge economically. In the twentieth century, the popular arts have been the sphere of mass media industries such as those for recorded music, radio, television, film and publishing. There comes a point in the attenuation of demand when it is simply not viable to distribute a wider range of minority-interest content in physical media or through limited broadcast frequencies. Consequently, as I described in the Parable of the Baked Bean, content is carefully modulated with a view to securing many sales for a relatively small number of products that are not *unpalatable* to the widest consumer base. A mass market requires hits, best-sellers and blockbusters.

The Long Tail

Chris Anderson, the editor of *Wired* magazine, described the phenomenon whereby the internet has turned previously uneconomical content into a viable proposition. In setting out his argument, he described the relation between

products in a marketplace and the volume of sales, which can be plotted as a curve (shown below).

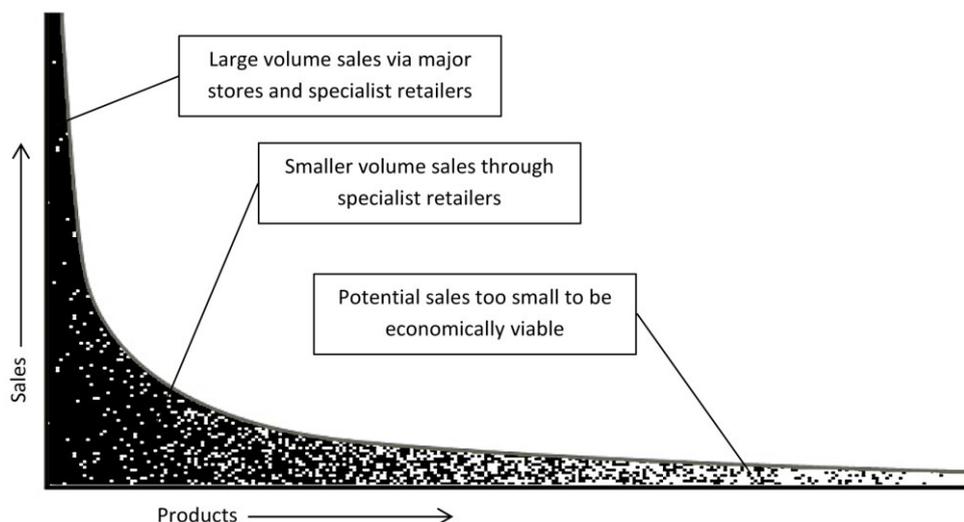


Figure 14. The Long Tail

The graph shows products plotted against sales. To the left are the 'hits' that sell in very high quantities. As the graph tails off toward the right, it describes the products which traditional manufacture and distribution system find uneconomical, but which may be made available digitally due to the low storage and distributions costs online.

On the left are the products that sell in massive quantities – the hit songs, best-seller books, blockbuster movies and so on. These are the kind of products sold in large stores with a high turnover, which in turn helps to build further sales. Moving to the right we find the moderately popular and more specialist products which sell in smaller quantities and retail through more specialist outlets. Continuing further right, the number of sales keeps falling and the curve glides down to almost zero. In classical economics, this long tail extending almost infinitely to the right is a nonviable zone, the consumers too thinly dispersed, sales too limited. Therefore, in pop-cultural terms, we all adjust to make do with something the majority will accept rather than finding a more specific and personal 'fit' for our individual needs and tastes. So insidious is the process and so emphatic the promotion that in time we can all too easily come to settle for tastes shaped by the market as though they were our own.

What Chris Anderson identified is that in the realm of the digital and the era of the internet the constraints of classical economics fall away. Shelf space effectively becomes infinite. It costs very little to add more music, more videos, more digital books, more imagery to the inventory, even less for it to be accessed by anyone with a suitable internet connection, anywhere in the world that does not actively block such activity.

People are going deep into the catalogue, down the long, long list of available titles, far past what's available at Blockbuster Video, Tower Records, and Barnes & Noble. And the more they find, the more they like. As they wander further from the beaten path, they discover their taste is not as mainstream as they thought (or as they had been led to believe by marketing, a lack of alternatives and a hit-driven culture). (Anderson 2004, 3)

Perhaps the long tail (by virtue of its sheer length) contains more talent than the tiny elite that, individually, have so much. Certainly, as Anderson demonstrates, the aggregated sales of ultra-minority products online exceed those of the mass-market hits (Anderson 2004). It is not just that more variety is reaching more people, but more products are moving within the economy. This changes the relationship between producer and consumer in a number of ways. The first is, of course, that there is more opportunity for the consumer to become a producer, to create a digitised work and reach an audience online. They may do this with the aim of making money or they may be motivated by more Hacker-like drives: the Virtual Choir for example. Second, Clay Shirky points to another quality of very small niche markets: that they can relocate fandom to a social media context as conversation. It is impossible for a creative artist to have meaningful interpersonal dialogue with millions of fans, but more feasible with a few dozen, or even a few hundred. That sense of direct contact with an artist, of the artist accessible to the audience as opposed to peering down on them from the pedestal of corporate hype or anonymised behind the vitrine of marketing-department gloss, suggests that new forms of intersubjective experience may be feasible along the tapering tail that are simply impossible in the star-bound head

(Shirky 2009). As Shirky notes, “egalitarianism is possible only in small social systems” (Shirky 2009, 93).

But if the long tail describes previously untenable goods and services that have now become viable, what of the producers of that hitherto untapped production? What, aside from sheer volume, is to be gained?

Cognitive Surplus

In his book *Here Comes Everyone*, Clay Shirky puts forward a “disorienting math” at the heart of long-tail, Hacker-ethic, open, internet-facilitated behaviours of collaborative online activity: “a chaotic process, with unpredictable and widely uneven contributions, made by nonexpert contributors acting out of variable motivations, is creating a global resource of tremendous daily value” (Shirky 2009, 139). He is describing *Wikipedia*, but he could have been describing any number of new initiatives springing up online, which employ open collaborative-productive systems that dramatically reduce “both managerial overhead and disincentives to participate” (Shirky 2009, 130). Charles Leadbeater has described similar processes of non-hierarchical, unorganised and unplanned collaboration that have evolved both online and off, resulting in creations as diverse as the mountain bike, the Linux operating system, rap music and the world’s most powerful super computer (Leadbeater 2009, 101, 65, 102, 163 respectively). In his recent book, Shirky explores in detail this collaborative creation of value, which taps into what he calls ‘cognitive surplus’ (Shirky 2011).

Cognitive surplus describes the creative and intellectual capacity latent within communities. It is a resource that remains inaccessible to conventional paid-employment systems. Its strength lies in numbers rather than in specific individual talents. Shirky argues that the internet has permitted an aggregation of fragmented cognitive resources in which the many may each add very little, but which together creates something of considerable value.

Viewed from the perspective of classical economic relations whereby a limited number of producers put in a lot of work to supply goods and services to a large number of consumers, this seems more than a little weird. Especially when

one adds that there is no overarching plan or leadership control, and no payment. However, as the physicist Philip Anderson observed in his seminal paper of 1972, “more is different”: when dealing with very large numbers the ‘common-sense’ laws of individual experience cease to hold good (Anderson 1972). Indeed, four decades later Chris Anderson speculated that in our present era (which he has dubbed the Petabyte Age)¹³¹ when data can be stored and analysed on an astronomical scale, what is revealed exceeds the insights of inductive reasoning and the usefulness of hypotheses. “Petabytes allow us to say: ‘Correlation is enough’. We can stop looking for models. We can analyse the data without hypotheses about what it might show. We can throw the numbers into the biggest computing clusters the world has ever seen and let statistical algorithms find patterns where science cannot” (Anderson 2008).

Shirky takes a more pragmatic and human-scale view. He acknowledges that, while some new collectively created content is extremely valuable, the greater part of user-generated material is mediocre. (He gives the example of LOLcats, funny pictures of cats with witty captions, amusing but lightweight).¹³² Here, however, there is another element in the equation to consider, aside from the magnitude of scale, and that is the dynamic nature of participation, because participation is not simply about production but about change. To participate is the best way to grow, because we learn most by doing and grow through learning. To be an active participant is to feel the upward pull of wanting to do more and do better. The difference between internet forms and those of broadcast such as

131 A petabyte is a million million kilobytes (1,000,000,000,000 kB). Anderson expresses the relative scales thus: “The Petabyte Age is different because more is different. Kilobytes were stored on floppy disks. Megabytes were stored on hard disks. Terabytes were stored in disk arrays. Petabytes are stored in the cloud. As we moved along that progression, we went from the folder analogy to the file cabinet analogy to the library analogy to — well, at petabytes we ran out of organisational analogies.” (Anderson 2008)

132 Richard Freudenstein, CEO of Foxtel, complained that “There will be a lot more cats on skateboards; we’ll have a lot less *Game of Thrones* ... If we sit and wait, and we don’t introduce some [stronger copyright protection] schemes soon, there won’t be an industry” (Knott 2014). This in a year when Foxtel posted a \$554 million USD profit (2013–14), up 13 per cent on the previous year (Groves 2014).

radio and television is that the former provide the opportunity to be an active participant. Watching TV, where our involvement is limited to switching channels, there is no such drive to develop, but rather an enveloping inertia to passively accept whatever is being delivered. Shirky's point is that, viewed longitudinally, mediocrity is not a bad thing because it is not the end game. It is the mark of a process begun, a process by which one might move in increments from mediocre to good. The real gap, he argues, is not between what is good and what is mediocre – not between, say, the Virtual Choir and LOLcats – but between doing *something* and doing *nothing*. And someone making LOLcats has already crossed over that gap (Shirky 2011).

This equation has another dimension: the psychosocial. As Shirky goes on to argue, the processes of user-generated content circulation describe not just personal acts but social relations.

The atomisation of social life in the twentieth century left us so far removed from participatory culture that when it came back, we needed the phrase 'participatory culture' to describe it. Before the twentieth century, we didn't really have a phrase for participatory culture; in fact, it would have been something of a tautology. (Shirky 2011, 19)

While mass media give us a sense of shared experience, participatory media involve us as active collaborators in the creation of experiences, as interlocutors and not simply consumers. Such active involvement can bring a number of benefits. Hugh Mackay lists ten things that "make us tick", that motivate us and bring a sense of wellbeing. Of those ten, at least five are potentially delivered by active participation in the arts: the desire to connect; the desire to be useful; the desire for something to believe in; the desire to belong and the desire to be taken seriously (Mackay 2010). It can also relieve the boredom arising from passivity and monotony, something Bertrand Russell considered a "vital problem for the moralist, since half the sins of mankind are caused by the fear of it" (Russell 1930, 47). The economist Richard Layard drew on a wide range of research studies to demonstrate that active engagement in the arts tends to bring greater happiness,

while the passivity induced by mass media, especially television, tended to stifle our social life (Layard 2005a). Although large groups are watching the same television program at the same time, they are not, in any meaningful way, sharing in the way one does in a conversive collaborative participatory form, but consuming in isolation. The sociologist, Robert Putnam, has identified such passive consumption as a significant contributory factor in the decline in community life in the United States (Putnam 2001).

If the creation of culture in a broad sense and the making of art in the narrower, beaux-arts sense, are involving more and more ordinary people (perhaps not so ordinary when they play to their strengths and are not cast in the flattening definition of the masses) what of professional artists? How are they to survive now the effective 'closed shop' in which they have been used to operating is opening up? If amateurs and pro-ams are creating vast tracts of cultural content, how will the arts infrastructure survive and the individual artist make a living?

Sustainability, Austerity, Resilience

Sustainability

Issues of sustainability in the arts were an ongoing concern for much of the twentieth century and continue to be so in the twenty-first. When the community arts activities that had blossomed following the First World War were threatened by the Great Depression, the Carnegie Trust stepped in to support the activities of amateur groups who in turn commissioned the services of many professionals. While Keynes had envisioned the arts council as a temporary measure to allow UK arts companies to recover from the war and the economic depression that had preceded it, over the following twenty-five years the council accreted ever more companies and individuals to its funding portfolios. In time, the question arose as to just how sustainable the arts reliant on such subsidy might really be. What would happen if and when funding were reduced or withdrawn? In the 1970s, a combination of economic stagnation and high inflation saw the threat of cuts in

arts funding as a matter of necessity and, while the numerical value of the government's annual grant to the arts council continued to rise, the real value did fall briefly in 1977–78. In the 1980s the Tories effectively froze public spending on the arts as a matter of policy, although there was a rise in 1986–87 ahead of the general election. That trend put further pressure on the organisations that had sprung up during the halcyon sixties. In the 1990s, attempts to refocus arts funding on stimulating demand and not simply subsidising supply met with mixed results, but raised once again the issue of how the arts might sustain themselves without sufficient audience support. As one century came to an end and another began, UK New Labour situated sustainability of the arts within the frame of social benefit and the concomitant savings anticipated from a reduction in the long-term costs of social welfare – so-called 'defensive instrumentalism'.

Sustainability is an expansive concept that tends to an ecological point of view. By this I mean one that interprets issues within their wider context, recognising the complexity of their interdependencies. I am not speaking of the environmentalist sphere of natural ecologies, although the way of thinking of systems as complex and interdependent has become much more widespread since those important discourses came to the fore. Rather, I am drawing an analogy between natural ecologies and cultural ones.

In the arts, economic sustainability is an issue of the balance between a number of variables: cost of production, including the balance of professional and amateur roles; earned income; ability to diversify sales through touring, export, recording contracts and other commercial spin-offs; the burden of subsidy considered appropriate to the public benefit gained; attractiveness to sponsorship and philanthropic donation ... and so on. Many of those issues are shaped not by those in the arts themselves but by wider considerations such as education.

Austerity

The 2008 global financial crisis and subsequent recession saw a momentary wavering of confidence in the neoliberal ideology of a completely free market. Keynesian strategies of lifting aggregate demand in periods of recession through

increased government spending – reviled by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s and ditched by New Labour in the 1990s – were hurriedly rehabilitated to stem the downward spiral of recession. However, it was not long before the problems of the financial crisis were turned to neoliberal advantage in the pursuit of ‘lite government’ through austerity measures that required cuts in public spending to return budget surplus *during* recession. One outcome of such a policy is that unemployment will rise, at least temporarily, until the economy begins to pick up. Thus, pressure falls on the individual in an escalating competition for jobs and resources. Meanwhile, neoliberal ideology asserts that economic growth is encouraged if those leading and investing in industry are given greater reward. Consequently, senior executive salaries and shareholder dividends rise while the decreased demand for workers puts downward pressure on wages at the lower end of the scale.

Resilience

Within the context of austerity, the language of the arts economy shifted from sustainability to resilience. Whereas sustainability had been a system-wide concept, resilience put the emphasis on the artist or arts organisation in isolation. Are they strong enough, flexible enough, lean enough, popular enough to survive on their own merits, if not wholly in a free market then as part of a contract with government in which it is up to the individual or organisation to make their case effectively within the frame of government ideology, or, more pragmatically, if it wins votes.

How do the possibilities opened up by the internet impact on issues arising from austerity with its emphasis on individual resilience?

One issue that becomes apparent is that, at a time when demand for workers is low, exploitation of the long tail might have the effect of further reducing demand. The embracing of value production by pro-ams and amateurs might threaten the livelihood of professionals. This is certainly the argument put forward by critics of internet ‘amateurism’. The reasons for this dislike of the pro-am and amateur as the generators of things that the market finds acceptable are complex.

Such modes of production are difficult to control and tend to sit outside of the corporate pyramid. But in terms of creating a glut or forcing down the market price by oversupply and undercutting professional rates, the issue becomes a question of whether the number of jobs in the arts is fixed such that any additional production threatens the sustainability of existing producers. This depends on whether there is a relationship between the number of those involved in making art and the demand for art.

What the rise of the pro-am may do is weaken the hold that corporations have on the market. It might be argued that this reduces corporate ability to finance innovation while suggesting that people be free to exploit the innovations of others without themselves investing in the R&D. However, as discussed earlier, the so-called Hacker Ethic tends towards innovation while remaining outside of the employment market. One result has been the development of the internet as the basis upon which commercial (and non-commercial) programs are able to run and through them many goods and services sold (while many more are made available free of charge).

This may be beneficial for the consumer, widening the range of goods and services available while reducing the cost and even making them free of charge, but where does it leave the professional? If the internet is becoming an economic bonfire of vanities, can the individual professional artist survive? One thing is for sure, the key to resilience is adaptability.

The Strategy of the Phoenix

Andrew Keen has argued that do-it-yourself music making and peer-to-peer file sharing are destroying the music industry, which he sees as equivalent to destroying the music. His argument is that musicians need the recording industry if they are to survive (Keen 2007). It might be more accurate to say that the recording industry needs the recording industry to survive. As technologies develop that reduce the cost of getting music to the listener, the running costs of the industry should fall and the amount of money reaching the artist rise. After all,

if they do not have to press vinyl or burn compact disks, distribute them to stores (which in turn have all the overheads of real estate and staffing), and take a gamble on whether they will sell, both risk and overheads should fall dramatically for the middlemen and women. In fact, the proportion of the income from sales online that feeds back to the artists is *lower* than that for the sale of compact disks. As at 2011, Apple pays the originating artist nine per cent of the price of each complete album download on iTunes, while the recording company takes 54 per cent and Apple 37 per cent. Individual song tracks pay the artist just nine cents per download, which, as Brian Reed expresses it, means that “musicians need to sell 12,399 songs a month to earn a salary equal to a McDonald’s employee”. Meanwhile, streaming sites such as Spotify pay such a small royalty that a song must be streamed well over four million times a year just to earn the US minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour) (Reed 2011).

Such low returns from recording contracts has created a math that changes many artist’s notions of ‘piracy’ – the accessing and copying of recording without copyright payment. The Spanish musician Ignacio Escolar *wants* fans to pirate his band’s music. Having sold 15,000 copies of their first album, he calculates that, after record company deduction and tax, each musician earned about forty Euros a month (c\$60.00 AUD) for their three-year’s work. While he admits that without the recording company “my band would never have sold 15,000 records,” he goes on “I bet we could have given them away.” The fact is that the band makes its money from live performance. As Escolar says, “Please, pirate my songs!” ... “Like all musicians who have done their sums, I know that 100,000 pirate fans coming to my shows are more profitable than 10,000 original ones [that is, fans who buy retail recordings]” ... “Free distribution of songs over the Internet will not put an end to musical creation, but I hope it will put an end to the abusive practices of the recording industry” (Escolar 2003).

What streaming and online digital sales have done is to help artists circumvent the industrial middlemen and women while vastly increasing the range of music available to the customer. Without the limitation of physical shelf

space or local retail catchment areas, such services can reach out globally with few overhead costs.

As Chris Anderson points out, “in the tyranny of physical space, an audience too thinly spread is the same as no audience at all” (Anderson 2004, 6). In the retailing of recorded music there is a point below which stocking a given disk in a given outlet is bad business. A typical Walmart store carries 39,000 songs, the limit for ensuring sales space is used effectively.¹³³ The law of diminishing returns maintains a distribution scarcity. Compare this with the streaming on-demand music subscription service Rhapsody, which offers unlimited access to a library of over 30 million songs for a flat monthly fee – \$9.99 as at 2014 (Rhapsody 2014). In 2004, Rhapsody sold more music from the ‘long tail’ than from the top 10,000 hits at a time when the platform held only 375,000 songs (Anderson 2004). That differential will have escalated with the hundred-fold increase in songs now in their catalogue. In terms of opportunity, the field is much wider for minority-interest and niche musicians.

The Canadian-born cellist and composer, Zoë Keating, markets her music direct via her website and previously via the independent online store, CDBaby (which passes seventy-five per cent of income on to the artist). She also sells through a range of download and streaming platforms including iTunes and Spotify. Keating has taken the unusual step of publishing her earnings from these sites online in an open Google Doc, in the hope that she might become a “data point”. She encourages other artists to do that same in order to shed more light on how the “new music industry” is evolving. Her approach is more sophisticated than Keen’s (and, to be fair, comes six years after Keen’s book was published, when we are further down the technological road). In an interview published in the *Guardian* newspaper, she set out her sales strategy as follows:

133 That figure was cited by Chris Anderson in 2004, but given the economies of space in selling CDs have not changed, it is unlikely to have risen and may in fact have fallen as online suppliers become the first point of enquiry for anything that is not a major hit of the moment (Anderson 2004, 5).

The income of a non-mainstream artist like me is a patchwork quilt and streaming is currently one tiny square in that quilt. Streaming is not yet a replacement for digital sales, and to conflate the two is a mistake. I do not see streaming as a threat to my income, just like I've never regarded file sharing as a threat but as a convenient way to hear music. If people really like my music, I still believe they'll support it somewhere, somehow. Casual listeners won't, but they never did anyway. I don't buy *all* the music I listen to either, I never did, so why should I expect every single listener to make a purchase? I think that a subset of my listeners pay for my music, and that is a-ok because ... and this is the key ... there are few middlemen between us. (quoted in Dredge 2013, emphasis in original)

As an independent artist, working directly with the distribution platforms, Keating sees streaming sites as “a discovery service” and what she would really like, rather than the relatively small royalties, is to “be paid in data”: to know her fans and potential fans – her market – more precisely. “It seems like everyone has it [the artist's data], and exploits it ... everyone but the creators providing the content that services are built on ... The law only demands I be paid in money, which at this point in my career is not as valuable as information” (quoted in Dredge 2013).

While it is always possible to download music for free from a range of peer-to-peer file-sharing platforms, there is a point at which, if the cost is low enough, the guarantee of quality and the lack of hassle tend to make purchase the preferable option.¹³⁴ As Anderson puts it: “you *can* compete with free” (Anderson 2004, 22, my emphasis). This is one of the points that Zoë Keating is making. Another is to do with the sense of connection true fans have with the music and, through it, its maker. The music is not simply a standalone commodity; it is part of the experience of connection with the artist felt by the fan. This is why Keating wants the data relating to streaming; to better know with whom she is

134 This is not a practice limited to the online digital age. The cassette tape recorder allowed one to record tracks from records (and later CDs) to share with friends. Indeed, the ‘curatorial’ act of making up tapes of themed or favoured tracks to give to a friend was a way not simply of saving money but of becoming more actively involved in the process; making it personal.

connecting. Now, more than ever, the artwork is a point of human connection between the interior life of the artist and that of the audience. Perhaps, paradoxically, the virtual environment can engender a potent sense of intimacy. Art and virtuosity are about empathy and community, expressiveness and fulfilment, and not just celebrity and a handful of mass media hits. “The cultural benefit of all of this is much more diversity,” Anderson concludes, “reversing the blinding effects of a century of distribution scarcity and ending the tyranny of the hit” (Anderson 2004, 26).

What is being described is not so much the revolutionary overthrow of the professional cultural worker as a diversification of the market. There will still be a role for professional artists just as there will continue to be a place for large-scale institutional means by which the arts – perhaps especially the repertoires of the past – can be presented. However, this may come to involve a greater partnership between professional, pro-am and amateur. Indeed, this already happens in a number of areas.

The London Philharmonic Choir is an independent amateur mixed-voice choir of some two hundred members. It works closely with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and, on occasion, with other professional orchestras providing the choral parts to works such as Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms* and more contemporary works such as David Bedford’s *Star Clusters, Nebulae and Places in Devon* (London Philharmonic Choir 1996). David Temple, the founder and conductor of another London-based choir, Crouch End Festival Chorus,¹³⁵ considers that such pro-am choirs have “a completely different sound” to professional ensembles, saying that he tends “to choose voices for their actual beauty rather than any kind of technique” (Gill 2013). There are many such choirs across the United Kingdom and internationally.

135 Founded in 1984, Crouch End Festival Chorus performs across a wide range of musical genres, changing its complexion to suit each style: from Bach’s B Minor Mass performed at the Barbican to backing Oasis at the Electric Proms to film and television soundtracks (Gill 2013).

In Australia, the Sydney Philharmonia and Gondwana Choirs, among others, are similarly reliant upon pro-am talent. According to a 2003 study undertaken by Chorus America, 23.5 million Americans sing in choral organisations at least once a week (Chorus America 2003).

The fact is that the majority of those described as professional artists must undertake other work to survive. They are, at best, part-time. The cultural economists, David Throsby and Virginia Hollister, undertook a survey of artist pay and employment conditions in Australia for Macquarie University, which was subsequently published by Australia Council under the mildly sardonic title of *Don't Give Up Your Day Job*. They found that, in the year surveyed (2000–01), half of Australian artists across the spectrum earned less than \$7,300 before tax (\$10,125 at 2013 values adjusted for inflation) from their creative practice, levels of pay that in real terms had hardly changed in the decade and a half since an earlier report in 1987. (This compares with the minimum wage at the time of \$21,497.) The great majority (seventy-five per cent) were freelance workers and thirteen per cent were employed as casuals. Only twelve per cent of all Australian arts practitioners were in permanent employment in 2000–01 (Throsby and Hollister 2003). Artists working outside the industrialised artform of theatre and music earned even less. While the mean annual income earned by a visual artist from their practice was \$12,600 (\$17,475 at 2013 rate), the median was only \$3,100 (\$4,300 at 2013 rates), the lowest of any art practitioner group, including other solitary practices such as writing and composing (Throsby and Hollister 2003). This differential indicates that while a few visual artists made substantially more than the mean, many made much less, with the distribution of earnings to artists following a curve similar to that for products and sales described by Chris Anderson. That is, most artists operate in the long tail and are, for all intents and purposes, pro-ams.

A similar pattern can be seen in the field of music composition. The culture critic, Brian Holmes, reports that of the 100,000 members who belong to one of the top composers' rights organisations in the world, only 2,500 have a vote; this is because eligibility is limited to those who earn at least 5,000 euros a year from

composing. In fact, only 300 members – or just 0.3 per cent of the membership – actually make their living from their royalties (Holmes 2003).

The rise of the entrepreneurial, one-person art producer–disseminator may well prove a challenge to an arts council bureaucracy that is more attuned and more comfortable dealing with corporate entities rather than flesh-and-blood individuals. Similarly, the arguments made by Keen and others about the economic damage caused by content created by amateurs made available online for free is firmly within the paradigm of the creative industries, where monetisation of creativity is the primary metric of success. But economics is a wider field than simply the movement of money; it is the study of *relative value* and the *interaction of agents*. I would argue that, despite the uneven nature of much that is available for free online, these new forms of, and approaches to, the arts constitutes a considerable net gain in the cultural and social capital of the community.

Nor is this a situation limited to the present or to the internet. Many of the poets writing from the Renaissance and later Baroque periods right up to the twentieth century, earned their living not from their art but in other ways.¹³⁶

The culture created by the many working *with* the meritorious few facilitated by new means of communication is not so different on an economic level from what came before. In many ways, the shift is one of labelling: if a professional artist is one who earns their living from their practice, then very few of those engaged in art creation in 2000–01 in Australia were, in that sense, professionals. Nor can it simply be a matter of training since a number of successful artists were self-taught and many arts graduates go on to work successfully in other fields. To a great extent then, the growth of pro-am activity

136 To take at random a few artists employed in other fields while making work: Geoffrey Chaucer was a bureaucrat and diplomat; Robert Burns was a farmer and exciseman; Anthony Trollope was a postal surveyor (he introduced the United Kingdom's first free-standing pillar boxes); Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) was a mathematician and cleric; Bram Stoker was a civil servant turned theatre manager; T. S. Eliot was a banker and editor; the composer Charles Ives was an insurance executive; the poet William Carlos Williams was a paediatrician; Mark Rothko worked as a primary school teacher and later art teacher until he was nearly fifty; the poet Norman MacCaig was also a teacher; Philip Glass worked as a plumber and taxi driver until he was well into his forties.

and the availability of communications and broadcast platforms via the internet offer ways that can empower the individual, while opening the field to many more people to be actively involved.

The arts should not be seen as limited by a 'lump-of-labour' constraint in which there is a fixed amount of work for artists and adding more artists to the pool simply reduces the earning capacity for the rest. The 'lump of labour' is an economic fallacy and art is not a zero-sum game. Demand for the arts is not exogenous to the process of their creation – far from it – though these new practices may well change the balance and nature of who is involved. The labour-saving technology of the printing press did not destroy the market for reading material, but it did make the skills of the scribe all but redundant. The more people who become involved in the arts, the greater will be the overall demand. That said, few arts outside the creative industries and popular culture, survive without subsidy and the *lump of funding* may well be fixed. Indeed, it is prey to political whim, rising or falling depending on ideological bent and voter opinion. The former may be less amenable to the pleas of the art lover but, in a representational democracy, the latter remains of acute interest to politicians. If more active involvement in expressive creativity builds broader and more passionate interest in the arts among the citizenry, it can stimulate the market economy and prise wider the public purse. However, the real strength, in my view, is that this can in many cases reduce the cost of production; just as the London Philharmonic Choir reduces the cost of performing major symphonic-choral works bringing them within the scope of economic viability. David Temple is adamant that pro-am choirs are essential to the contemporary presentation of classical choral repertoire. "Take all the amateur choirs out of the Proms this year, for example. I would say that three-quarters of the choral works simply wouldn't be audible" (Gill 2013).

Partnerships between pro-am and professional may well prove to be the most effective way forward for the arts if they are to be economically viable. As Leadbeater reports, in the field of science, such partnerships are already achieving important breakthroughs. Astronomy, for example, "is fast becoming a science

driven by a vast open source Pro-Am movement working alongside a much smaller body of professional astronomers and astrophysicists” (Leadbeater and Miller 2004, 14).¹³⁷

What *is* changing is the relationship between the traditional and twenty-first century modes of art production and consumption. It is a shift from institution to community; from authorisation to collaboration; from consumption to participation; from elite to many. But how much is such leaderless activity to be trusted? Without gatekeepers, how will quality be assessed? Can the many collaborate to make us smarter? Are collective judgements astute? Or will it be a free-for-all that rapidly descends into a cacophony of voices; a leaderless chaos? Can the crowd be wise... and under what conditions?

The Wisdom of Crowds and the Myopia of Tribes

Advocates of the internet have argued that it is creating new ways in which the many can usefully influence spheres of activity normally governed by the few. The internet’s facility is to connect individuals within a vast network that nonetheless has mechanisms to locate information and like minds from amongst the chaos. The results can be far-reaching: social, commercial, political, ethical. In his book *Here*

137 This partnership between amateur and professional astronomers has been facilitated by three things: John Dobson’s design for a cheap but highly effective telescope, which he made freely and openly available, led to the widespread manufacture of inexpensive high-power telescopes suited to the amateur market; the development of the charged coupled device (CCD), a highly light-sensitive chip that can be used in conjunction with the Dobson telescope to record very faint astral activity; and the internet, which allows amateur astronomers worldwide to communicate in real time with research labs around the globe. In 1987, three amateur astronomers – in Chile, New Zealand and Australia respectively – observed the moments before and during a super nova on the edge of the Tarantula nebula. A shower of neutrinos from the explosion was detected by professional labs in the United States and Japan, but they did not observe the visible event. Together, the amateur and professional information was cross-tabulated to provide critical evidence to support a hypothesis about the difference in speed of neutrinos and photons under such circumstances. Without the observations of the amateurs this would have been impossible. Since then, extensive networks of pro-am and professional astronomers have formed, working together to discover the secrets of the heavens (Leadbeater and Miller 2004).

Comes Everybody Clay Shirky recounts the way in which a paedophile priest was outed by those he abused despite the best efforts of church officials to smother the issue. In the past, individual complaints were dealt with in a David and Goliath contest between the individual abused and a politically and emotionally commanding church authority that wielded power, temporal and spiritual. And Goliath always won. But the ability of the internet to connect individuals, to allow them to share their experiences and to consolidate their evidence turned the tables and David finally brought Goliath to justice (Shirky 2009).

Collecting evidence is one thing, Shirky goes further. He describes the race to combat sudden acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) which first appeared in China in 2002. While China had both incentive and a substantial biological research infrastructure, it was not China but a small laboratory in Canada that first published the genetic sequence for the pathogen. The Canadian lab worked in an open-source network with many other researchers globally, drawing on and sharing information freely via a platform (Linux) which was itself open source (Shirky 2009). However, as Martin Enserink reported, the Chinese research was limited not by resources or talent, but by government restrictions on the sharing of data and viral samples. The authorised view was that the disease was an atypical form of pneumonia and the ministry of health effectively shut down discussion of any alternate hypotheses. When contrary results were discussed in a newspaper interview with the virologist Bi Shengli, a working group was immediately established by the public health agency (the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention) to filter all publicity relating to studies into the SARS pathogen and prevent alternative views from being expressed. In taking control of the information flow, they actively worked against the early control of the disease and the prevention of its spread.¹³⁸ Yu Jun was one of the researchers

138 The lesson was eventually learned, at least in this case, and health minister, Zhang Wenkang, and the Mayor of Beijing, Meng Xuenong, were dismissed from their positions for their mishandling of the epidemic (Enserink, Yimin, and Lei 2003).

at the Beijing Genomics Institute where the pathogen had been isolated and identified as being something other than a strain of influenza. He drew the following analogy to describe the frustration of working in isolation and having results that may not be shared in a network: “It’s like having a lawnmower in your hand, but other people are trying to do the job with paper cutters” (Enserink, Yimin, and Lei 2003, 296). In this case, defensiveness of an elite few frustrated the urgent pursuit of life-preserving knowledge by ignoring and actively suppressing alternate views arising from among the wider bio-scientific community.

Understandings of the Multitude

It is not a particularly new idea that decisions reached by the many are often better made than those by an individual, even if the individual is an expert and the many are not – especially in the realm of the arts. Aristotle in his *Politics* expressed the view that

as they are many, each person brings in his share of virtue and wisdom; and thus, coming together, they are like one man made up of a multitude, with many feet, many hands, and many intelligences: thus is it with respect to the manners and understandings of the multitude taken together; for which reason the public are the best judges of music and poetry; for some understand one part, some another, and all collectively the whole. (Aristotle 1912, 6762)

This is perhaps especially the case in the area of judgement; that is, decisions made on complex questions that ultimately have no completely right or wrong answer. We recognise that a jury of twelve ordinary people selected at random from the community is the safest way to determine guilt or innocence on the basis of the evidence, even though they know significantly less about the law or forensics than the judiciary, lawyers or the police. Modern-day representational democracy is based on a selection of the ruling party by a general vote of the people, a plebiscite, even though the vast majority know little of politics, economics, law making, diplomacy or statesmanship.

David Hume was also of the view that aesthetic judgement need not be limited to specially trained experts: “It seldom or never happens, that a man of sense, who has experience in any art, cannot judge of its beauty; and it is no less rare to meet with a man who has a just taste without a sound understanding” (Hume 1760). However, he did not believe this happens as and of itself – that such taste is necessarily innate – but that it grows from the sharing of opinions in what I am calling the conversation of the community. Hume states it thus:

Many men, when left to themselves, have but a faint and dubious perception of beauty, who yet are capable of relishing any fine stroke which is pointed out to them. Every convert to the admiration of the real poet or orator is the cause of some new conversion. And though prejudices may prevail for a time, they never unite in celebrating any rival to the true genius, but yield at last to the force of nature and just sentiment. Thus, though a civilized nation may easily be mistaken in the choice of their admired philosopher, they never have been found long to err, in their affection for a favourite epic or tragic author. (Hume 1760)

But just how far should such collective decision-making go? While guilt or innocence is decided by a jury, sentencing is (in the majority of cases) left to the judge to determine on the basis of law. The people may vote for one party or another in an election, but it is that party that then governs. They do not, except on very rare occasions, come back to ask the people their views on a specific issue. And how should such group decisions be made: through rigorous discussion (as for a jury) or by secret ballot (as with an election)? Conventional western wisdom would suggest that debate is the surest means by which to reach the best judgement, since it tests ideas in the contest of thesis and antithesis, a tradition we have inherited from Ancient Greece.

These things seem commonsensical, yet evidence points to some challenging results. The philosopher, Miriam Solomon, undertook a review of empirical results sourced from the business sector, one which, as she points out, places a particular emphasis on outcomes. She drew from these data four “surprising” results:

1. Group deliberation often produces worse results than can be obtained without deliberation. (Often enough for epistemic concern.)
2. A group of nonexperts often produce better decisions on a topic than does an expert about that topic. (Thus challenging the traditional deference to the expert.)
3. If group deliberation does take place, outcomes are better when members of the group are strangers, rather than colleagues or friends.
4. Groups and organisations sometimes don't know what they know. (Solomon 2006, 31)

Similar conclusions are reached by James Surowiecki in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds*. It is not that every decision is better made by a crowd than an expert, but that many are *if* the conditions are right. Surowiecki identifies three such conditions: independence, diversity and decentralisation (Surowiecki 2005).

Independence

The quality of the outcome is better when each individual reaches their decision independently, without reference to others and without knowing their views. This avoids the phenomenon of 'groupthink' in which the desire to conform and concern about what others may think leads a group to adopt views that the individual may not hold in isolation. The phenomenon was first explored in detail by the research psychologist, Irving Janis, who concluded that:

The more amiability and esprit de corps there is among the members of a policy-making ingroup, the greater the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink, which is likely to result in irrational and dehumanising actions directed against outgroups. (Janis 1971, 44)

Janis identified a number of tendencies in groupthink which militate against good decision-making. Such groups share an illusion of unanimity, creating an environment in which any alternative point of view comes under group pressure to conform and consequently members self-censor any doubts they may have. They perceive themselves as invulnerable, constructing faulty rationalisations in

order to avoid addressing doubts or counterviews. They hold negative stereotypical views of oppositional groups while holding an unquestioning belief in the inherent morality of their own position, which can lead them to ignore ethical issues arising from their actions (Janis 1971, 44, 46 and 74).

Janis was not talking about people of below-average intelligence; far from it. His four particular examples were Admiral Husband Kimmel's failure to anticipate the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbour in 1941; the decision in 1950 by President Truman and his advisors to cross the 38th parallel further intensifying the Korean War; the disastrously bungled Bay of Pigs invasion sanctioned by John F. Kennedy's administration in 1961; and Lyndon B. Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam War, despite contra-indications as to the benefit. Janis is clear that the problem was not stupidity – speaking of the high-level group involved in decisions leading to the Bay of Pigs, he notes that they “comprised one of the greatest arrays of intellectual talent in the history of American Government” (Janis 1971, 43). The problem then, as identified by Janis, was a matter not of intelligence but of behaviour.

Diversity

Turning to the second quality identified by Surowiecki for effective group decision-making: diversity. When working towards a decision, it is important to have a range of knowledge and perspective to ensure that all salient issues are considered. An individual's opinion may be based on information that is not known by other members of the group, just as for the individual it will be partly shaped by what he or she does *not* know (Surowiecki 2005). Solomon, argues that a situation where group opinions are aggregated without discussion has the advantage of more fully preserving information (Solomon 2006). Cass Sunstein goes further to assert that, when issues are to be debated, it is important that there be both diversity *and* dissent. “Well-functioning societies take steps to discourage conformity and to promote dissent. They do this partly to protect the rights of the dissenters, but mostly to protect interests of their own” (Sunstein 2005, 213). Sunstein (an American legal scholar who was Administrator of the

White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs from 2009 to 2012) points to the dangers of groups making decisions without airing dissent. In military jargon this is sometimes called ‘incestuous amplification’, where like-minded people can tend to reinforce each other’s views during times of stress, opening up a dangerous risk of miscalculation. In the field of jurisprudence, judges may exhibit ‘collegial concurrence’ whereby, in order to maintain a perceived sense of efficiency, they agree publicly whether or not they are persuaded personally (Sunstein 2005). In the Chinese research into SARS described earlier, to challenge the authorised view, in the words of the microbiologist, Yang Ruifu, “would not have been respectful” (Enserink, Yimin, and Lei 2003, 294).

Sunstein analyses a number of examples where dissent has been essential in reaching the correct decision. He discusses Reginald Rose’s *Twelve Angry Men* (1954),¹³⁹ in which a jury deliberates over their verdict in a murder trial. Initially all but one believe the accused is guilty, but the single dissenter raises issues of reasonable doubt and as the story unfolds, the jury come to reach a verdict of not guilty (one which, within narrative, we understand to be correct). *Twelve Angry Men* is a drama and, in that sense, a fiction; Sunstein uses it because it allows a detailed examination of the mechanism by which dissent can operate to usefully open out debate. In bringing all information to the discussion the group have the best chance of being fully informed. In a deliberative group situation this will inevitably involve challenge and the kind of dissent that is said to be avoided in the groupthink model, such being the nature of its defect.

Arthur Koestler considered openness to different points of view to be an essential condition for creativity. He described the creative moment as one in which an idea is perceived in “two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference” (Koestler 1964, 35). He visualises this concept in a sketch of two infinite planes set at an angle to each other, each representing a different

139 Reginald Rose’s *Twelve Angry Men* was first broadcast as a television play. It was adapted for the stage in 1955 and made into a film two years later.

frame of reference. Ideas are represented by lines journeying across a plane. The moment of creative innovation is represented by the point at which two lines from different planes meet in the mind of a single individual. He called this innovative or revelatory moment *bisociation*. Bisociation is not simply the association of two things, but the understanding of one thing in two distinct paradigms simultaneously.

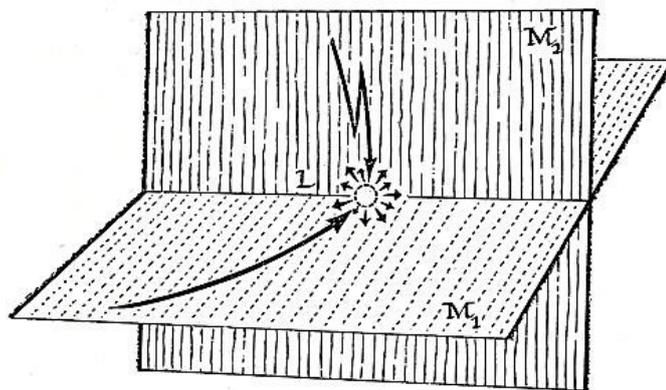


Figure 15. Arthur Koestler's Visualisation of the Creative Moment

In this sketch L as an idea is 'bisociated' in two distinct frames of reference (M_1 and M_2).

Half a century later, Charles Leadbeater described a similar way of understanding innovation, seeing it as a necessarily disruptive force that is often unappealing to the risk-averse corporate mentality. Here the pro-am has a freer approach to the development of radical new ideas because their primary motivation is not money.

Pro-Ams can be disruptive innovators. Disruptive innovation changes the way an industry operates by creating new ways of doing business, often by making products and services much cheaper or by creating entirely new products. Disruptive innovation often starts in marginal, experimental markets rather than mainstream mass markets. Embryonic markets are often too small to sustain traditional approaches to R & D. That is where Pro-Ams come in. Dedicated amateurs pursue new ideas even when it appears there is no money to be made. That is why they are a persistent source for disruptive innovations. (Leadbeater and Miller 2004, 52)

However, I would caution that dissent has to be more than simply putting a minority position persuasively. To take another (semi)fictional but illuminating example: in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953) Abigail, a dominant and charismatic character, initiates the hysterical cycle of accusations of witchcraft among young women in the community. Here a single person turns a group to the bad, not the good. This seems incompatible with Sunstein's requirement for views which run against the mainstream.¹⁴⁰ However, as Solomon argues "the dissenting positions don't need to have overall plausibility, but they *do* need to bring information to the table." That information must be "relevant", by which she means defensible; in the realm of science this would require there to be some empirical evidence to support the view (Solomon 2006, 38, emphasis in original). This is an important point, because it does not require an individual to have *all* the answers to be of value in the process of deliberation, but it does require that at least *some* of what they have to offer is useful and that their dissent is not simply vexatious or malign.

I would note also that there is a difference in the *mode* of argument involved in these two examples. In the case of *Twelve Angry Men* the jury's deliberation required careful argument, reasoning and testing of ideas. In *The Crucible* emphasis is on the ability to persuade emotionally, initially through fear and subsequently in the apparent empowerment that complicity brought with it. In terms of the mode of discourse, the former is dialectical the latter rhetorical. I will return to this a little further down.

Decentralisation

The third condition Surowiecki identifies as necessary for a 'wise crowd' is decentralisation. By this he means that every individual's ideas should have equal importance, every vote counts. There should be no especial emphasis laid on the

140 I recognise, of course, that in Miller's play the context of belief in witchcraft is an idea already sown among the villagers by the stories of Thomas and Ann Putnam and, initially at least, amplified by the 'expert' authority of Reverend Hale.

point of view of experts, no weighting of the opinions of those in authority (Surowiecki 2005). The rationale for this condition draws on some of the points made above. In a large group, individuals have diverse experience and possess a range of perspectives and information. The larger the group the more likely it is that the full range of information and insight is present, albeit distributed in a fragmentary way. Surowiecki argues that, while each individual's view may involve some information and some error, in large numbers the errors tend to cancel each other out, leaving the "truth".

As an example he describes an experiment undertaken by Francis Galton in 1906. Galton asked some eight hundred visitors to a fair in Plymouth to guess the weight of an ox. When the mean of their estimations was calculated it proved to be almost exactly right, while estimates by individual experts (farmers and butchers) proved less so.¹⁴¹ This came as a surprise to Galton who was himself sceptical of the benefits of permitting ordinary people to vote.

The physicist, Mark Silverman, while recognising that Surowiecki puts forward a wide range of examples of 'wise crowds', questions whether his arguments are founded on any clearly articulable theoretical basis. Silverman recites two mathematical theorems that might relate to Surowiecki's thesis. The first is the *central limit theorem* which describes the way that a large number of observations tend to be distributed in a characteristic bell-shape Gaussian curve. However, as he points out, there is no mathematical or scientific reason why the peak of the curve arising from a "diversely (un)informed" group should coincide with the "correct" answer (Silverman 2007, 191).

Silverman points to another mathematical theorem: *the law of large numbers* in which the larger the sample of a given population, the more accurately the mean of the sample will match the mean of the total population. It is on this principle that market research is based and it is useful in cases with a

141 Surowiecki gives many examples, of course; I have just chosen this one to help illustrate the point I am making.

focus on opinion and personal choice rather than externally verifiable fact. As Silverman puts it

In matters for which true expertise (and therefore legitimate experts) can be identified – for example, questions of global warming, biological evolution, stem cell research, or a lost submarine – I would much rather rely on the best judgments of the most knowledgeable specialists than a crowd of laymen. But in matters for which (in my opinion) no expertise or training is genuinely involved – in other words, in dealing with fields of study whose principles are ambiguous, contentious, and rarely testable, and circumstances where anyone is conceivably an expert, as, for example, questions of economics, politics, and popular culture – then yes, there is sense to polling a group of people to arrive at an average (mean or median) reply. (Silverman 2007, 191)

Considered in relation to art, one might agree that on issues of, say, art historical fact the judgement of an art historian is more likely to be accurate than that of a group of people with no knowledge of the history of art. Similarly, an auctioneer may well have a better idea of the market value of a painting than a group of men and women in the street; though less than a group of potential buyers, simply because the buyers are directly implicated in the outcome under discussion.

So, when it comes to the cultural value of an artwork – its value to the community as a whole – who knows best? I would argue that, in those terms, it is just that: the community as a whole and not any particular group, expert or otherwise. However, I do so with the caveat that this does require some level of collective ‘conversation’. Whether or not such decisions are made by ballot or deliberation, I would argue that, starting from the current position, a level of open and inclusive conversation is needed, not just to illuminate the issues but to reduce the counter-thrust that arises from perceived rejection. In such conversations, I believe that the views of those considered experts should not per se hold more weight than those of the untrained. If the arguments are strong they

will hold good, if they can only be understood in one particular formulation of language and belief, then they are probably suspect.¹⁴²

This seems to run counter to conventional notions as to the way in which quality and excellence may be identified and ensured. Specialist expertise was a central tenet of the arts-council model from its inception in the late 1940s, though in some countries this has more recently been replaced by bureaucratic assessment.

Truth or Victory

For the ancient Greeks, excellence in the individual was formulated in the concept of *aretē* (ἀρετή) in which the individual has developed his or her full range of worthy faculties to maximum effectiveness. The Sophists held that *aretē* enshrined the highest values an individual may possess, developing its pedagogy as a commercial enterprise. This included the art of oratory, the ability to speak eloquently and persuasively, to be influential. In this context, excellence becomes closely aligned with winning an argument – a tradition we find in latter-day debating societies and western democratic politics. It also, according to Werner Jaeger, was often subject to “fashion or caprice” (Jaeger 1939, 341). Socrates, as we know him through Plato, favoured the pursuit of truth rather than simply winning the argument. The Socratic mode of discourse is dialectical; its focus is upon reasoned discussion in which ideas are viewed from a number of perspectives, challenged and tested. Socratic dialectic is a process that works towards truth, though a final conclusion may never be reached.

Aretē is closely related to the word *āristos* (ἀρίστος) referring to superlative ability and superiority, and it was the central educational principle for the classical

142 Karl Popper was of the view that: “It is often asserted that discussion is only possible between people who have a common language and accept common basic assumptions. I think that this is a mistake. All that is needed is a readiness to learn from one’s partner in the discussion, which includes a genuine wish to understand what he intends to say. If this readiness is there, the discussion will be the more fruitful the more the partner’s backgrounds differ.” (Popper 1963, 474)

nobility (Jaeger 1939). But, if the aristocracy were defined initially by their excellence, the term came to operate in reverse as a justification of aristocratic power and privilege, whether or not such excellence was evident in praxis. As I describe earlier in this chapter, groups initially defined by merit eventually become self-justifying oligarchies.

In a modern democracy we might hope that the qualities of being a good and effective individual be the aspiration for all. In the terminology of psychologist Abraham Maslow, this might be understood as self-actualisation, the individual's realisation of his or her full potential. But the competitive interpretation of excellence (that it is measurable only against the failings of the less than excellent) continues to dominate in the artworld, and the idea that excellence is a potential in each of us is ignored or dismissed as the dangerous dilution of 'quality'. Within this way of thinking, the notion of excellence espoused by the arts council ethos tends towards an 'aristocratic' view where the 'nobility' of the artworld define excellence in the image of their own tastes and economic domain, rather than an inclusive cultural ambit in which excellence is judged as deriving from the most effective forms of cultural expression for and by the wider community.

It was Aristotle (for whom *aretē* was a quality that could attach to things as well as people) who considered the public collectively to be the best judge of music and poetry (the activities which, in his era, were held to be the highest of the arts).¹⁴³ Aristotle considered that there were a number of qualities or perspectives necessary for proper understanding. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he describes "five qualities through which the mind achieves truth in affirmation or denial" which he lists as "art or technical skill [*techne*], scientific knowledge [*epistēmē*], prudence [*phronēsis*], wisdom [*sophia*], and intelligence [*nous*].

143 I recognise of course that the public in this case was not the egalitarian concept we have today, but limited to male, property-owning Greek nationals. Nonetheless, this is a wider group within the context of the time than those with specialist knowledge of the arts or a particular economic investment in them.

Conception and opinion,” he notes, “are capable of error” (Aristotle 1934, 1139b). Thus Aristotle considers the craftsperson’s skill of making and the prudence born of practical insight to be as necessary as factual knowledge, theoretical wisdom or pure intellect.

The arts educationalist, Ken Robinson, has famously argued our modern-day schooling system fails children because it is structured as though its ultimate purpose was to equip individuals for academia. In his view, we consequently fail to nurture other important forms of intelligence when we ought to understand that intellectualism is but one form of ‘thinking’; we can think in other ways not currently encouraged by formal education. A dancer, for example, ‘thinks’ with his or her whole body, coming to an understanding through the activity itself (Robinson 2009).

Robinson is drawing on the theory and terminology first proposed by the developmental psychologist, Howard Gardner, in his book *Frames of Mind* (1983), which Gardner and others further refined over the following three decades. Conventional psychology at the time construed intelligence either as a singular, general capacity (the ‘general factor’ or *g-factor*) (Spearman 1904) or as two interrelated aspects: problem solving capabilities (‘fluid intelligence’ or G_f) and the acquired skills and knowledge of an individual (‘crystallised intelligence’ or G_c) (Cattell 1971, 1987). These and other similar approaches were theoretically suited to IQ testing, and to the description and prognosis of intelligence as a metrical unit. Gardner proposed that there were seven or eight distinct forms of intelligence, augmenting the conventional intellectual areas of logical and linguistic intelligence with those of spatial, musical, kinaesthetic, interpersonal (social) and intrapersonal (introspective) intelligence. He later suggested two further forms: naturalistic (or nurturing and environmentally sensitive) intelligence and existential intelligence, which dealt with the “big questions” (Gardner 2003). It is questionable whether these qualities are best described as

intelligences or whether they might more accurately be considered aptitudes.¹⁴⁴ His concern is the value judgement inherent in calling some aptitudes ‘intelligence’ and not others, stating that “I balk at the unwarranted assumption that certain human abilities can be arbitrarily singled out as intelligence while others cannot” (quoted in Garlick 2010, 6). Terminology aside, Gardner defines such qualities as combining three things: the ability to create something that is of value in one’s culture; problem solving skills; and the facility to acquire new knowledge (Gardner 2000). He is emphatic that these are not ways to describe different kinds of *people*; rather, that we each possess all of these qualities to a varying degree and that no two people have exactly the same mix. That mix may be especially strong in one area (as is the case with specialists such as mathematicians or musicians) or may be relatively uniform across the field (as with ‘generalists’ such as politicians and business leaders) (Gardner 2003).

Richard Sennett similarly argues that we should understand *making* as a form of thinking; that it is in the act of making – and making well – that we come better to understand (Sennett 2009). Albert Einstein is credited with the opinion that “everybody is a genius”, referring perhaps to the Latin roots of the term (which mean ‘to create or produce’) that only later evolved into notions of inspiration and exceptional talent. That is, we all have some ability to create, we all have some talent, but those talents are diverse. The aphorism goes on: “if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid” (Kelly 2004, 80).¹⁴⁵

144 Indeed, Gardner later expressed the view that had he not titled his book *Frames of Mind* but, say, ‘Seven Talents’ it would not have received nearly as much attention, or so much criticism from those psychologists with an especial interest in IQ testing (Gardner 2003).

145 While there is doubt as to whether this quotation may be accurately attributed to Einstein, it echoes an older allegory published in the *Journal of Education* in 1898, which described a school for animals. At the school, skills were divided into specialities: running, swimming, climbing and flying. Each animal naturally displayed aptitude in some skills and inaptitude in others. The educational policy at the school was to focus on improving the latter. “Nature was not to be trusted in her make up of individuals, for individuals should be symmetrically developed and similar for their own welfare as well as for the welfare of the community ... So it happened that the time taken by the duck in learning to run at the prescribed rate had so hindered him from swimming that he was (*this note continues at the foot of the next page...*)

I would argue that excellence in art, in terms of its ability to enrich and illuminate the life of the community, is best understood through the multiple perspectives of these plural intelligences or aptitudes and not through the lens of a single discipline or as the judgement of only one segment of society or as a discriminating reflexive measure of the judges themselves.

This is not simply to argue for a neoliberal free-market approach. The so-called freedom of the market is based on purchasing power and so privileges the wealthy who have many choices while the poor have many fewer. The free market is weighted in favour of the oligarchy that maintains it. For a culture that truly grows from and within the community as a whole – that draws on the richness of which the community in its entirety is capable – the perspectives and tastes of each member should have equal weight. As Surowiecki argues, such decentralisation is a condition for wisdom.

Can the internet facilitate such a process?

Friendship: It's Complicated

The internet has the facility to connect the many and offers an unparalleled potential for sharing views. While it is not wholly cost-free, it has, in developed western societies especially, a deep penetration, and in many towns and cities, libraries provide free access to computers for any citizen who may wish to use one. It is now ten years since Surowiecki published his book, however, and in the intervening period we have experienced an explosion in social media: Facebook (launched 2004); Twitter (2006); Tumblr (2007); Instagram (2010); Google+ (2011)... As discussed in the preceding chapter, the strength of social media – that it brings like-minded people together in social grouping regardless of distance – is also a weakness, since it effectively cocoons the micro-network,

scarcely able to swim at the prescribed rate, and in addition he had been scolded, threatened, punished and ill-treated in many ways so as to make his life a burden, and he left school humiliated." (Dolbear 1899, 1)

reducing exposure to views and perspectives at odds with those shared by its members. Social media filters out dissent. "Today, online, we increasingly do not reach any wisdom of any independently-minded crowds," writes Neil Seeman. "We speak to our friends" (Seeman 2013). Is friends-to-friends networking in the online world of social media the same as people-to-people? Or does it actually create another kind of exclusion; one that is not top-down but peer-polarised?

E. M. Forster's science fiction novella *The Machine Stops* (1909) is oft cited for the uncanny prescience with which it describes a society living in atomised isolation, while linked via a two-way screen to the vast network of others. Individuals such as Vashti prepare lectures which they broadcast via the network to their friends (Forster 1909). It is an erudite, hermetic, airless world which, I would argue, reflects (perhaps ironically) many of the qualities of the Bloomsbury group of which Forster was a member. They were a rentier class insulated from the exigencies of the wider society. As Forster later noted ruefully of the Victorian liberal tradition to which he belonged, "in came the nice fat dividends, up rose the lofty thoughts, and we did not realise that all the time we were exploiting the poor of our own country and the backward races abroad" (Forster 1946, 302). Does the similarity extend to contemporary social media, where each friendship network forms a likeminded group which, while perhaps not sharing the same intellectual credentials of the Bloomsbury set, is in a sense a coterie carefully ignoring (or impugning) the things that might disturb it?

Thus, via Keynes' "neo-Bloomsbury, free-standing, mini-ministry of culture" (Everitt 1994), do we have a technological reiteration of the coterie that is now 'egalitarian' not in itself, but simply in its multiplicity.¹⁴⁶ If so, how do the groups interrelate? Are they separate tribes or is each member multi-modal, thus

146 I am taking the specific illustration of the Bloomsbury Group, but there were other examples of such like-minded, 'high-minded', self-congratulatory elites.

interlinking networks through the mobility of individuals with multiple interests between groups?

And what happens if the machine stops?

As I outlined earlier in the section, while such ‘tribalisation’ might appear more egalitarian – since there are many tribes and not just a few elite – it maintains many of the dangers of isolated thinking. By tending to shield the individual from alternative and dissenting views, social media effectively distorts and blinkers their understanding of the world and, perhaps particularly, of other people. This is exacerbated by the increasingly sophisticated way in which search engines rank the information they deliver through algorithms that catalogue one’s tastes and, on the basis of those data, deprioritise things which appear not to that taste. Even when we seek to be informed, dissenting concepts are filtered out. We find what we want to find rather than what we *ought* to find.

Seeman has also pointed out that, while there is amongst the chatter a proportion of posts discussing issues of social, cultural and political weight within social media, much of this involves the reposting and aggregation of content produced by a much smaller set of opinion shapers. These pundits and protestors use ‘crowd-speaking’ technologies such as Thunderclap to drench the social media environment with a given point of view through an informational pyramid distribution; “kind of like a press release on steroids” (Seeman 2013).¹⁴⁷

147 Thunderclap was founded by David Cascino in 2009. During the early Occupy rallies at the University of California, he observed that the messages broadcast by the protest leaders via megaphone tended to be reiterated word-for-word by members of the crowd in subsequent discussions. Crowdspeaking operates in a similar way to crowdfunding, it requires the client to supply the names and social media details of a minimum number (for Thunderclap this is currently five hundred) of people who have agreed that their accounts may be used directly by the platform to broadcast to their networks of friends. When the client submits a message to Thunderclap it is posted direct to the Twitter, Facebook and other accounts of all those friends of friends. The advantages are immediate wider dispersal of the first stage of message diffusion combined with useful analytics. However, it does require individuals to agree to allow a third-party program to access their social networks direct and send messages on their behalf, which is something many people are uncomfortable about, for good reason.

While the internet offers a new and powerful way in which communities can formulate themselves and have a voice, it is by no means perfect. Indeed, like any human endeavour, it is in a state of flux in which different interests, perspectives and agendas arise and insinuate across a field of actors who are themselves diverse in their levels of attention, comprehension and motivation. The internet is not, I would argue, a replacement for physical world communities and human interactions, but it is a radical augmentation. In the field I am addressing here, that of culture and the arts, I think what is required is an evolution in our approach to both physical and virtual interactions, to the way in which communities form and how they converse – with each other and with other groups. This would suggest that public policy should involve strategies of synthesis that span both physical and virtual frames of reference. Such strategies should explore the means by which more egalitarian engagement in the formation and enjoyment of art and culture might be achieved, while accommodating niche interests and personal predilections. However, they should attempt to do so in ways that sustain larger ‘conversations’ across the wider community to avoid a fragmentation into isolated, self-admiring tribes. This would require art and culture to be understood as an ecology within which the personal, social and political are expressed, take meaning and find agency. The alternative is a splintering – divided and ruled by an elite oligarchy that sustains its influence through control of the discourse. It is a situation which, I believe, requires the development of empathy, of the ability to connect through our common humanity even when disagreeing with, or perhaps simply not comprehending, one another’s position.

One way to approach this is by ensuring that our cultural strategies and the institutions of delivery espouse those qualities described by James Surowiecki: independence, diversity and decentralisation; that they allow for and indeed encourage the dissent recommended by Cass Sunstein; that they include and respect knowledge of many kinds as proposed by Ken Robinson, Howard Gardner and Richard Sennett; and that they pursue answers through the honest

conversation of the many rather than relying on the rhetorical force of the few. This becomes all the more necessary as the objects and activities of art are themselves evolving, becoming harder to pin down, evaluate and perhaps even to recognise.

Dematerialisation

An Economy of Signs

In the 1980s and 1990s there was much talk of the postmodern consumer product. It was argued that whereas a traditional consumer good was acquired for its utility (a chair to sit on, a bicycle to get around on, a sandwich for sustenance) the postmodern consumer acquired a good for what it symbolised. Products became, as Baudrillard put it, commodity signs (Baudrillard 1981). It was not that the nature of objects themselves had changed, so much as the way they operated within a sociocultural system. They became a kind of currency that transcended their material utility, just as money (with the possible exception of the US one cent coin) is accepted to have a greater value than that of the paper and metal disks that constitute its medium. If the material utility of traditional consumer products could be said to *inhere* within the nature of the object itself, the meaning and value of a postmodern object was understood to *adhere* to the object. In the language of semiotics, the signifier could be associated with a signification that was other than its inherent (or purely functional) nature.

In the analysis of Carl Jung, symbols are both powerful and evasive; they cannot be explained in purely rational terms, if they could, he argues, they would cease to be symbols in any true sense (Storr 1973). For some, this marked the descent into an Alice-in-Wonderland world of irrationality. Guy Debord expressed the view that “The real consumer becomes a consumer of illusions. The commodity is this factually real illusion, and the spectacle is its general manifestation” (Debord 1990, 24). Baudrillard lamented that the ‘real’ had been usurped by the simulacrum, “the copy without an original” (Baudrillard 1994).

I would argue that this was not a revolutionary upending of cultural values, but an intensification and devolution of one aspect of a type of value that has always pertained to art. The symbolic nature of objects goes far back in our history and prehistory. Indeed, as I will discuss in more detail in Part Two, the antecedence of art can be found in making things more than simply functional, to make them 'special' beyond their utility alone, to enhance them with a form of symbolic value. Within the cultural context in which the object or action is made special or becomes involved in some kind of exchange with others, that value of specialness must be recognised by all concerned. It is, according to the ethnographer, Robert LeVine, a consensus found in every human community, however much individuals may vary in their attitude and behaviours in other ways. This is "because such a consensus is as necessary for encoding and decoding messages in social communications in general as agreement about speech rules is to encoding and decoding in the linguistic mode" (LeVine 1984b, 69).

In my view, the particular emphasis on symbolic value arose following the Second World War when, for the first time in human history, production capability began to outstrip demand. This drove a need to create additional (or 'excess') demand through increasingly sophisticated advertising that promoted products less for their usefulness than for the status they were purported to confer. Thus, the postmodern approach to a more overt exploitation of symbolic value eventuates from an *expanding* economy. Taking a somewhat rosy view of the free market, James Ogilvy is of the view that the plethora of symbolic value made it possible to escape the win-lose nature of commercial competition within a fixed economic envelope.

Rather than conceiving of the marketplace as a zero-sum game that mediates the redistribution of physical goods from one place to another, always leaving one person richer and another poorer, remember that different people have different preferences, and the market place is the most efficient means yet devised for real-time optimising over an incredibly complex array of different preferences. (Ogilvy 2002, 33)

But is this multiplicity of meaning a form of liberation or atomisation? Does it allow the individual a freer movement within society or simply destabilise social meaning and create confusion? And who, if anyone, is in control of all of this?

The gatekeepers of publicly funded art and culture were, in the Keynesian model of the arts council, clearly defined as the educated establishment elite. But the escalation of postmodern symbolic goods and services has seen the rise of what Pierre Bourdieu has called “the new cultural intermediaries” (Bourdieu 1979, 366), those working in advertising, design, fashion, the media. The sociologist, Mike Featherstone, calls these the “para intellectual information occupations” that, according to Featherstone, “have the capacity to ransack various traditions and cultures in order to produce new symbolic goods, and in addition provide the necessary interpretations on their use” (Featherstone 2007, 19). Their position as middlemen and women leads, he argues, to an internal paradox.

Their habitus, dispositions and lifestyle preferences are such that they identify with artists and intellectuals, yet under conditions of the demopolitisation of artistic and intellectual commodity enclaves they have the apparent contradictory interests of sustaining the prestige and cultural capital of these enclaves, while at the same time popularising and making them more accessible to wider audiences. (Featherstone 2007, 19)

According to this view, it is a cake-and-eat-it mission in which the ‘intermediaries’ attempt to parlay the value of high culture into the popular realm while themselves drawing status from its exclusivity. Richard Elliott is less convinced that such manipulations of meaning are universally embraced. He notes Machiavelli’s advice to his eponymous prince that people are innately sceptical and “do not truly believe in new things unless they have actually had personal experience of them” (Machiavelli 1984, 21). The divide between those within the artworld who valorise contemporary art and those outside that often look on perplexed, if not actually dismayed, can perhaps be illuminated by this observation (Elliott 2000). The experiences of the artworld cognoscenti take place

‘within’ a conversation that normalises and codifies the contemporary arts, while those outside evaluate what they see against their experience of everyday life, and find little to connect the two.

However, while the focus on symbolic value and the plethora of ‘postmodern’ goods has made evident the fluidity of meaning and value, it is not, I would argue, a wholly new phenomenon. A chair may be an object understood in terms of its utility (it may be sat upon) but the function of a throne, while it is also a type of chair, is eclipsed by the status it confers, or at least confirms, on those who sit upon it. At a more modest level, a sandwich may be a source of sustenance, but there is a deal of difference in the status of the crusts-on, plastic-wrapped offering at a station cafeteria and the dainty, crusts-off cucumber variety at an aristocratic garden party or the open-topped, wood-fired baguette served at the local vegan restaurant. In each case, their symbolic value is at least as significant as their calorific. Such symbolic meanings operate both in the world (as does the throne) and in terms of how we see ourselves (as with the sandwich). As Richard Elliott has argued “the functions of the symbolic meanings of products operate in two directions: outwards in constructing the social world, social symbolism; and inward towards constructing our self-identity, self-symbolism” (Elliott 1999, 113; 2000, 57).

An Economy of Experience

If the 1980s and 1990s saw a developing economy based upon symbolic value, the new century has witnessed the emergence of value located not in or with the object per se, but in the experience of consuming. The ‘experience economy’ was a term coined at the very end of the century by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore to describe an advanced service economy that sells ‘mass customisation’ services. These, they suggest, are similar to a dramatic performance in which both consumer and service provider become actors who use goods as theatrical props. Thus, businesses orchestrate memorable events for their customers and the memory itself becomes the product – the ‘experience’. More advanced businesses

creating experiences with a lasting benefit to the consumer are described as 'transformative' (Pine and Gilmore 1999). In shifting the emphasis from the good to the experience they do away with the concerns about validity that beset the 'postmodern' good under scrutiny (is its value true or illusory). In Pine and Gilmore's view, "there's no such thing as an artificial experience. Every experience created within the individual is real, whether the stimuli be natural or simulated" (Pine and Gilmore 1999, 36).

This may seem radical, but much of the criticism of the 'experience economy' concept has been to point out that businesses were, anyway, moving in this direction and Pine and Gilmore's theory did not amount to an innovative strategy, but simply described what was already happening.

As an example, Starbucks has created an experience-based approach to selling coffee in which an environment of 'escape' and 'sanctuary' is staged with appropriate attendant facilities (free Wi-Fi, highly selective goods for sale and a guarantee that all venues will offer a comparable experience, wherever they may be in the world). Starbucks also sells CDs as a sideline. In the first three quarters of 2014, album sales via "chains continue their decline and now sell less albums than non-traditional CD outlets like Amazon, Starbucks and concert venues" (Christman 2014). Starbucks and live concerts are both experiential environments, albeit in very different ways. Amazon might be thought of as a participatory environment, with its exploitation of user-generated reviews that also bind the buyer into a sense of relationship.¹⁴⁸ Meanwhile, high-street music retailers struggle to be anything other than mundane places of purchase providing neither an 'experience' nor a sense of participation.

The theory of experience economy has also been criticised for laying too much emphasises on process rather than outcome. But, as economist Richard Layard has pointed out, "it is a deep fallacy of many economists to think of human

148 As Machiavelli observed, "the nature of men is such that they find themselves obligated as much for the benefits they confer as for those they receive" (Machiavelli 1984, 38).

interaction as mainly a means to an end, rather than also an end in itself" (Layard 2005a, 226).¹⁴⁹ I would suggest that it is also a failing of many in the artworld to see the art object as the be-all and end-all rather than the intersubjective 'conversation' which artist and viewer undertake *through* the artefact and *in* the act of making.

I would suggest that the significance of this economic concept for my research lies in the fact that experience and transformation are (and always have been) core to the processes of art – I described this in terms of a Weave-Wave metaphor in the introduction to this thesis. As the wider population of consumers becomes more familiar with experience as a form of consumption so there is the potential for broader engagement with the arts because, while the arts have always offered the possibility of transcendence, the experiential mode through which they operate is now one with which a wider public is more familiar. At the same time, any clear division that may have existed between concepts of fine art and popular culture are becoming so porous as to dissolve. Perhaps life – or at least the marketing paradigm of commercial life – is beginning to imitate art. Or perhaps their imbrication extends to such a degree that they have become indistinguishable except in their extremes.

In this analysis, there is a mounting confusion over the status of both the object and those who interact with it, leading to the collapse of a hierarchical order that had previously defined some objects and activities as belonging to the sphere of 'high art' and others to popular culture, the lowbrow and the amateur. For the arts council system, born of a Keynesian–Bloomsbury attitude that was confident of such differences, this is problematic.

In 2011, Australia Council published a report entitled *Arts and Creative Industries*, which it had commissioned from Justin O'Connor, a professor in the Creative Industries Faculty of Queensland University of Technology. While the first

149 I should note here that Layard is speaking generally and not commenting directly on Pine and Gilmour's theory.

part of the report was a review of various conversations that O'Connor and his colleagues, Stuart Cunningham and Luke Jaaniste, had with "eighteen practitioners, micro business operators, curators, managers, directors, lecturers and consultants" (O'Connor, Cunningham, and Jaaniste 2011, 9), the second, larger part was O'Connor's critical review of the relationship between art and society over the past few centuries; the route by which he assessed we had arrived at the present moment. The report concluded that there is now no dividing line between the arts supported by public funding and either popular culture or the creative industries; no classification of art into 'high' 'low' and 'applied' that still has meaning (O'Connor, Cunningham, and Jaaniste 2011). This cannot have been what the Council had anticipated much less desired since, in that analysis, the very distinction that defines the functional framework within which the arts council operates, evaporates. The *raison d'être* of the arts council is that it supports those areas of our society's creative and expressive life that are both special and economically unsustainable in a free market, whereas popular culture and the creative industries are only sustained for as long as they are financially viable. The report took the well-worn rhetoric of the arts as an 'industry' and turned it back on the council.

Following the experiences of the last thirty years, policy should not just ensure 'contact' with art but the ability to practice and produce it. Art does not have to be professional, and we cannot ignore or patronise the amateur, especially in an age where the tools are so readily available. But much art and media and design is necessarily professional (though it includes amateur input); they form a significant sector of the economy and have profound cultural, social and political impacts. How they are organised as cultural economies is of great importance. They are 'industries', markets within which creative producers should be given a reasonable chance to make a reasonable living. (O'Connor, Cunningham, and Jaaniste 2011, 101)

As had a number before it, the report laid emphasis on active participation and not simply passive consumption. It argued that our understanding of what is valuable in the arts should embrace both amateur and professional yet, with the

exception of certain instrumentally applied ‘community arts’, the amateur now lies outside of the arts council purview, if not actually beyond the pale.

This must indeed have been a challenging set of ideas for an agency that, in the view of Marcus Westbury, had retreated into “more and more of a conservative posture in terms of what it does and who it engages with” (Taylor 2012). The *Arts and Creative Industries* report was published quietly, with muffled drums, lest anyone should turn up for the funeral and demand to see the body. It has since been removed from the Australia Council website.¹⁵⁰



Thus we might see a progression of ideas from the notion of a ‘real’ art object in which value and meaning inhere within the object itself, through ‘postmodern’ art objects to which a symbolic value and meaning adheres (though such value and meaning may later become detached or reapplied to something other), to the art experience in which meaning and value are created in the relationship between the individual, the object and the context in which it is being engaged. Arthur Danto remarked on this in an essay he wrote in 1992: “What we see today is an art which seeks a more immediate contact with people ... we are witnessing, as I see it, a triple transformation – in the making of art, in the institutions of art, in the audience of art” (Danto 1997a, 183).¹⁵¹ This is a phenomenon which the philosopher and curator Nicolas Bourriaud termed ‘relational aesthetics’.

150 I downloaded the report on 29 May 2011 from http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/resources/reports_and_publications/subjects/arts_sector/arts_and_creative_industries; on 26 October 2014 the link returned a “404 - PAGE NOT FOUND” notice and a subsequent search of the Australia Council site revealed no trace of the report.

151 Originally published in *Artforum* in 1992, this statement was later include in one of the A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts delivered in 1995 and subsequently published in the book from which it is cited here.

An Aesthetics of Relation

Bourriaud coined the term 'relational aesthetics' to describe the kind of art practices that were arising in Europe in the 1990s. These differed from the self-contained self-aggrandising gestures of the YBAs in the United Kingdom, with their focus on the market and celebrity. The European practices tended to the low-key and provisional, with no conspicuous auteurist signature. They also marked a shift away from (or at least a radical modification of) the approach of the avant-garde with its "social utopias and revolutionary hopes". This, Bourriaud argues, has "given way to everyday micro-utopias and imitative strategies" (Bourriaud 1998, 31). The focus in such work is on the creation of spaces of small-scale social interaction that are neighbourly and convivial, hence the notion of a micro-utopia or 'microtopia'.

To give three examples: in 1996, Rirkrit Tiravanija built a reconstruction of his New York apartment in the Kölnischer Kunstverein – *Untitled (Tomorrow Is Another Day)*. Here visitors could make food, wash, hang out or even sleep if they wished. The curator, Udo Kittelmann, considered this to be a "unique combination of art and life [which] offered an impressive experience of togetherness to everybody" (Kittelmann 1996). In 2002, Michael Lin was commissioned to paint the floor of the bar at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (of which Bourriaud was co-director). Liam Gillick did something similar at Whitechapel Art Gallery, redesigning the café in a Prada-meets-fin-de-siecle-Vienna style he described as a "compromised functional utopia"; he also organised yoga classes in the gallery (O'Hagan 2002).

Relational aesthetics is not a manifesto but simply the description of a form. In its description it shares with the arguments I am exploring in this thesis certain key words and ideas that reflected the spirit of the times: active participation, the impact of the internet, the collapsing of the division between high art and popular culture, democracy, intersubjectivity, empathy. In addition, relational aesthetics places especial emphasis on conviviality. However, I would argue that there are significant differences, which can be understood when one

looks closely at the form and practice of those art activities Bourriaud cites as exemplars of relational aesthetics. It is also the case, as he himself agrees, that “art has always been relational in varying degrees, i.e. a factor of sociability and a founding principle of dialogue. One of the virtual properties of the image is its power of *linkage* ... all [images] produce empathy and sharing, and all generate *bond*” (Bourriaud 1998, 15, emphasis in original).

In relational aesthetics the emphasis is on creating spaces of interaction in which, it is supposed, the ‘audience’ become the actors or participants in a process that is itself the artwork. As such, these are open-ended processes; there is no poetic resolution and consequently little space for ironic insight or emotional closure. This clearly draws on the wider commercial processes of what Pine and Gilmour described as the experience economy, which never completely satisfies because consumer demand must always be maintained, if not increased. So how do the initiatives of relational aesthetics differ from their commercial cousins? In some ways, Bourriaud is arguing that they do not, or that, at least, there is a significant overlap. In such a view, a DJ or programmer, for example, may be seen as an artist. Artists become designers, entertainers, bar managers; and museums adopt the milieu of the mall. Is this, in itself, democratic? Claire Bishop thinks not and, quoting Hal Foster, points to the undertow beneath such practices:

An effect of this insistent promotion of these ideas of artist-as-designer, function over contemplation, and open-endedness over aesthetic resolution is often ultimately to enhance the status of the curator, who gains credit for stage-managing the overall laboratory experience. As Hal Foster warned in the mid-1990s, “the institution may overshadow the work that it otherwise highlights: it becomes the spectacle, it collects the cultural capital, and the director-curator becomes the star” (Foster 1996, 198). (Bishop 2004, 53)

This highlights another, deeper question. Who is this work for? It may claim to recreate the ordinary spaces of community interaction within the institution, or outside of the institution but through the agency of the artist, but its value as art is that it is not indistinguishable from the everyday commercial or community

version, it is *distinguished* (in all meanings of the term) by the status the museum and artist are considered to bring to it: institutional value. Relational aesthetics harnesses the residual ‘status’ of the artist and museum as ‘institutions’ in an attempt to imbue the process of convivial meeting with qualities additional to those which do not involve artists or museums, but arise commercially or through community, social and voluntarist activity. But that is also what makes the activity itself difficult to relate to. Those in the know, the art-world cronies and acolytes, understand what they are supposed to do and, duly go about it in a reflexively self-conscious way.¹⁵² But to the average person, outside the loop of fashionable artistic discourse, it may all seem a little weird, a little stilted. If it does it is because, in my view, it is. As Dean Kenning notes, in fielding the notion of a ‘microtopia’ “Bourriaud is able to gloss over the real exclusions that the congenial social formations ... are predicated upon” (Kenning 2009, 437). It has the same kind of whiff about it that Charles Lansdowne described of the UK arts council visits to the regions towards the end of the Second World War: the happy glow of the aristocrat gone slumming (Landstone 1953).

While the difference between the institutional space of the museum and the socio-commercial space of the café, bar or night club may appear to collapse, there remains a significant difference in that such projects either take place within the institution of the museum or at the behest of the ‘institution’ of the artist, or

152 Claire Bishop illustrates this with an extended extract from an article by Jerry Saltz from *Art in America* discussing an exhibition by Rirkrit Tiravanija, an artist whose practice is identified by Bourriaud as archetypal of relational aesthetics: “At 303 Gallery I regularly sat with or was joined by a stranger, and it was nice. The gallery became a place for sharing, jocularly and frank talk. I had an amazing run of meals with art dealers. Once I ate with Paula Cooper who recounted a long, complicated bit of professional gossip. Another day, Lisa Spellman related in hilarious detail a story of intrigue about a fellow dealer trying, unsuccessfully, to woo one of her artists. About a week later I ate with David Zwirner. I bumped into him on the street, and he said, ‘nothing’s going right today, let’s go to Rirkrit’s’. We did, and he talked about a lack of excitement in the New York art world. Another time I ate with Gavin Brown, the artist and dealer ... who talked about the collapse of SoHo – only he welcomed it, felt it was about time, that the galleries had been showing too much mediocre art. Later in the show’s run, I was joined by an unidentified woman and a curious flirtation filled the air. Another time I chatted with a young artist who lived in Brooklyn who had real insights about the shows he’d just seen.” (Saltz 1996)

both. The aspiration is to somehow escape the commodification of art while finding in art a means to greater harmonious social connection. However, Stewart Martin analyses relational aesthetics in terms of the Marxist theory of commodity fetishism which, as Marx wrote “attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities” (Marx 1867, 165). In this analysis, the true nature of social relationships is obscured by the market exchange of goods and services, onto which subjective value is translated. In Martin’s view, “Bourriaud’s fetishism of the social produces an inversion of his critical claims for relational aesthetics. His realised utopianism echoes with the commodified friendship of customer services” (Martin 2007, 379). The kind of art projects described by relational aesthetics are done *for* the public as an extension of the institute as service provider and not *with* the public as a shared community activity, however much they may be dressed up otherwise in terms of theory or performance.

This leads to another problem which, on the surface, may seem to be a benefit. Bourriaud emphasises that these ‘microtopias’ are neighbourly and convivial, and in terms of the narrowness of those they effectively engage, this may be the case. Viewed as ‘customer service’, such assurance of harmony is all part of the package. But here we come up against the same problem one finds with online social media – its tribalism. Within Bourriaud’s description, relational aesthetics is understood as a move away from (perhaps a rejection of) the conflictive, clashing nature of the avant-garde. But, as discussed above in the context of social media, without dissent there can be no true democracy. Claire Bishop points to the want of ‘antagonism’ in relational aesthetics, which she, like Cass Sunstein in his way, considers an essential condition of democracy. However, as Kenning observes, this sets up an overly simple binary opposition between either accepting an ersatz equality or recognising embedded inequality and the hopelessness of unity. He proposes an alternative:

What this leaves out is a conception of antagonism which comes out of and itself produces group solidarity, and the possibility that individual subjectivity may be disrupted not for its own sake but in order to be

reformed as the 'we-subject'. If 'relational antagonism' is the outcome of presenting the immutability of societal inequality, then we might contrast this with an antagonism that stems from the drive to *equality*. (Kenning 2009, 439-440, emphasis in original)

He goes on to argue that "this approach to antagonism is one which must take root from below in order to destabilise the stratified orders in which it finds itself" (Kenning 2009, 440). What Bourriaud describes in relational aesthetics is most certainly top-down and I would agree with Kenning that this is its fundamental limitation. I am not arguing that artists should be replaced by the public individually or as a whole, but that artists should be *part* of the community and not segregated elite. This is, in my view, a fundamental difference that distinguishes the ideas I am exploring from the descriptions Bourriaud makes of relational aesthetics. And there are significant reasons why this is important: the collective space of imaginative conversation, the intersubjective connections of empathy, the productive friction of dissent and the processes of creative synthesis have become increasingly important in the technologically profluent and ethically stagnant times in which we live.

"The ability of people to share, cooperate, and act together is being improved dramatically by our social tools," Clay Shirky wrote. "As everyone ... starts to adopt those tools, it is leading to an epochal change" (Shirky 2009, 321). Shirky tends to take an optimistic view of what this epoch might presage, others take a bleaker perspective. Perhaps Shirky is right, better to aspire upwards than to slouch down the slopes of doom. But one thing we do know: we stand, Janus-like, on a brink.

The Twin Horizons

From where we stand in time we can see only so far in each direction: back and forward. We attempt to look back over the horizon from whence we came by interpreting the jetsam cast into our own era by the surge of ages: ruins, landforms, middens, treasures, fragments, artefacts ... We speculate as to what might lie over

the horizon ahead using a form of vector analysis that bases our estimations upon the magnitude and direction of change today. We live in an era of technological acceleration – perhaps we always did, but it is the nature of acceleration that speed continues to increase with time. The level of change – the technological velocity today – is more intense than it has ever been in the history of our species. And one thing seems certain on present indications, it can only get faster.

As our tools for the interpretation of the traces of the past become (at least in our own estimation) more acute, so the horizon of pre-history rolls back and we come to understand, little by little, where we came from. In doing so, we have also come to understand that we are intimately connected to the past through our genes. We evolved. The map of that journey is written in our DNA and expressed in our bodies through the dialogue between inheritance and environment. But as our speed of technological development and social change accelerates, the horizon before us gets ever closer. It is a perceptual and cognitive phenomenon akin, metaphorically at least, to the Lorentz–FitzGerald contraction of special relativity, in which distances contract with increased speed.¹⁵³

One cannot see beyond the horizon, but experience suggests that there always is something over the next brow. A horizon is not an apocalyptic limit akin to the edge of the earth feared by pre-Socratic cartographers. It is simply a point past which we cannot currently see. As we journey on, new horizons will open out before us. What we will discover may be a happy surprise or nasty shock: a land of milk and honey or barren desert. As we develop powerful technologies of global influence, what we find may well prove to have been the inevitable consequence of what we are doing now. But we lack the vision to face those questions and to develop an ethics appropriate to our would-be omnipotence. Do we lack the imagination?

153 The Lorentz–FitzGerald contraction describes the phenomenon which occurs when observing an object that is in motion relative to the observer. Lengths parallel to the trajectory begin to shrink in proportion to speed, although such shrinkage remains negligible until the velocity of the object approaches the speed of light.

While subjects such as climate change and escalating inequality are recognised and debated, others, such as nanotechnology, cybernetics and a brain–computer interface tend to remain the stuff of science fiction. As such, this genre represents a field of imaginative conjecture on what may lie beyond the horizon of the future and, importantly, to speculate as to how such changes could play out and the ethical challenges they will bring. Such narratives can be powerful tools for thinking about today’s cause and tomorrow’s effect, but they come with two significant limitations: they are categorised as fiction rather than forecast and they too often set their narrative in a future far more distant than we have a right to assume.

Things May Be Closer Than They Appear

If writers such as Marvin Minsky, Ray Kurzweil, Vernor Vinge, Hans Moravec and Damien Broderick have it right, the twenty-first century will see some of the most profound changes in what it means to be human since the development of speech.¹⁵⁴ Growth in computing power, advances in biotechnology and developments in the molecular ‘machines’ of nanotechnology are all accelerating exponentially. Indeed, this acceleration is at such a rate that these writers predict that by the middle of the century we will have reached what Vinge has called a ‘technological singularity’. Borrowing the term from mathematics and physics, he refers to a time that is beyond our current comprehension. It is an idea more graphically expressed by Broderick as ‘the spike’, describing the rapid upward arc of a line plotting an exponential curve. It is not the end of the world they prophesy, but rather a point past which we simply cannot yet see. It is a time when the nature of what it is to be human as we have come to understand it may

154 Marvin Minsky is a cognitive scientist in the field of artificial intelligence and co-founder of the AI laboratory at Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Ray Kurzweil is a director of engineering at Google and author, computer scientist and inventor; Vernor Vinge is a mathematician and computer scientist, formerly an associate professor at San Diego State University, and a science-fiction author; Hans Moravec is a futurist focusing on transhumanism and was formerly principal research scientist in the Robotics Institute of Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Damien Broderick is a science and science fiction writer and formerly a senior fellow in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne.

no longer hold true. A time when, they predict, computers will upgrade themselves, when manufacturing will be undertaken at almost no cost by self-replicating machines of molecular scale, and when the distinction between real and virtual will melt into a continuum of experience. A time, they suggest, when we will become transhuman.

A transhuman is a hypothetical future being whose basic capacities so radically surpass our current norms as to be no longer unambiguously human. The biologist Julian Huxley coined the term in an essay written in 1957, asserting that transhumanism will come to describe “man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realising new possibilities of and for his human nature” (Huxley 1957, 76). His grandfather, Thomas Huxley, had done much to advocate Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution and Julian Huxley saw transhumanism as synonymous with ‘evolutionary humanism’: human beings taking proactive control of a process which, until this point, had been a matter of natural selection and parentage. “It is as if man had been suddenly appointed managing director of the biggest business of all,” Julian Huxley wrote, “the business of evolution” (Huxley 1957, 73). That business metaphor was prescient, because today large amounts of money are being invested in transhuman research, especially, in the United States, by the National Science Foundation and, perhaps more disturbingly, DARPA, an agency of the US Department of Defence (Hansell 2001).¹⁵⁵

I raise the concept of transhumanism less because of those longer-term outcomes than to emphasise the enormous changes that will occur, with mounting rapidity, over the next few decades. The transhuman moment is not a

155 According to its website: “The Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) was established in 1958 to prevent strategic surprise from negatively impacting US national security and create strategic surprise for US adversaries by maintaining the technological superiority of the US military ... DARPA’s scientific investigations span the gamut from laboratory efforts to the creation of full-scale technology demonstrations in the fields of biology, medicine, computer science, chemistry, physics, engineering, mathematics, material sciences, social sciences, neurosciences and more.” (DARPA 2014)

wall or a precipice but a horizon beyond which we cannot yet see. As we approach it, many of the qualities we think of as integral to the ‘human condition’ will become open to choice and modification. It seems likely that such profound changes will call for a range of imaginative tools to help us come to terms with these possibilities, whether individually we choose to embrace or reject them. Indeed, I believe there will be a significant role for the cultural sector in re-envisioning our sense of what it means to be living, conscious beings. Perhaps we will simply adapt our concepts of what it is to be human to include these new developments, just as in the past feudal, totalitarian and enslaved societies have redefined themselves within a democracy that offered them new choices never before available, or antibiotics have rendered previously fatal diseases a merely temporary inconvenience.

Over two decades ago, the systems scientist, George Land, and cultural educationalist, Beth Jarman, describe the speed, complexity, turbulence and unpredictability of change in our era as leading to what they call ‘breakpoint’. They warn that “few, if any, of us living on the planet today are insulated from the profound effects of the maelstrom of breakpoint change going on around us.” For those who carry on as usual, who stick with conventional wisdom, “the future will no longer be a desirable place”. To survive and prosper will take the imagination through which “unrelated things combine in creative ways that produce unexpected and powerful results” (Land and Jarman 1992b, 40).

These profound changes anticipated in our immediate future are one reason why our art and culture must be understood as more important than an oligopsonistic market or the vagaries of social status. Yet, in a multicultural society that also spans wide differences in education and income – and, some would claim, ill prepared by formal schooling – how can cultural processes develop and be maintained that are not, inevitably, exclusive and excluding. Even if economic barriers are circumvented, personal heritage and community custom will tend to confound the translation of meaning and the relative significance of what is meant. Indeed, the very diversity which invests contemporary society with its

richness, bringing with it the benefit of plural perspectives and necessary dissent, also makes it harder to sustain a shared cultural conversation through which we might imagine an equitable future. Rather, as with social media of the internet, we turn inwards within tight groups and, for the most part, turn our back to others.

The Intimacy of Ancestors

How then is public policy to be formed? A top-down authoritarian system such as that set in place by Keynes was certainly much easier to manage. A small group with a more or less consensus view decide what is best and set in place the mechanisms by which it is to be made available. If the one size does not fit all then 'education' is the answer, to bend the minds of the people, especially the young, to what is 'good for them'. In time, it became clear that the 'freedom' offered by this system was the freedom of privilege. Not the freedom to *be* privileged but the freedom which privilege brought. An educated, wealthy minority defined the arts that were to be considered important, not because they were popular (heaven forbid) but because they were emblematic of that privilege, which was itself constructed as 'earned' by, and therefore indicative of, merit.

In the preceding chapters I have explored in some detail the evolution of the arts council mechanism, its failures and missed opportunities. But what, if anything, can replace it? Is it possible for the state to develop cultural policy in any fair or democratic way given the citizenry is so diverse; increasingly so as multiculturalism enriches the population and neoliberalism wedges ever wider the gulf between haves and have-nots. With such diversity and inequality, how can principles be developed for an arts policy that does not, by its very nature, benefit some to the exclusion of others? For policy must, in the end, be based upon general principles and not upon individual circumstance, be it of a single person or a select group.

In seeking possible answers to these questions, I have explored the relatively new field of investigation called sociobiology. The endeavour of sociobiology is to understand the bigger picture through an attempted consilience

of the sciences and humanities. As outlined in Chapter 2, sociobiology sets a range of disciplines within the overarching theory of evolution. I believe that, to understand the arts, we must first understand ourselves. To understand ourselves we must understand not just our history (the relatively recent past of written record) but our pre-history. Because it is that prehistory that shaped our genetic heritage and it is through that pre-history that we became human.

Talk of genes in relation to the humanities can sound alarm bells, and not without cause. It raises the spectre of eugenics and the inhumane ends to which it was applied in the mid-twentieth century. My intention is quite other. One general difference between the humanities and the sciences – and this is a very broad brush-stroke comparison – is that the humanities tend to explore differences whereas the sciences tend to look for underlying commonalities. The former explores the richness of humanity and our diverse conceptions of the world as we perceive it; the latter seeks insight into the underlying principles of the natural world as we try to conceive of it as independent of human perception. Both are empowered by, and at the same time limited by, the nature of mind. Both employ a mixture of imagination, philosophical argument and empirical testing. We build hypotheses which attempt to develop a logical chain of cause and effect that is meaningful to others, a descriptive grammar that parses in a similar way across a range of individuals. This is then tested to see if the expected results are found in the actions of the world, though again, such understanding is limited by the machinery of our perceptions.

One area of sociobiology that is proving useful concerns the way in which the evolution of the brain may influence the working of the mind: its desires, fears, values, beliefs and mechanisms. Another is in the way in which behaviours that had survival benefit for our ancestors millennia ago have ensured that the genetic propensity for those behaviours has been passed down to us. These traits may no longer have direct survival value in the modern world, but they can become re-adapted in ways that find a productive interplay with life in the present. Many of those genetically encoded adaptations lie so deep in the wiring

and chemistry of our brain that they pre-date the diversification of humanity into separate ethnicities and cultures; indeed many predate our species, drawing filial threads from an ancient hominin past. Perhaps here we can find some clues as to common ground on which a richly diverse and cosmopolitan society might build a shared framework for culturally conversive communities.

Our ancestors are, quite literally, in our heads. Their experience of the world helps shape the way we perceive ours. Their needs inform our desires. Their survival bequeathed our genes. We share with them a profound intimacy, for they are the unwitting architects of our human nature.

PART TWO

CHAPTER 6

The Accidental Aesthete

What do we want from art? In 1993, two Russian émigré artists, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, set about finding out using the favoured tool of western consumerism, the market research questionnaire. The research was undertaken by Marttil and Kiley Incorporated, an opinion research company based in Boston. In 11 days, they obtained answers to 102 questions from 1,001 respondents. Some of the results were to be expected; more people liked representational landscape painting than angular abstracts. Pure 'primary' colours such as blue, red and green were preferred to shades of mauve or fuchsia. What did surprise the artists was that there seemed to be a strong consensus as to the kind of landscape preferred by respondents. This became all the more surprising when, working with the DIA Foundation, they conducted similar research in countries as diverse as Iceland, Kenya and China.¹⁵⁶ Despite the great differences in the topography of those countries, respondents selected image characteristics that described very similar scenes (Komar, Melamid, and Weiss 1997). How could this be?

¹⁵⁶ The countries surveyed were: China, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Kenya, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States.

How indeed. It was certainly not what Komar and Melamid had expected. Having grown up under Stalin and immigrated later in life to the United States, their interest lay in comparing the monolithic top-down 'taste' of state-sanctioned socialist realism with what they imagined would be the heterogeneity of consumer democracy. In fact, the tastes expressed by Russian and American respondents demonstrate remarkable congruence. Open spaces with short grass; groups of trees branching near the ground; a path leading into the distance; an expanse of water; flora and fauna; an open view to the horizon; and blue. Lots of blue. It is the kind of scene made by children when asked to paint a landscape. Was the 'blue landscape' some kind of notion of paradise deeply embedded in the human psyche?

Was this culture or was this nature? The American critic Arthur Danto was horrified that people seemed to be choosing the kind of kitsch landscape found on chocolate boxes and cheap calendars. Perhaps, he surmised, the global distributing of such mass-market imagery had imprinted itself upon the current generation and this could explain the ubiquity of the 'blue landscape' in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas (Danto 1997b).

In a sense, Danto's rejection of Komar and Melamid's paintings is right. When the two artists assembled their paintings based precisely upon the statistical proportions generated by the market research, no one much liked the results. This was, no doubt, part of their original strategy, for their art-making exhibits a Russian sense of socio-political irony. Their works were conscious pastiche, as, one suspects, were their theorising texts. Like chefs who had researched favourite edible ingredients to put them all into a single dish such as steak-flavoured ice cream, or pizza flavoured Turkish delight, the concocted paintings failed to satisfy. That is not to say, however, that we do not like steak or ice cream. Indeed, there are evolutionary arguments for why this should be. Protein, sugars and fat were important to survival in the time when our hunter-gatherer ancestors roamed the savannah, and those who, through natural

selection, developed a taste for them tended to be better fed and more likely to survive to reproduce.

This did not, however, explain the underlying data coming through from the market research.

Judith Heerwagen and Gordon Orians have hypothesised that we are attracted to aspects of landscape that our hunter-gatherer forebears would have associated with safety and resources: trees that are easy to climb; clean water reflecting a blue sky that is itself a sign of clement weather; non-predatory animals; unimpeded access to the horizon and so on. The reason these preferences are so similar among people from very diverse environments and cultures around the world, they contend, is that these preferences were laid down genetically over the extensive period in which *Homo sapiens* and their particular forebears spent in the African savannah (Orians and Heerwagen 1992). Denis Dutton argues from this that these safe blue landscapes represent some kind of aesthetic instinct that is tapped into by such paintings (Dutton 2009).

Two decades before Komar and Melamid's market research experiments, the British geographer, Jay Appleton, had proposed a theory of human aesthetics he called 'prospect-refuge', described as "an acquired preference for particular methods of satisfying inborn desires" – a "taste" (Appleton 1975, 237). Our attention is drawn to landscapes in terms of the opportunity (prospect) and safety (refuge). He argued that these basic inborn desires have led to an enduring landscape aesthetic. The subject of these inborn 'tastes' is not limited to the more permanent aspects of landscape. Cloud formations might give insight into approaching changes in the weather. Appleton described such phenomena as 'attention-getters' (Appleton 1975). Orians and Heerwagen further note that "the environments portrayed need not be ones that evoke desires to engage in extensive exploration. They may be designed to evoke fear or sensations of the sublime, but above all, they must command our immediate attention" (Orians and Heerwagen 1992, 573).

Ellen Dissanayake does not agree with explanations that break down aesthetic response into encoded elements which are then proposed as somehow leading to or causing art. She argues that art making is a complete behaviour that was born in the act of “making special”. The elements identified in Komar and Melamid’s market research are signals that can be usefully included in art but are not limited to art. Heerwagen and Orians, for example, apply their findings to urban design; Appleton was involved in the integration and preservation of British countryside. In Dissanayake’s view, “such signals are not in themselves art, but ingredients of art ... one might call the signals *protoaesthetic*” (Dissanayake 1998, 491).

It should be noted here that neither Dissanayake’s ‘making special’ nor the ‘protoaesthetic’ signals discussed above relate to interpretation and meaning. I would argue they are two different prerequisites for an artwork to engage us, but that it is in the *experience* of the artwork that meaning is created. The protoaesthetic signals are, it is hypothesised, qualities in landscape to which our Pleistocene forebears found it adaptively useful to pay heed. The act of making special, which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, is about something we do to make an object or activity more complex than it needs to be in order to achieve a functional result. Making special is about *investment* and the *recognition* of that investment. Protoaesthetic signals are building blocks that engage our attention. As responses, they are innate within us, part of human *nature*. The investment of making special is a human *behaviour*; one which Dissanayake argues is also universal in our species.

I do not consider these two aspects to be antithetic, but rather different qualities that come together (with others) as prerequisites of an art experience. As Komar and Melamid demonstrated, it is easy enough to make something that is replete with protoaesthetic signals, while nonetheless failing to satisfy. I would add that it is also possible to put a great deal of effort into making something without it necessarily becoming art or, indeed, particularly special.

I am proposing, then, that *attention* and *investment* are necessary but not sufficient qualities for an art experience. I will discuss investment in more detail in the next chapter. Here, I want to explore the common human heritage of adaptive traits that play an important role in aesthetic attention. Before I do, however, I will first turn my attention to the organ in which those evolved traits are perceived: the brain.

The Kludge and the Pleasure Dome

While we live in the modern, post-industrial world we have Stone-Age brains (Mazur 2002; Winston 2011). Given the slow processes of change involved in physiological evolution, our brains have remained unchanged for millennia and certainly for the 6,000 years or so of recorded history. The traits that are inherent – rather than the skills and opinions we have learned – are our shared genetic inheritance delivered within the ‘hard wiring’ of the brain.¹⁵⁷ Building on the work of a range of researchers worldwide, I will argue that such traits represent key elements of aesthetic response and consequently influence the way we approach art. That is not to say that such traits define the way we respond to what we find or derive meaning from a given work, but rather that what draws us to the work at its most basic level is strongly influenced by traits evolved over hundreds and thousands of millennia. They represent a set of persistent evolved building blocks that find new cultural uses as contexts change. Those building blocks are common to all humankind (Orians and Heerwagen 1992; Turner 1996a; Grinde 1996; Cooke and Turner 1999; Ramachandran and Hirstein 1999; Tooby and Cosmides 2001; Zeki 2001).

¹⁵⁷ I am using the metaphor of wiring in this description. It is not wholly accurate, since the brain, while it functions through electro-chemical interconnection, is considerably more complex in terms of its network functioning than a simple electrical or electronic model might suggest. As with some of the language used in discussing evolutionary outcomes in terms of ‘design’, it is imperfect but useful shorthand to ease the flow of discussion. The important thing is not to assume that it describes the brain simply as some kind of large, but essentially conventional, machine.

Such traits are wired into the human brain – an organ of great complexity but messy design. Indeed, given the haphazard nature of evolution, one should not consider the brain as the result of any kind of coherent design. Rather it is a patch-up job, with each new acquired element growing over the previous accretions. As neuroscientist, David Linden, puts it: “the brain is ... a kludge ... a design that is inefficient, inelegant and unfathomable, but that nevertheless works” (Linden 2008, 6).

The Bequest of Evolution

The brain is an evolved organ. It started out very simply and as each new element has added to its sophistication, that new element has been appended to the pre-existing more primitive base. The result is an agglomeration of add-ons arranged with the most recent developments on the outside of the brain mass and towards the front of the skull. This is not an efficient way to build a brain. It lacks the elegance of design-for-purpose. While some of the ‘more primitive’ parts of the brain do continue to evolve in relation to the accretion of other newer parts, these are but slight adjustments only, and not a redesign for higher purpose. As a result, in order for it to function, the brain has a large number of work-arounds and cross-linkages. In the human brain, those cross linkages constitute an extensive parallel and distributed neural network that rewires the shambolic kludge so that it is capable of remarkably sophisticated activity.¹⁵⁸ In order to operate efficiently, those networks focus on what is adaptively important, giving a ‘usefully distorted’ sense of the world. They also interfere with or ignore the working of other areas of the brain, leading to curious perceptual phenomena and, in turn, our narrative, imaginative and fabulist propensities (Linden 2008).

158 Parallel and distributed systems involve a number of areas working simultaneously in different areas of the brain, each focusing on a different aspect of data analysis. While parallel and distributed systems have many similarities, their main difference is that paralleled systems draw on, and intercommunicate through, a common memory resource while distributed systems operate in a more independent way, drawing on specific memory resources without reference to other brain areas.

Take for instance our sense of vision. Even before one considers the involvement of the brain, the design of the human eye is itself less than perfect. In vertebrates, the light-sensitive retina (the surface at the back of the eye) is oriented back-to-front. It faces away from the direction of vision and much of the nervous 'wiring' and vascular 'ducting' runs over the front of the retina, creating visual interruptions and the blind spot of the scotoma. (This is in contrast to the retina of cephalopods, which faces front and so has no such surface interruptions and no blind spot.) Our brain processes 'paper over' such interruptions, which only become apparent in very particular circumstances (Bear, Connors, and Paradiso 2007).

When nervous signals from the retina pass to the brain they are not processed in a single 'centre' associated with all aspects of sight, but are routed via the thalamus to the primary visual cortex and distributed to a number of different regions. This involves connecting to other areas of the brain including those associated with memory and emotion (the hippocampus and amygdala). These areas work in a parallel or distributed manner to process the data before sending information to the cerebral cortex to be blended into coherent unified perceptions. Sight is never 'pure' and not all aspects of the process are 'revealed' by one process to another. By the time the information has reached the area of the brain in which we become conscious of stimuli, the data has already passed through areas dealing with memory and emotion. As David Linden notes: "In the sensory world, our brains are messing with the data" (Linden 2008, 83).

There is a good evolutionary reason for this: emotion is itself an evolved trait that guides us in rapid decision-making without the need for laborious rationalisation. That can be crucial to survival in a life-or-death moment, though it can be more equivocal in complex social situation where what one feels and how one ought to respond are not always the same thing (Tooby and Cosmides 1990).

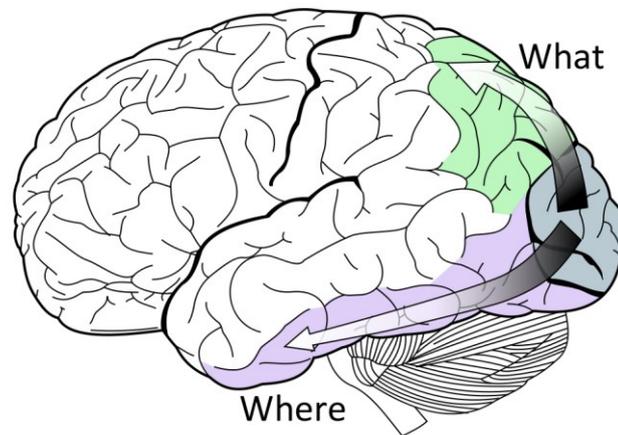


Figure 16. Paths of Visual Signals in the Human Brain

Image showing ventral stream and dorsal stream in the human brain visual system

The brain also distorts our sense of time, part of a larger mechanism of narrative building. Taking the time-distortion first: the visual signals flowing from different parts of the brain arrive in our consciousness at different speeds. The perception of where an object is comes to us via a set of cells in the retina called rods. These cells do not perceive colour and have low acuity, but they are highly sensitive to small differences in contrast and their signals travel fast. Those signals pass through the primary visual cortex along the dorsal stream to the posterior parietal cortex. This area is associated with object location and motion, and also the control of eye and hand–arm movements, especially those relating to the direction of vision and reaching. Meanwhile the ‘what’ of the object comes via retinal cells called cones, which perceive colour and have high acuity, but are less sensitive to contrast and send signals that travel more slowly. These also pass through the primary visual cortex but then to the inferior temporal cortex, which is associated with colour perception, object representation and recognition, and with memory. The ‘where’ information arrives in the frontal cortex as a conscious perception before the ‘what’, but, except for situations of emergency, the information is temporally shifted so that we perceive the information as a complete, singular and coherent picture. In an emergency situation, our motor response is activated ahead of our full awareness of the what, which is why one

ducks if a projectile is flying towards one, even before fully comprehending what the object might be (Livingstone 2002).

On the other hand, when colours in the line of sight are of equal luminance, they cannot easily be distinguished by the retinal rods and our sense of object location (the 'where') is compromised. This effect has been harnessed by artists, for example in the work below by Richard Anuszkiewicz, *Plus Reversed* (1960). As Margaret Livingstone points out, the crosses in this painting seem to move about, because our luminance-analysing 'where' apparatus cannot fix on the shapes identified by our colour-analysing 'what' system (Livingstone 2002).

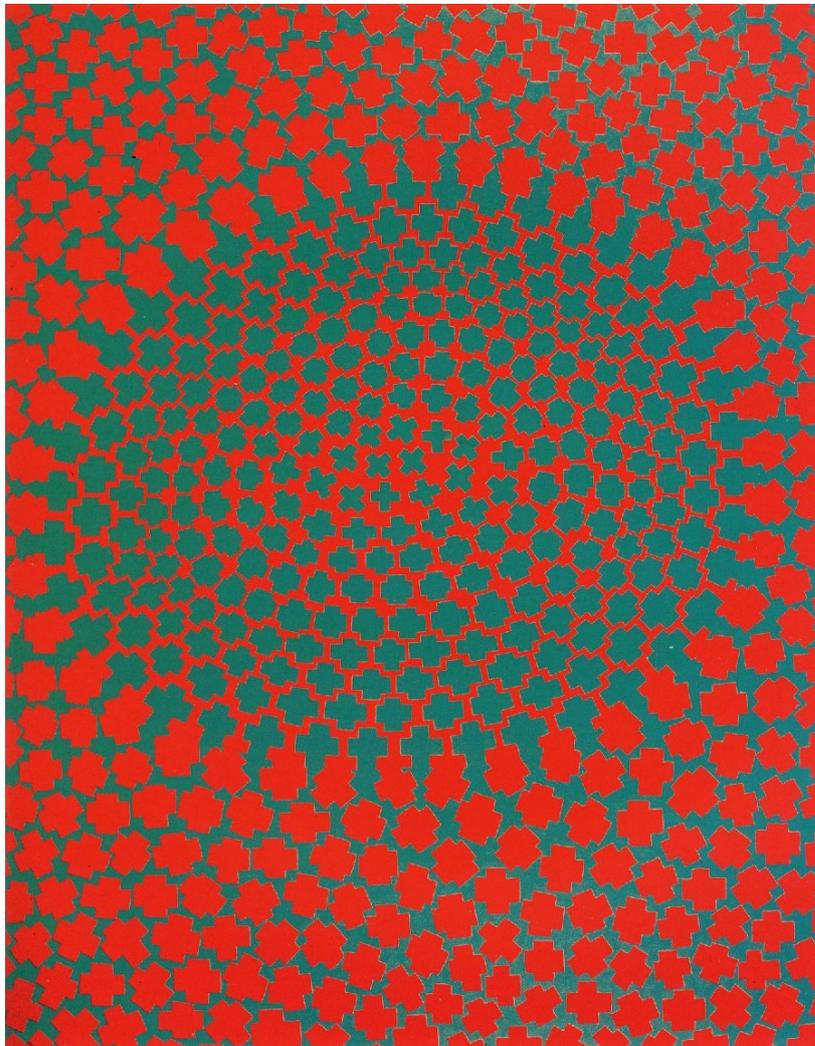


Figure 17. Richard Anuszkiewicz *Plus Reversed* (1960)

Our visual processes are highly selective and not always totally candid. Only a small part of what we perceive visually is a direct result of what has just passed through the eye. To ensure the most efficient and economical use of brainpower, that information is sifted for salient content. Much of the perceived image is based upon memory and expectation. Our “experienced visual world [is] a product of interactions between abstract top-down visual memory templates and bottom-up sensory ones, with the former generally more influential in subjective perception” (Hodgson 2008, 342). Once the fixed areas of a scene are registered and recognised, the brain does not keep reprocessing that information in detail. We concentrate on those things which are – or in our experience are likely to be – changing and we interpret things which appear familiar to be as we remember them.

Further, we do not focus on the whole object in our line of sight but most especially upon its edges. Much more attention is paid to the behaviour of the edges of objects than to smooth fields of tone that define an uninterrupted surface. Our visual perception is biased in the way it reports the world to our consciousness. It amplifies those things in which we have a particular investment, whether that is because they are pleasurable or dangerous or in some other way have the potential to impact our lives. David Linden puts it this way: “Our senses are not built to give us an ‘accurate’ picture of the external world at all. Rather, through millions of years of evolutionary tinkering, they have been designed to detect and even exaggerate certain features and aspects of the sensory world and ignore others” (Linden 2008, 83). I will discuss this in more detail later in this chapter.

Sight is not only divided in the brain by the various functions of analysis and interpretation, but also into a primitive and conscious visual system: the former in the midbrain and the latter in the primary visual cortex. This can be illustrated in the phenomenon of blind-sight. The condition results from damage to the visual cortex leaving the patient unable to see in any conscious way. He or she is functionally blind. Nonetheless, if the patient is asked to reach out and take hold of an object – and even though that patient is certain she or he cannot do this – a

high proportion of the attempts are successful. In this case, coordination is being guided by nervous connections, separate from the visual cortex, which lie below consciousness or which fail to synchronise with the processes of consciousness, but retain functional connectivity with the motor and proprioceptor systems of the body (Ptito and Leh 2007; Linden 2008).

There is another significant aspect to the way the brain patches over issues of inefficient design, one which has a central role in understanding the evolution of the arts. To illustrate it in a specific case, I will once again consider how the eye and brain function to create a sense of coherent, consistent visual perception.

When surveying a face or a scene, the eye flits from point to point, bringing aspects of the scene within the range of the area of sharpest and clearest visual perception: the fovea. Each movement of the eye from one point to another is called a saccade. Modern eye tracking systems are able to map these points of focus and the darting motions that connect them demonstrating the way in which the eye concentrates on certain key areas and skims over others. Edges, as I have mentioned above, are important points of concentration. When looking at a face, the eyes and mouth are repeatedly scanned for the tiniest flicker of emotional information that might reveal the intention and internal affective state of the person at whom we are looking.

All this darting eye movement is not, however, a component of our visual perception. The short periods of time when the eye is in motion are edited out of the signals and instead the brain builds a singular comprehensive perception of the subject. The gaps left by the edited motion are back-filled by the image recorded at the next moment of hesitation when the eye collects fresh data. The result is a smooth image with all the spaces hidden by back-fill.¹⁵⁹

159 One can perform a simple experiment to demonstrate this phenomenon. Look at a clock with a second hand. Glance away briefly and then back again. The second hand will seem to hesitate for a moment before it resumes its sweep of the dial. That hesitation is the back-fill of the image perceived by the eye once it returns to the clock, covering the period of time of the eye's transition (the saccade) from the previous point of focus.

This filling of gaps is part of a fundamental workaround evolved in the kludge-brain: narrative building. The brain works hard to create a coherent perception of the world, albeit one that exaggerates certain aspects while turning down the volume on others. That narrative function is conducted in the left cerebral cortex and it is always 'turned on'. When we sleep, it is this function that seeks so inventively to connect various fragments of memory into the narrative of dreams. When awake, if we find the directly perceived data does not render a satisfactorily complete picture, the brain, working in part below the level of consciousness, draws on our memories and emotions to fill out the experience, 'enriching' the real-world phenomenon, or at least our perception of it. It is this function also which can explain why, when faced with forces beyond their comprehension, our ancestors created narratives of the supernatural to connect phenomena and build a coherent, if fanciful, explanation (Linden 2008). And it is, of course, a trait that has been harnessed for story-telling and pretend-play. Indeed as Tooby and Cosmides conclude: "Involvement in fictional, imagined worlds appears to be a cross-culturally universal, species-typical phenomenon" (Tooby and Cosmides 2001, 7).

I would go further to argue that such narrative building is not only the basis of storytelling but also the foundation of metaphor (both visual and literary), pointing to its very existence and the reason why it engages our imagination so powerfully. The drawing of information or knowledge from one sphere and applying it imaginatively to another in order to create a stronger sense of perceptual understanding is a 'work around' of the kludge brain that we have learned, in certain circumstances, to harness consciously. This enrichment is not simply in terms of aesthetic appreciation or supernatural confabulation; it allows us to develop rational explanations for things that are beyond the descriptive scope of our human experience. For example, physicists describe the elementary particles called quarks in terms of 'colour' and 'flavour'. They do not literally mean that quarks come in assorted colours and flavours like M&Ms. They assign these properties because they are understandable to us as denizens of 'middle-world'

(living in a scale between the infinitesimally small of quantum physics and the incomprehensively vast of relativity). The qualities being described have superficial but usefully analogous relations to flavour and colour when constructing theoretical explanations.¹⁶⁰

Our brain may not be an example of efficient design (divine or otherwise) but in its evolving of networks and work-arounds, it has become something more than just an organic computer. The curious perceptual effects that come as a by-product of parallel and distributed processing can and have been harnessed by artists for specific aesthetic effect. The gaps left by inefficient data collection and processing have required that we use imagination to make up for those ‘weaknesses’. The trait of using narrative and metaphor to engender a sense of coherence and extend understanding is not simply a higher acquired skill, but a fundamental quality of our mental apparatus inscribed in the circuitry of the brain. It is shared deep within us all, regardless of our culture. “Our very humanness,” David Linden asserts, “is the product of accidental design, constrained by evolution” (Linden 2008, 144).

That is only one side of the story. The human skull may contain a kludge, but it is also a pleasure dome.

The Joy of Survival

Pleasure is integral to survival. That may seem counterintuitive in a world where pleasure is associated with hedonistic luxury, but evolutionary theorists point to feelings of pleasure as essential shapers of behaviour. As Geoffrey Miller puts it: “pleasure is an evolutionary hallmark of psychological adaptation” (Miller 2001a, 21). If sex, for example, was an indifferent affair or even an unpleasant one,

160 There are six ‘flavours’ of quark in all, known as ‘top’, ‘bottom’, ‘up’, ‘down’, ‘strange’ and ‘charm’. ‘Colour’ describes the charge associated with each quark as red, blue or green. Quarks can only ever exist in triplets forming particles such as protons, the colours suggest that all three types are necessary to produce a ‘colourless’ particle (the analogy drawing on the additive colour mode describing shades of coloured light).

would we be so keen to procreate? The fact that we take pleasure in the sweetness of high-energy foods but are repelled by the smell of rotting meat has clear survival benefits.

However, evolution is not an intelligent design process but simply the retention, through natural selection, of randomly occurring genetic mutations. Those mutations that improve the chances of survival to reproduce are carried forward to future generations. Those that reduce, even slightly, the chances of survival, fail to prosper in the long run. This is the essence of natural selection described by Charles Darwin (Darwin 1871, 1872). The brain-reward mechanism of pleasurable feelings arose from the lottery of genetic copying and is maintained because it proved useful.

Feelings of pleasure, desire, satisfaction and wellbeing arise through the stimulation of the limbic system, although exactly what the term 'limbic system' describes is still a matter of debate. Anatomically, it is the name given to a grouping of structures in the centre of the brain.¹⁶¹ In the anatomical view of the brain these regions are strongly associated with processing of memory and emotion and, to a lesser degree, with alertness, spatial awareness, learning and decision-making. The limbic system was so named by Paul MacLean in the 1960s. He developed the triune theory, which divided the brain into three areas in the order in which they were believed to have evolved. Within this descriptive system, the limbic system is older than the neocortex; evolving to manage basic survival responses including fight-or-flight, maternal nursing and protective behaviours, and the urge to play. MacLean argued that each area retains many of its peculiar

161 The structures of the limbic system include: the amygdala (associated with emotional response, decision-making and memory); the thalamic nuclei (associated with alertness and thought to be involved in learning and memory), the cingulate gyrus (associated with the formation and processing of emotion, and with learning and memory); the hippocampus (associated with the consolidation of information from short-term to long-term memory, it also plays a role in spatial navigation); the mammillary bodies (associated with episodic memory, that is the memory of events as opposed to the retention of learned skills); the olfactory bulbs (associated with the sense of smell) and the parahippocampal gyrus (associated with the storage and retrieval of memories) along with a number of connective structures.

qualities, implying that the limbic system operates on a more primitive level than the executive processes of the neocortex (MacLean 1990; Vasudevan 2002). However, while this is a useful starting point, it is not a wholly accurate description. As Stephen Pinker points out, the parts of the brain nearest the spinal cord may have developed first but they did not stop evolving after that (Pinker 1997). That said, their location remains fixed and much “subtle rewiring” was necessary to ensure the current level of brain functionality (Linden 2008, 49).

Research by Joseph LeDoux suggests that the perception and modulation of emotion are a more complex process than might be understood from MacLean’s model. LeDoux argues that canonical emotions such as fear, anger, happiness, sadness, disgust and surprise are not universally expressed primary emotions, but involve both the relatively ‘primitive’ areas of the limbic system and the executive areas of the neocortex. Consequently, as with other areas of brain science, the idea that the brain is neatly divided into anatomical segments with distinct functions defined by final outputs is being superseded by one that understands the work of the brain as a network process. Such network processes draw on many areas that are often at a distance from one another (because they evolved in different eras). As discussed in the previous section, we are only conscious of some of the outputs resulting from these network processes and, when we are, it is in a blended form. Furthermore, while “genetic forces, operating on the synaptic arrangement of the brain, constrain, at least to some extent, the way we act, think and feel”, the ‘nature’ of genes is modified by the ‘nurture’ of environmental experience (LeDoux 2002, 4). Emotion, like cognition, “depends on the operation of genetically programmed capacities to learn. Learning involves the nurturing of nature” (LeDoux 2002, 9). We can learn to manage or even shut out certain emotional responses (LeDoux 2002, 2012; Hustvedt 2014). So, while I am arguing that there are a number of basic human traits that have become associated with aesthetic responsiveness, these do not include any universal *emotional* response to a given stimulus.

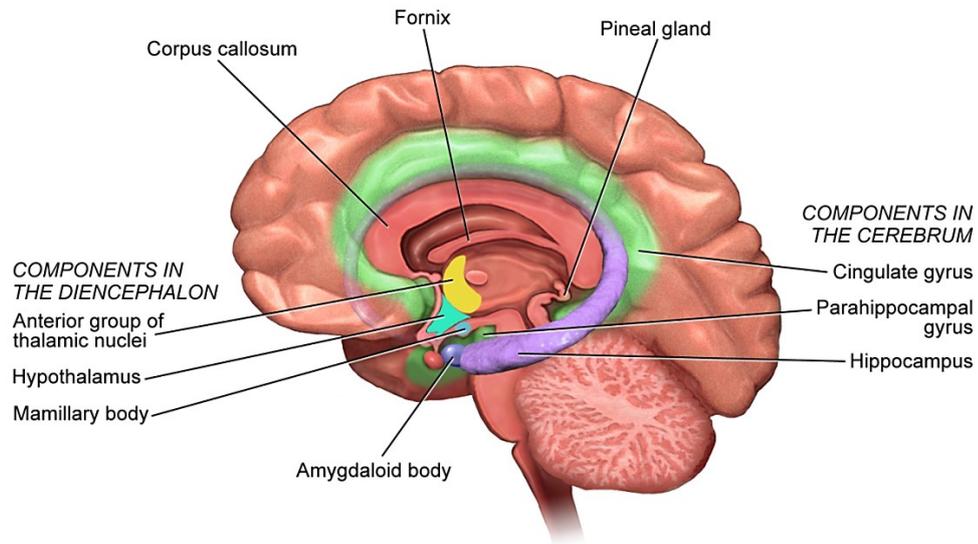


Figure 18. The Limbic System

Pleasure is chemical in delivery and electrical in expression. The limbic system produces substances such as dopamine, noradrenaline, serotonin and endorphins which are delivered to other parts of the brain. Dopamine and noradrenaline are associated not simply with pleasure–reward sensations, but with anticipatory (reward-seeking) behaviours and attention. They help coordinate the cognitive state and learning. Serotonin is associated with more generalised feelings of wellbeing and with cognition. Endorphins are associated with euphoria and pain suppression. These are broad categorisations and each process has a range of outcomes depending on the nature, quantity and ‘cocktail’ of chemicals delivered.

There are three qualities of dopamine that it is useful to highlight. The first is that the ‘pay off’ from dopamine is not associated with the cue or stimulus itself (say, eating food) but with seeking it out (say, foraging for food) – it is a reward for paying attention to a need, not satisfying it (Wise 1996).¹⁶² Second,

¹⁶² Rats depleted of dopamine will not seek out food and, if left in that state, will starve. However, if food is placed in the mouth, they eat it and display expressions of pleasure in so doing.

motivational states (for example hunger, sexual arousal or early symptoms of drug withdrawal) will raise the 'incentive salience' (the intensity of the motivation) with increased levels of dopamine focusing attention on satisfying that need despite distractions or obstacles that may arise. Third, the dopamine 'pay off' depends on the reward a given cue or stimulus is *anticipated* to provide. Rewards are liked and sought because they are experienced as "making things better" (Arias-Carrión and Pöppel 2007, 485). The repeated reward from a cue reinforces learning that associates the cue with a sense of benefit. However, if the level of reward remains the same on future occasions, dopamine release falls off until there is eventually no appreciable delivery above ambient levels. If the cue reward is greater than anticipated from previous experience, then dopamine is released; if less than expected, dopamine levels fall below the ambient level. This is known as 'reward prediction error': where a cue reward is higher or lower than expected, a dopamine increase or reduction is triggered, but if it is repeatedly as expected, dopamine levels do not change (Arias-Carrión and Pöppel 2007; Tobler, Fiorillo, and Schultz 2005). There is, therefore, an aspect of the 'seeking' associated with dopamine that tends towards novelty and amplification. This contributes to the upward pull of active participation discussed on page 230 et seq.

While I have described this effect in terms of positive reward, the response has also been shown to occur with pain. Where the pain is greater than anticipated for a given cue, dopamine rises; when less, dopamine levels fall below the ambient level (Matsumoto and Hikosaka 2009). Thus, dopamine can be understood to call to our attention those things which are not as we had anticipated them to be, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant. In terms of aesthetic response, it is not hard to see how we might feel a kind of reward associated with events (or identification with events in narrative form) and concomitant emotions we would consider negative. People queue to view films, plays, ballets and operas that will make them cry. Sadness, perhaps even more than happiness, can build the kind of empathy that gives us a sense of the interior

life of another (even a fictional other) and so a deeper sense of inter-connectedness.

Noradrenaline also plays an important role in guiding attention. In an aroused state it draws rapid attention to a given stimulus that may presage threat or opportunity. As such, it is associated with the fight-or-flight response. At a physiological level, it raises heart rate and prepares the body of action while, mentally, enhancing alertness, and facilitating discriminatory reasoning and executive function (Aston-Jones, Rajkowski, and Cohen 1999; Hunt 2006). Importantly, noradrenaline is critical to the higher cortical functions of focusing and maintaining attention (Biederman and Spencer 1999). Noradrenaline contributes to the laying down and recalling of memories, especially those associated with intense emotion. At more contemplative moments, it also has a role in maintaining concentration by sustaining behavioural and forebrain neuronal activity necessary to the collection and processing of sensory information (Aston-Jones, Rajkowski, and Cohen 1999; Berridge and Waterhouse 2003).

Serotonin influences mood and emotional behaviour, tending to reduce aggression and improve sociability. In normal levels it enhances attention and positive attitude, although acute increases in serotonin can tend to focus attention on negative or fearful subjects (Hensler 2010; Azmitia 2010). Efrain Azmitia has argued that serotonin plays an important role in the emergence of mind and the integration of mind and body with the exterior world (Azmitia 2007). While serotonin production is predominantly associated with certain types of food (carbohydrates), it is also stimulated naturally by sunlight. The bright light and colour of daytime stimulates secretion of serotonin, while the monochrome of night releases the sedative melatonin. This helps us sleep, although, in extended periods of darkness such as the Scandinavian winter, it can cause depression. The association of bright colour with serotonin production has led to suggestions that it can be an effective component in art therapy to induce a sense of wellbeing (Graham 1998; Withrow 2004).

Endorphins are naturally occurring morphine-like chemicals produced in various parts of the central nervous system. They have an analgesic effect and can create a sense of euphoria (Bear, Connors, and Paradiso 2007). Production of endorphins is normally associated with exercise and as a response to pain, which is thought to be part of the primitive fight-or-flight response, temporality dulling pain from wounds and encouraging bursts of energy. Endorphins play a role in social bonding and research undertaken by Robin Dunbar and colleagues has indicated a link between laughter and endorphin production (Dunbar et al. 2012).

These chemicals generate positive emotional feelings that 'reward' a range of beneficial behaviours including anticipation and attention, concentration and cognition, laying down and retrieving memories, sociability and reduced aggression, a generalised sense of wellbeing and the integration of one's sense of self with the exterior world. In addition, dopamine especially is associated with responses rewarding attention paid to novelty and the unexpected. These are part of our shared, pre-cultural repertoire of aesthetic-responses that *precede* the construction of meaning. They focus our attentional and cognitive resources and, in some cases, suppress distractions, clearing the way to cognitive processes that engage with personal memory to interpret sensory data through the lens of individual experience. It is such experience that shapes the psychological phenotype of the individual – his or her genetic inheritance as it has been influenced by the cultural and physical environment. Meaning will be interpreted differently by each individual in terms of the way the sensory information interrelates with personal memory as described earlier in the Weave-Wave metaphor. On a very simple level, for example, red berries stand out when we survey a natural scene, they draw our attention and we are 'rewarded' for that response. But we have to learn which berries are edible and which are toxic before we can understand the meaning of the berries as either food or poison.

Which brings me to an area of human perception that is, it turns out, not only shared but a figment of the human visual apparatus: colour.

Colour My World

Is the nature of colour perception cultural? One might expect, as cultures developed in different climates and topographies, that their colour vocabulary (which colours are considered as primary and which intermediary) would be highly modulated by such environmental considerations. It might also be shaped by more abstract (religious, supernatural or ritualistic) contexts specific to that culture. In fact this proves not to be the case. It may appear counterintuitive, but the way in which colours are recognised as distinct one from another seems to be highly consistent across all cultures. What is more surprising is that the hues associated with the principal or primary colour names show remarkable consistency between cultures.

Brent Berlin and Paul Kay published research in 1969 in which individuals from twenty different ethnolinguistic backgrounds were asked to locate the principal colours as they understood them using a Munsell chart like the one below. The researchers found that the hues identified by the various participants, regardless of their cultural and linguistic background, clustered around the same colour areas: red, blue, green and yellow (Berlin and Kay 1969).



Figure 19. A Munsell Chart

Those initial findings were challenged by a number of critics. Subsequently, extensive research was undertaken involving many more participants in many parts of the world and this data has been collected over the past forty years into

the World Color Survey based at the University of California, Berkley. The results confirm that this bias towards the naming (and, by extension, conceiving) of colour is remarkably consistent across diverse cultures (Kay and Maffi 1999; Kay and Cook [in production]).

This appears to be deeply engrained. Red, for example, is most often the first hue term acquired by children and frequently the first given by adults when asked to randomly name a list of colours. While this is true of English, research undertaken elsewhere around the world has shown it is also the case for German, French, Italian, Russian, Spanish and the languages of the Bantu (Setswana), the Maya (Mam) and West Fortuna (Winch 1910; Harkness 1973; Istomina 1963; Descoedres 1946; Davies et al. 1994; Dougherty 1975). At a more fundamental level, analysis of simpler cultures with a limited vocabulary found that as language developed, hues were first of all simply divided into dark-cool and light-warm (Kay and Maffi 1999). The first colour to be identified after this was consistently found to be red. Indeed, in a study of one hundred ten languages, Berlin and Kay found that in twenty-one the *only* colour named (apart from light and dark) was red (Berlin and Kay 1969). Human beings all appear to conceive of the colour spectrum in terms of four primary hues and, among those four hues, most prioritise red.

Why should this be?

As early as 1802, Thomas Young deduced that the reason we perceive the range of wavelengths we do is because we have just three colour receptors. Over the millions of years it has taken for the human eye to evolve, three types of colour-sensitive cells (cones) have arisen that are each sensitive to a given colour and wavelength: 'blue-violet' (short wavelength), 'green' (medium wavelength) and 'orange-red' (long wavelength). Later Hermann von Helmholtz demonstrated that the most efficient number of types of cones for sharp colour vision is precisely three. If we had more types of receptors, the acuity of our vision would degrade as the cones for any one wave-length became spread more widely (Livingstone 2002).

Young, then, had confirmed that colour is not a function of objects in the external world, but a sensation activated within us. Among mammals, only humans and other high primates have three types of cone. Some birds, fish and insects do have more than two colour cones, and a number have photoreceptors that respond to ultraviolet wavelengths, which are invisible to the human eye, while some snakes, insects and bats have a similar visual extension into the infrared area of the electromagnetic spectrum. Our colourful world is a perceptual function of the brain we share with our primate cousins and none other (Livingstone 2002).

Our sense of colour is dictated by our nervous apparatus in other significant ways. When, for example, red light hits a long-wavelength cone, it stimulates a molecular reaction that produces an electrical signal. The signals from all three types of cone are gathered up by the retinal ganglia and recombined to generate signals across two axes: red–green and blue–yellow. The yellow signal is defined by a blend of inputs from the long- and medium-wavelength cones. These signals then travel to the brain where they are interpreted as colour. So, while light begins as a continuous range of wavelengths, the visual apparatus breaks it down into four basic units, which we recognise as the ‘primary’ colours (Bear, Connors, and Paradiso 2007). As Edward Wilson notes: “all of human culture involving colour is derived from this unitary process” (Wilson 1999, 177).

This leads to two important aesthetic phenomena that are purely a function of the eye–brain apparatus, having no relation to the nature of light itself. The first is that we perceive colour as a circle of hues with the highest wavelength (which we perceive as violet) forming a continuum with the lowest wavelength (which we perceive as red). This has nothing to do with the wavelength since visible light is simply a range of wavelengths within the linear electro-magnetic spectrum. The perception of ‘circular continuity’ is a function of the symmetry of the two-axis structure of the nervous signals that pass to the brain (Livingstone 2002).

The second aesthetic phenomenon, which plays an important role in colour harmony, is that of complementary colours. If colour is described as a circle of

hues, then any two colours that are directly opposite each other on this hypothetical circle tend to 'cancel out'. Red and green paint blend to create a dark, blackish colour. If we stare at a blue dot for a long time and then move our attention to a plain white surface, we see the 'afterimage' of an orange dot. Both these phenomena relate directly to the physical arrangement for the transmission of signals from the cones to the brain, which firstly divides the continuous spectrum into four primary colours, with all other colours generated as a mixture of these primaries, and then relays the signals for those primaries as two pairs of oppositional hues (Livingstone 2002; Bear, Connors, and Paradiso 2007).

It is the physiological structure of the eye–brain apparatus encoding electromagnetic wavelengths into four distinct 'primary colours' that accounts for the results discovered by Berlin and Kay in their culture-linguistic research.

There are other aspects to the way in which colour is apprehended that seem to be directly associated to our evolved physiology and are consequently perceptual qualities we all share. I will take one colour as an example. Red, the longest wavelength visible to the eye, focuses behind the plane of the retina requiring the eye to elongate to focus on it. This gives the impression that it is coming towards the viewer, making red appear to 'leap out' from a scene. At the other end of the spectrum, blue–violet has the shortest visible wavelength and requires the eye to flatten to bring it into focus, making blue–violet hues seem to recede. This is, of course, a phenomenon that has been familiar to artists for centuries. Adding blue to the rendering of distant scenery in a two-dimensional painting tends to make it appear further away, while red in the foreground appears stand out (Livingstone 2002).

The acuity of vision depends on how closely the cones in the eye are packed and not on the mix of the three types of cone. While red receptors are less sensitive than those for blue, there are many more of them. Of the six to seven million cones in the human eye about 64 per cent respond to red light, 32 per cent to green light and only 2 per cent to blue light. At the fovea (the point at the back of the eye with maximum acuity), the cones are predominantly those

associated with long- and medium-length waves (Nave 2013). So here, also, blue tends to be perceived as a 'peripheral' colour.

In survival terms, red is important because it stands out and signals for us to pay attention. However, red can have many associations in nature. It is the colour of blood and the colour of fire. Red berries may be ripe for eating or poisonous. The sexual organs, when aroused and perfused with blood, become red. Red does not have a definite meaning or emotional connotation (it is neither 'good' nor 'bad'), but rather it demands attention, calling us to assess what meaning we should attach to this particular red object and, accordingly, how we should respond. That attention is rewarded with a release of dopamine.

These, then, are some of the aspects of colour that we share in a consistent way across the human world. They are not part of nature 'in the world' but part of human nature within our eye-brain apparatus. As humans, we have a unique view of the world of colour that we only share with each other and some close primate cousins. Colour is understood in terms of four primary hues because of the way the cones in the retina send signals to the brain and that perception tends to be reflected in the conceptualisation of vocabulary across a wide range of cultures. Reds draw our attention while blues seem to recede due to the accommodation of the eye when focusing on different wavelengths. The 'circular' nature of our colour perception, which conceives violet as flowing seamlessly to red, and our sense of colour harmony and the complimentary nature of colour pairs are also functions of our nervous structures that have nothing to do with the nature of light itself. They are part of our common human heritage.

There are some examples of ways in which those psycho-physiological traits are harnessed in human symbolic communication. For example, the fact that red draws our attention has been harnessed in a number of ways in different cultures. Seventy-seven per cent of the flags of the world contain red (the highest proportion for any colour). For many years, pillar boxes and phone booths in the United Kingdom, and several other Anglophone countries, were painted red. There are some associations that seem to carry through from the physiological

qualities and survival connotations of blue as a colour associated with clean water, safe terrain and depth of perspective. Blue is the most widely used colour for corporate identities (especially banks) that wish to give a sense of permanence, suggesting that they are an established part of the 'landscape'. Blue is associated in many cultures with aristocracy ('blue blood') – and is the second most common colour to be found on national flags (fifty-three per cent of countries include it).

However, when we come to the *meaning* one might attach to different colours, it proves to be far from consistent across the cultures of the world. For example, in many parts of East Asia, red is considered lucky and closely associated with wealth. East Asian stock markets use red to denote a rise in stock prices. In the West, red is associated with danger and falling stock prices. Brides in China, Japan and Nepal wear red; but in Europe this would be interpreted as provocative. In India red is the colour of purity while in Abrahamic cultures it represents sin and sacrifice, which is perhaps why European cultures descending from Abrahamic stock associate it with lust and danger. In Celtic culture red is associated with the afterlife and in South Africa it is the colour of mourning, while in European cultures it is often associated with sexual licence (as in 'scarlet women'). Meanwhile, yellow is the colour of cowardice in the West and of courage in Japan. It is a royal colour in China, but in India it is associated with the merchant class. In Egypt it is the colour of mourning.

More indirect metaphorical usages also demonstrate the heterogeneity of meanings that can come to be associated with colour. In English we describe melancholy as 'the blues', whereas if a German is said to be '*blau sein*' he is drunk and in Russia '*голубой*' (literally: sky blue) means homosexual. In Australian slang, a 'blue' is an argument or fight, a mistake or a legal summons.

Colour, then, is a shared subjective experience resulting from the structure and function of the human eye and brain and not an objective quality of the exterior world. Research indicates that we share our sense of colour and the peculiar properties our perceptions have of it. We have similar basic responses in terms of attention and our aesthetic sense of the harmonies and

complementarities of hues. When I speak of colour, I speak of my interior experience of the world and you connect that with your internal experience of the world, even though those experiences are not intrinsic properties of the exterior world itself. The human perception of colour is a fiction we share with our species and a few close primate relations, and none other. But, while we share the basic fiction, we construct meaning in diverse ways that are shaped by our environment and, especially, our culture.

What then of form? How are we affected by the shapes, symmetries, patterns and rhythms perceived by the eye? Are these, too, in some way things we share?

Recycled Building Blocks

Our aesthetic sensibility is an accident of nature, born of a ragbag of recycled adaptations and a tangle of cross wiring (Pinker 2002; Solso 2003). Natural selection is a slow and parsimonious process. Its working methods are arbitrary. There is no intelligent design, mutations arise randomly and are retained or lost according to whether they assist the survival of the individual to produce offspring. The randomness of genetic mutation and the slow process by which often marginal benefit comes to be spread across future generations suggests that such basic physiological responses as pleasure-rewards evolved over very long periods of time, reaching back beyond the Pleistocene and the evolution of our hominin ancestors. But the frugality of natural selection does mean there is no 'investment' in *potentially* useful traits. If a mutation does not bring a direct and current benefit, it does not possess the advantage that will ensure its preferential spread to future generations. While this is clearly true of adverse mutations – which will tend to disappear due to the additional disadvantage with which they encumber the individual – it is also the case that neutral or functionless mutations will present no benefit to draw them into the ascendancy.

Once acquired by a species, however, a pleasure response or other adaptation will tend to be retained so long as it is not actively detrimental to the individual or is lost due to further random mutation. In certain cases, traits that have evolved due to one specific benefit can be harnessed to a second use, whether or not the initial benefit of the adaptation has subsequently become redundant. For example, birds originally developed feathers as a form of thermal insulation. It was only when they later took to the air that feathers proved useful (because of their combination of lightness and strength) for flight. This process, known as exaptation, can account for evolved traits that would have had no survival benefit until they were fully developed (Gould and Vrba 1982). Feathers must be fully functional to permit flight, so what would have been the criterion for natural selection of the initial growth of proto-feathers?

Pleasures that evolve because they encourage activities that promote survival and reproduction can be harnessed to another function later on. For example, Dale Guthrie describes how the intensely intimate, pleasurable and comforting act of kissing evolved “among apes mouth-feeding young and became a metaphor for family attachment and dependence” (Guthrie 2005, 14). The pleasure felt by mothers and babies engaged in feeding and being fed is clearly a useful adaptation, ensuring infant survival. Kissing is an exaptation of that genetically engrained pleasure, which is extended to take on a symbolic value that carries the associations of intimacy and interdependence into a new aspect of human expression. In turn, the sensual richness and sensitivity to the other is further amplified by the fact that the lips and tongue contain a great many and variety of nerves; they are considerably more sophisticated in their sensitivity than, say, the genitals (Linden 2008).

In the next section I will explore a series of aesthetic responses that are effectively exaptations of more primitive survival traits. The pleasure-reward evolved with that survival trait then becomes associated with the aesthetic exaptation. These aesthetic–pleasure responses do not carry any universal

meaning. Rather, they associate these limbic rewards with mental attention and discernment.

Mental Economies

The neurologist, Vilayanur Ramachandran, and philosopher of mind, William Hirstein, have hypothesised that some of our key aesthetic responses evolved from survival benefits, which in turn arose from efficiencies in the use of limited brain resources. Research in this and related areas has been undertaken by the visual neuroscientist, Horace Barlow, the philosopher of art, Denis Dutton, the biologist, Bjørn Grinde, the experimental psychologist, Stephen Pinker, the psychoaesthetist, Gerda Smets, the neurobiologist, Semir Zeki, and many others.

The rain forest or the savannah, the alpine ranges or the tundra are visually complex landscapes full of information. Much of this information is of little survival value but some, associated with an aggressive predator, food or a potential mate, are significant. The ability to isolate, amplify and focus on important clues within a complex environment would have added greatly to the efficiency with which an individual could remain safe and prosper. The benefit of this adaptation is in the efficient allocation of limited attention resources in the brain. Rather than reading the whole visual field all of the time, a limited number of visual modalities are amplified while others are given only cursory attention. The individual is rewarded for paying attention to those specific modalities with a chemical release in the limbic system; especially dopamine and noradrenaline, which are strongly associated with attention and memory, both important in gathering visual information and testing it against what is already known about the world.

Ramachandran and Hirstein sought to draw out the relationship between such survival adaptations and the pleasure we get from certain basic aesthetic qualities. Broadly, they argue that artworks tend to simplify and focus visual information in a way we find pleasing because they harness adaptive mental processes, laid down millennia before, that trigger the same limbic rewards. Here,

it is important to emphasise that it is not *what* is viewed so much as *how* it is perceived that is key to stimulation of the response. It is not, say, a learned response to the sight of a sabre-toothed tiger or mastodon; and while the response to an attractive member of the opposite sex (for a heterosexual at least) may be stimulating because of the nature of that individual (and so their potential meaning to the viewer), this is not what is being discussed here. That said, the way in which an object of desire might be depicted certainly is relevant to the ensuing set of ideas. Such a mechanism might, for example, clarify the nature of the individual in contrast to his or her surroundings, assess symmetry, accentuate those aspects that are considered attractive and so on (Ramachandran and Hirstein 1999).

Before looking at issues of how a subject is perceived relative to how an artist might depict it, I want first to look at the broader issue of what we see relative to what we come to know. How do the various views of the subject I have gathered relate to my understanding of the subject as a whole, regardless of a given point of view?

A General View

Horace Barlow has pointed out that our visual system abhors ‘suspicious coincidences’ – information that either depends on a specific vantage point or includes ambiguities that make it unreliable as evidence (Barlow 1992). Consider the following two sketches. Looking at sketch A in isolation we tend to analyse this as a picture of two discs (or the two-dimensional representation of two spheres), one behind the other. But sketch B shows that this is not the case. The first image is open to misreading because it presents a unique perspective but suggest a general view, one that leads us to impute something about the relationship of the objects including those areas we cannot see. We apply Bayesian logic to conclude that sketch A is a general view and that what is

depicted in sketch B would be highly unlikely. In this case, sketch B demonstrates that such an assumption is mistaken.¹⁶³

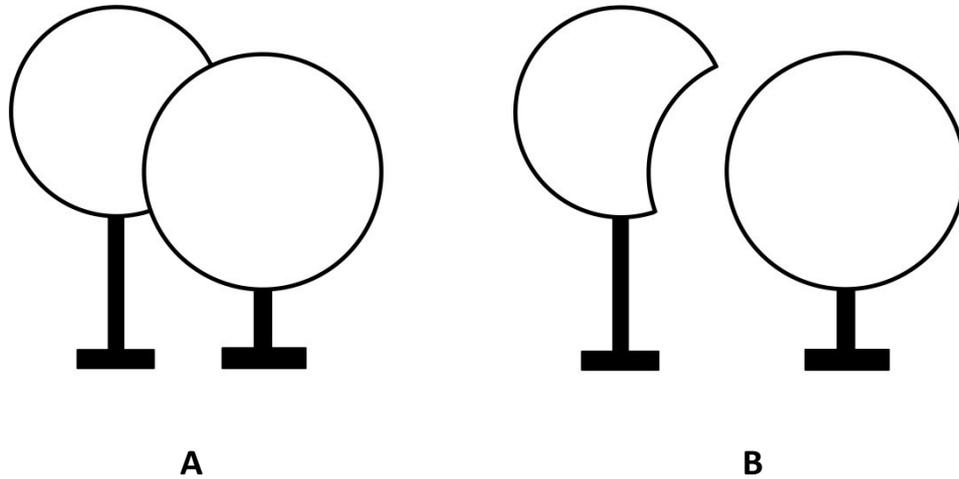


Figure 20. Bayesian Logic

Sketch A appears to represent two circular paddles, one in front of the other – this is the simplest explanation which leads to the assumed generalised view. Sketch B shows that in fact the left-hand paddle was unusually shaped and that only from one specific point of view would one see the arrangement as shown in Sketch A.

In prehistoric survival terms, where benign circles are replaced by something much more urgently significant, such ambiguity would have been problematic. It would have led to the misapplication of Bayesian logic that compromised decision-making either by slowing down the process of interrogation or by delivering false impressions. Ramachandran and Hirstein argue that, as a result, we are made uneasy by such ambiguity and, by inference, artworks containing such ambiguities can make us similarly uncomfortable. Thus,

163 Bayesian logic is applied to decision making and uses the knowledge of prior events to predict future events. It is named after Thomas Bayes, an English clergyman and mathematician who, in 1763, first proposed that the only way to quantify a situation with an uncertain outcome is through determining its probability.

they argue, the arrangement of objects in an image is more pleasing when we perceive that the configuration shown in the image does not appear to have more than one logical interpretation (Barlow 1986; Ramachandran and Hirstein 1999). We want to know that the view we have is not unique, but leads to an accurate understanding of the subject regardless of perspective: one we can discern as a general view.

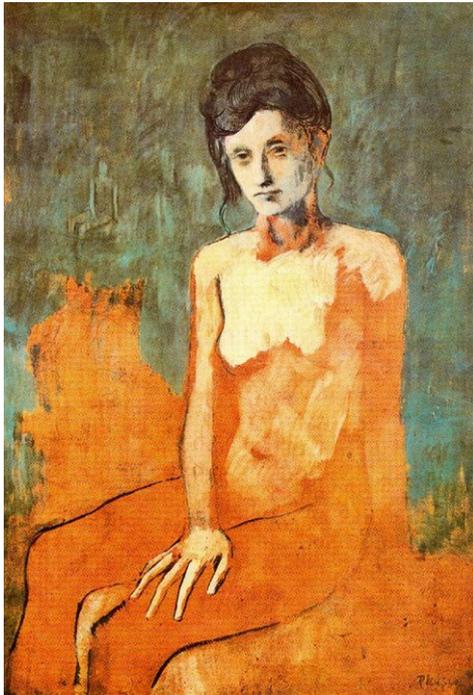


Figure 21. Pablo Picasso *Seated Female Nude* (1905)

Artists may, of course, wish to evoke such unease, perhaps to draw attention to a particular aspect of a painting. For example, Ramachandran notes of Picasso's *Seated Female Nude* (1905): “the *improbability* of the arm's outline exactly coinciding with that of the torso grabs the viewer's attention” (Ramachandran and Hirstein 1999, 30, emphasis in original). A more surreal and disquieting effect can be seen in work such as Salvador Dali's *Paranoiac Face* (1935) which plays on the ambiguity to shift the viewer's perception back and forth between two interpretations of what is depicted.



Figure 22. Salvador Dali *Paranoiac Face* (1935)

However, for many artists the intention is to capture something more general within the artwork. Here, of course, we are speaking primarily of those artists that represent the three-dimensional world in two dimensions. Unless the museum or gallery requires one to view a sculpture through a keyhole, we have the opportunity to move around and integrate many points of view into a well-defined sense of the general whole. Here again, though, an artist like Maurits Escher, may play on our expectations by creating within the three-dimensional object certain unique perspectives that suggest contradictory stories.

Writing in 1912, the French critic, Jacques Rivière, argued that “The Cubists are destined ... to give back to painting its true aim, which is to reproduce ... objects as they are.” By which he means objects that can be understood as giving an unequivocal (general) sense of the subject. To achieve this they must remove all those things that are transitory. Rivière continues: “lighting must be

eliminated” because “it is the sign of a particular instant ... If, therefore, the plastic image is to reveal the essence and permanence of things, it must be free of lighting effects ... It can therefore be said that lighting prevents things from *appearing as they are* ... Sight is a successive sense; we have to combine many of its perceptions before we can know a single object well. But the painted image is fixed.” Accordingly, he argues, perspective must also be rejected because it “is as accidental a thing as lighting. It is the sign ... of a particular position in space. It indicates not the situation of objects but the situation of a spectator ... Perspective is also the sign of an instant, of the instant when a certain [person] is at a certain point” (Rivière 1912, 183 emphasis in original).

Semir Zeki considers Rivière’s observation to be “one that a modern neurobiologist would applaud, for the brain likewise never sees the objects and surfaces that make up the visual world around us from a single point or in a standard lighting condition” (Zeki 1998, 84). Rather, the brain constructs a sense of the object as an integration of angles and lighting conditions so that the mind can draw on memory to identify the object even though it may be encountered in a totally new context. However, Zeki concludes that: “the attempt by Cubism to mimic what the brain does, to create a perceptual constancy for objects regardless of viewing angle, was, in the neurobiological sense, a failure – a heroic failure perhaps, but a failure nevertheless” (Zeki 1998, 85). He goes on: “From the neurobiological point of view, representational art was a good deal more successful in meeting the brain’s incessant demands for constancy” (Zeki 1998, 86). Zeki’s observation accords with the level of difficulty that many ordinary viewers encounter when first looking at Cubist works of art. The problem is that the processes that generalise an understanding of an object from its various instances have developed in the specific context of how things look in reality. By trying to replicate that integration process *outside* the brain, the result does not present itself in a form that can be directly related to experience. Rather, in the same way that Komar and Melamid’s painting do not satisfy even though they contain the desired constituents, so Cubism, while it attempts to give a general

view, presents this to a brain that has developed in a single-point-of-view experiential world. The general can only be construed in a 'persuasive' way in terms of things that relate to how we actually perceive the world. That is not to say that one cannot appreciate Cubism. It offers an interesting example of what Arthur Koestler called the 'infolding' at work in art. I will discuss this in more detail towards the end of this chapter (see page 332).

Edges, Forms and Balance

Outline and Art

Pliny the Elder relates a story proposed as the birth of realistic modelling in clay when Core, the daughter of the potter, Butades of Corinth, drew around the shadow of her lover who was about to leave on a long journey (Pliny 1857). This highlights the power of images to keep memory alive, of course, but it also points to the importance of outline in the understanding of things and, consequently, in their depiction.

Edges are important in vision because they are useful in distinguishing one object from another. That has clear adaptive benefit in terms of being able to quickly identify opportunity or danger. In the interests of efficiency, the eye and brain have adapted to allocate particular attention to edges and to enhance their visibility. Cells in the retina (rods), the visual cortex and the relay station between them (the lateral geniculate body) respond to the step changes in luminance found at edges by increasing their perceived contrast. Thus, dark areas at an edge appear darker than they are, while light areas appear lighter. Meanwhile, gentle gradations of luminance over surfaces are largely ignored (Hubel and Wiesel 1979; Ramachandran and Hirstein 1999; Linden 2008). This perceptual effect is demonstrated in the following images. In the image on the left, the central bar is of even luminance across its breadth, but it appears to be lighter on the left-hand side and darker on the right because our visual apparatus is amplifying the contrast at the edge to make it more apparent. The image on the right shows the same bar with the background shading removed.

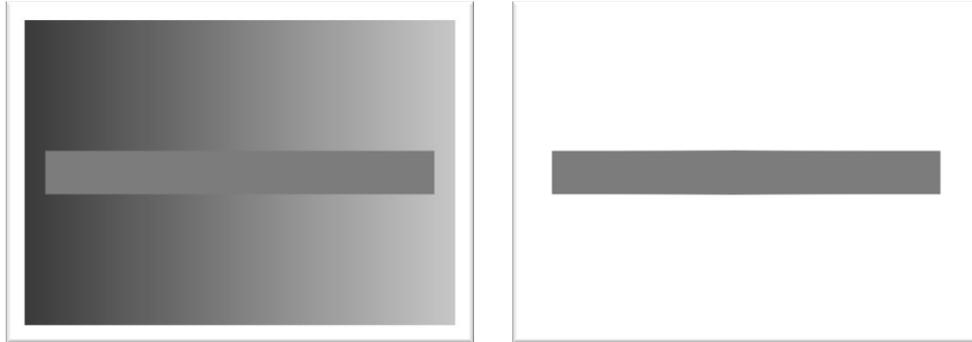


Figure 23. Edge Contrast Enhancement

The central bars in both images are identical

I believe it is this prioritising of outline – the way the eye is drawn to edges – that first captured my attention in Room 59. Carlo Crivelli’s images are full of detail, but that detail is crisply delineated; even the shadows and shading are laid down as hatching. I am, of course, responding to these paintings on many levels at once. But there is something compelling about the way they hold my eye and, after much contemplation, I have concluded that this aesthetic magnetism is in the crisp delineation. It somehow assures me that while there is much to discover in each image, these things are precise and their relation is meaningful. It is, in a way, comforting as well as attention holding. This is, of course, a personal reflection, albeit based upon a universal property, and I am not suggesting that my personal sense of comfort, and the way I subsequently engaged with the image on my many visits, were determined solely by the aesthetic response to outline. Simply, that crispness was one of the aesthetic qualities that first captured my attention and began to draw me into the imaginative space of the picture.

Line and Balance

Bjørn Grinde argues that the aesthetic pleasure in a balanced composition finds its roots in our tree-dwelling ancestors’ need for a rapidly attuned sense of equilibrium, which, it is proposed, has evolved as a limbic pleasure reward when

we perceive visual equilibrium. This, in turn, he hypothesises, leads to our sense of aesthetic balance. In doing so, he emphasises that aesthetic balance has not itself evolved, but arises as an exaptation of a more primitive survival trait.

Certain cells in the primary visual cortex exhibit ‘orientation selectivity’. They respond to lines, giving a much stronger response to those lying in a certain direction and almost none for those that are perpendicular to that selective orientation. These cells come in many subsets that respond to different specific angles around the full 360 degrees (Bear, Connors, and Paradiso 2007). According to Semir Zeki “they are usually considered to be the physiological ‘building blocks’ of form perception” (Zeki 1998, 91). However, perceiving form in a visually busy environment is a challenge; one for which additional skills are required.

Perceptual Grouping and Binding

Landscapes are full of information. Shadows, lighting, foreground interruptions, colours, movement... How can we discern objects that are important (opportunities or threats), which may be present within this multiplicity of visual stimuli, perhaps even strategically camouflaged by it? The answer is a process of perceptual grouping that identifies disparate stimuli as belonging to a single entity, binding them together in our consciousness.



Figure 24. Perceptual Grouping and Binding
See next page for description

As an example, in the image above the splotches may at first seem random (especially if the viewer has not seen this image before). But, with study, the form of a Dalmatian dog becomes clear. Once apprehended, it cannot be 'unseen'; awareness locks the relevant marks into the perception of a distinct and specific whole.

Ramachandran and Hirstein hypothesise that such a process builds iteratively in the moment. It begins with only a partial sense that certain points might potentially be parts of the same object. This partial response triggers a limbic reward which encourages further attention in the search for connected elements until the object is identified (Pinker 1997; Ramachandran and Blakeslee 1998; Ramachandran and Hirstein 1999). I would add that, in terms of dopamine delivery discussed above, if the initial call on our attention proves increasingly to resolve into awareness of a significant object, the 'reward prediction error' mechanism keeps the dopamine flowing. If, on the other hand, it is simply a momentary trick of the light, the same process will cut back dopamine secretion and the reward will subside.

Bruce Mangan has criticised Ramachandran and Hirstein's hypothesis on the grounds that this mental processing is distributed across a number of parts of the brain which are not directly available to the conscious mind (Mangan 1999). However, the adaptation that stimulates the limbic system to urge further attention makes the positive feeling available to the conscious mind even while the processes themselves remain unconscious. Our attention is drawn and rewarded even before we fully realise that we are looking *for* something.

That said, as Richard Gregory has pointed out, the identification of the Dalmatian in the preceding picture requires that we have a concept of 'Dalmatian' and some generalised sense of what one looks like. Thus, memory must also play a part in the distributed processing, which, as I outlined earlier, is one of the correlate activities associated with dopamine and noradrenaline release (Gregory 1999). However, as memory becomes engaged, we move from the universally

shared process of human perception to learned associations of a specific individual and culture involved in the construction of meaning.

The process of grouping and binding involves a number of areas in the brain that each analyse a different aspect of visual information: motion, angle, colour, memory and so on. The signals from the retina are distributed by the primary visual cortex along a number of pathways for processing. Identifying an object might relate to motion – all the parts are moving in the same direction; or it might relate to colour – all those fragments are the same colour; or memory – those fragments remind me of a shape that I recognise, and so on...

The aesthetic importance of binding can be seen in a number of ways. For example, in terms of fashion (as Ramachandran and Hirstein note), wearing a blue scarf with red flowers along with a red skirt draws the elements together as the red colour binds the elements into a pleasing ensemble. A more subtle sartorial example might be wearing a tie that matches one's eyes, making the irises more pronounced in relation to the neckwear.

While these examples are drawn from the visual world, and to an extent one's bodily relation to it, similar evolutionary processes have been put forward in the field of the aural (including: Fitch 2005; McDermott 2008; Masataka 2009; Boyd 2009; Dutton 2009; Perlovsky 2012; Schulkin and Raglan 2014).

The Origins of Beauty

Symmetry and Significance

One of the most significant visual modalities is symmetry. Few things in nature are totally symmetrical, but the body of an animal or hominin displays considerable symmetry, the face particularly so. (This is due to the inversion of the early foetus in higher animals, which wraps around the organs and creates a line of symmetry down the front of the body, in bipeds, or underside, in quadrupeds.) We have an acute sensitivity to discerning faces in even quite visually chaotic environments. This is why so many glossy magazines carry a large face looking directly out; it

catches our eye, makes us look. Faces trigger a deep sense of significance. The survival benefit is clear, whether the face belongs to a potential mate or an enemy, the next meal or a ferocious predator, it was important to focus attention on it, find out more and act accordingly.

More subtly, as we have evolved, it has become increasingly important to know as much as we can about the inner feelings and intentions of another. We are the only species that recognises that others may have false beliefs (Boyd 2009). This is particularly true as we are a social species. We recognise individual people with remarkable speed and accuracy. We rely on the cooperation of others, but we must also be wary of possible deception. Consequently, human beings have a highly evolved neural system for recognising and analysing the smallest changes in facial expression. The face fascinates us for good adaptive reasons (Solso 2003, 140; Dutton 2009). Symmetry draws our attention and delivers a limbic reward (Ramachandran and Hirstein 1999).

Symmetry is also an indicator of fitness. The observable qualities of the individual constitute their phenotype. The phenotype is, first and foremost, what makes us individual.¹⁶⁴ The phenotype is the expression of our genes (the genotype we inherit) in relation to how they develop within the environment, and it is unique to each of us.

Asymmetry in the face or body may indicate congenital abnormality, injury, malnourishment or parasitic infestation. As Geoffrey Miller has pointed out, “symmetry can be a powerful indicator of developmental stability, which in turn is a major component of fitness” (Miller 2001b, 229). It is not simply a demonstration that the individual is free from such issues, but that his or her genes are strong enough to resist such adversities as there may be. The symmetrical individual has the resilience to survive periods of malnutrition; the

¹⁶⁴ The Oxford English Dictionary defines phenotype thus: “a type of organism distinguished from others by observable features.”

robust health to resist parasitic infection; the perspicacity and physicality to avoid injury and so on. The individual manifests 'developmental stability'.

Elsewhere, Miller has observed that: "Because perfect bodily symmetry is so hard to produce but so easy to assess perceptually, many visual ornaments in many species have evolved to show off their bilateral symmetry" (Miller 2001a, 22). Thus, he argues, symmetry as a sign of fitness has evolved in aesthetic terms as a way of assessing the 'beauty' of a naturally occurring physiology. Darwin had stated as much when he said: "when we behold a male bird elaborately displaying his graceful plumes or splendid colours ... it is impossible to doubt that [the female] admires the beauty of her male partner" (Darwin 1871). It is a proposition that has been criticised by those who consider beauty to be a concept limited to human sensibility and one learned rather than in any way innate. However, recent research, especially in the area of evolutionary psychology, does tend to support Darwin's observation (Sinkman 2012). This is a subject I will return to in more detail in the next chapter.

Symmetry can play an important role in non-living design also, especially in architecture. However, slavishly symmetrical paintings and photographs do not always attract us. They can seem boring – too perfectly regular. In the case of portrait painting this is often true, though with notable exceptions such as Albrecht Durer's *Self-Portrait* (1500). Here we must delineate between the relative symmetry of the face represented (one aspect of what makes it beautiful – or not) and the symmetry of the pose depicted. That is, in the 'general view' – what we understand about the subject regardless of any specific point of view – we understand that the subject exhibits a certain level of symmetry, but the perspective selected for the depiction of that subject is not itself symmetrical, something which makes it more interesting to interrogate for meaning.

Christopher Tyler identified an interesting compositional aspect found in a large number of the portrait paintings he studied. While they do not demonstrate symmetry in the orientation of the face in the image plane, they do appear to have a particular quality that relates to the central axis of the canvas. Having

assessed 265 paintings from the past six centuries of art making (in the European tradition) he found a significant weighting towards compositions which situated one of the subject's eyes on the horizontal midline (Tyler 1998).



Figure 25. Eye Centring in Classic Portraits

The portraits are reproduced at the full width and arbitrarily cropped at the bottom; the white line runs down the centre. The examples (left to right within each layer) are by Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1460), Sandro Botticelli (c. 1480), Leonardo da Vinci (1505), Titian (Tiziano Vecellio; 1512), Peter-Paul Rubens (1622) and Rembrandt van Rijn (1659). (Source: Tyler 1998)

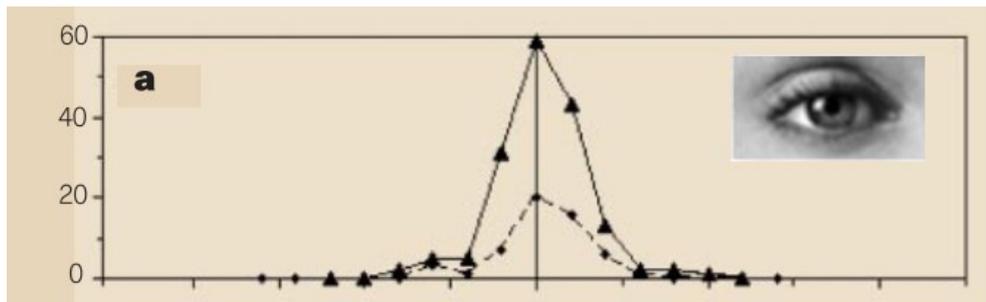


Figure 26. Relation Between Eye Position and Canvas Frame

Relation between eye position and canvas frame in portraits painted over the past 600 years. Histogram of the middle of the most-centred eye. Triangles: all 265 portraits; diamonds: one third of the sample in which the faces were most frontal. (Source: Tyler 1998)

Tyler's findings were challenged by Christopher McManus and Peter Thomson, who undertook research suggesting that there was no significant weighting in positioning the eye at the horizontal centre of the canvas and that any apparent correlation could be explained by constraints of composition involved in placing a head within a rectilinear frame (McManus and Thomas 2007). Tyler, however, pointed to his subsequent research which had not only extended the range of paintings measured but also explored preferences expressed by experimental subjects responding to images while unaware of the issue under investigation (Tyler 2007). An independent research into the placement of the eye in photographs undertaken by Vincent Cassandro produced results in line with Tyler's findings, despite the additional flexibility photographers have to crop their images when printing (Cassandro 2000).

As we scan the face, we spend a lot of time looking into the eyes of the other person. To be precise, at any one time, we look into one eye or the other. In human beings, the eyes give subtle indication of the interior emotions and intention of the subject, which we have evolved very sensitive ways of reading. This clearly has a useful evolutionary basis; it is good to be able to estimate another person's intentions, which they may be trying to mask. The phenomenon noted by Tyler and Cassandro would appear to suggest a way in which artists tend to harness the importance of the eye as a 'centre of attention', employing it compositionally while maintaining the interest of an asymmetrical orientation to the image plane.

Echoes of Deep Beauty

Some researchers, such as Frederick Turner, have proposed another type of embedded response mechanism linked not to adaptation for survival, but to an affiliation with the patterns of nature. His hypothesis is that, in a universe where the same basic patterns are repeated from the subatomic to the galactic, we sense within these patterns a deep connectedness to the rest of the universe. The golden mean and the proportions of the Fibonacci series (found in the branching of tree limbs, the relative lengths of the bones in the human finger, the

arrangement of leaves on a stem, the facets of a pineapple, the curl of a fern frond, a galactic spiral and so on) and the endless swirling ‘Paisley patterns’ of a Julia set are aesthetically pleasing because, he argues, they ‘remind’ us of the ‘deep structures’ of which we are a part. They are an expression of the feedback systems fundamental to the universe at every level of scale (Turner 1996a; Cooke and Turner 1999). Turner goes on to propose:

The iterative feedback principle which is at the heart of all these processes is the deep theme or tendency of all of nature – nature, the creator of forms. It is the logos and eros of nature; and it is what we feel and intuit when we recognise beauty ... As the most complex and reflexive product of the process that we know of in the universe, we are, I believe, charged with its continuance; and the way that we continue it is art. (Cooke and Turner 1999, 128)



Figure 27. Examples of Fibonacci series in nature

Paul Trout has subsequently criticised Turner’s methods and rhetorical style, though he has gone some way to presenting evidence in support of “Turner’s intuitions and assertions” (Trout 1993, 197). Edward Wilson’s early explorations into ‘biophilia’ (literally: love of living things), which propose that an affinity with nature is ingrained in our genotype, share some themes with Turner’s holistic view of our place within Nature. Wilson has since developed his ideas of biophilia into the broader theoretic framework of sociobiology (Wilson 1986). Meanwhile, John Barrow takes Turner’s concept further still, arguing that our

culture, and indeed our very existence, is a function of physical and mathematical structures deep within the universe (Barrow 2005).

These are certainly interesting propositions and can usefully be considered in relation to the things we find beautiful. That said, they remain highly speculative theoretical frameworks that are still in an early stage of development. While I acknowledge them here in the interests of completeness, I will not rely on these ideas for the ensuing arguments, although they may usefully become a part of future research into this field.

Beautiful Building Blocks

Conventional wisdom has it that beauty is subjective – in the eye of the beholder. But the mechanisms described above suggest that beauty is far from being a personal taste or romantic illusion. As Donald Symons puts it: “beauty exists in the adaptations of the beholder” (Symons 1995, 80). It is an evolved response. Indeed, beauty is a concept common to all cultures. All societies have a word for ‘beauty’, while few had (before the globalising influence of Europe) a word for ‘art’ (Turner 1996a). For many cultures, the activities of art are embedded too deeply within the fabric of community life to be conceived of as distinct practices and objects.

Art exploits our sense of beauty. Our sense of beauty does not cause art. The traits that were later harnessed as aesthetic pleasure came into being for quite other reasons than art making, or even visual representation. The nature and diversity of those pleasures was not shaped by aesthetic culture, but aesthetic culture is built from those fundamental traits. In a sense, “artists are neurologists”, albeit unwittingly (Zeki 1998, 77). Through experimentation and intuition they have learned to harness the aesthetic neurological responses hard-wired in the brain and use them to create some of the most profound and eloquent expressions of our humanity.

The diversity of aesthetic fruition may be the result of different forms of cultivation in the many gardens of ethnic and societal variety, but they are all rooted in the common ground of our shared hominin nature. That basic nature is

not the acquired taste of cultural elite, but fundamental to the human condition. The constituents of that condition command our attention and require our discernment; they fire our imagination and build narrative; they conjure a kaleidoscope of colour and recall deep memories of a lost blue landscape; they urge us to the adventure of new experience and some even define qualities we find beautiful.

Complication and Conundrum

In 1973, the Belgian psychoaestheticist, Gerda Smets, undertook a series of experiments to explore mental arousal and aesthetic appreciation in relation to scales of complication. Arousal was gauged using an electroencephalograph to measure brainwave activity; appreciation was measured subjectively by each individual. Visual arrays were assembled using grids of black and white cubes arranged in various two-dimensional patterns. These arrays were in three orders of detail comprising 64, 225 and 900 cubes respectively, in which half were white and the remainder black. Within each set of blocks, patterns could be created that were totally regular (say a checkerboard) or totally random. The former are said to have one hundred per cent 'redundancy', while the latter have zero per cent redundancy – redundancy being a measure of pattern repetition and so inversely proportional to complicatedness.¹⁶⁵

The subjects in the cohort were exposed to each pattern in turn and the arousal in terms of brainwave activity measured by the electroencephalograph. Comparing results for the 225 and 900 arrays, the highest level of brain activity was recorded at twenty per cent redundancy, with the spike rising higher for the

¹⁶⁵ Smets refers to the complexity of the patterns. However, given that the term complexity also refers to a theory of systems (sometimes known as chaos theory) which exhibits the phenomena of emergence, I want to avoid any confusion between complex visual arrays in relation to cognitive load and complex systems in terms of their generative potential; the former describing levels of static intricacy and the latter mechanisms of dynamic generation. Therefore, I have, where possible, substituted the term 'complicatedness' where Smets used 'complexity'.

900-cube set. Thus, brain activity continued to rise as the patterns became more complex, peaking at twenty per cent redundancy before falling away. The results were perhaps surprising in that twenty per cent redundancy in a pattern of 900 elements represents a considerable cognitive load.

However, subjective evaluation of the aesthetic pleasure the subject attributed to each pattern was rather different and varied considerably between the three sets (65, 225 and 900 cubes). The 225-cube set showed the most pronounced subjective response, which corresponded to sixty per cent redundancy. The results for both the 900-cube and 65-cube arrays were much more widely spread and tended to rise again as redundancy fell below twenty per cent.

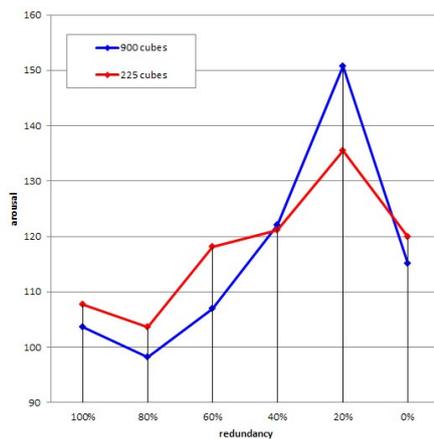


Figure 28. Redundancy and Arousal
Relationship between redundancy and arousal for sets with 900 and 225 cubes respectively. (Source: Smets 1973, 31)

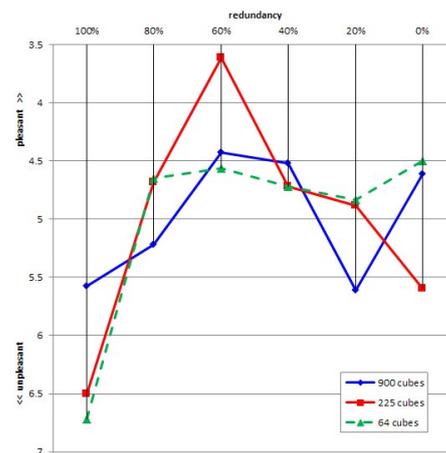


Figure 29. Redundancy and Pleasantness
Relationship between redundancy and pleasantness for sets with 900, 225 and 64 cubes respectively. (Source: Smets 1973, 35-36)

The results suggest that aesthetic pleasure is highest around sixty per cent redundancy in moderately detailed arrays, well below the level of complicatedness of maximum brain activity. Meanwhile, both the simplest and most detailed sets generated a much wider range of responses with the additional characteristic that subjective aesthetic pleasure rose again after twenty per cent

redundancy (the point of maximum mental arousal). The rationale for this is that, beyond the point of optimal complicatedness, the pattern is no longer perceived in detail, but generalised as simpler forms within which the black and white squares become fields of 'grey'.

A subsequent analysis of the data that looked at the results in terms of each individual's personal level of aesthetic sensitivity (measured using the Meier Art Judgement Test) compared those with a higher aesthetic sensitivity (for simplicity I will refer to this group as 'arty') and those with lower sensitivity ('average'). Smets found that with the 'arty' group, preference peaked at forty per cent redundancy while the 'average' group peaked at sixty per cent. That is, the 'arty' group preferred a higher level of complicatedness than those in the 'average' group. Further, there was a greater divergence in perceptions of ugliness than in those of perceived beauty, with the 'arty' group being much more tolerant of ugliness than the 'average' group (Smets 1973).

A relationship between pattern recognition and both attention and perceptions of beauty or ugliness can be found when comparing tonal and atonal music. Leonard Meyer was one of the first analysts to point to *expectation* as an important way in which composers of tonal music elicit emotional responses in the listener and, indeed, hold the listener's attention. Rhythms, harmonies and the relation of melodic line to the home key lead the listener to anticipate what might be coming next. The composer may choose to confirm those expectations, to delay and so build tension, or to surprise by taking the music in an unforeseen direction. Thus, the listener is actively engaged with the music through a continuing predictive investment (Meyer 1956). More recently, David Huron has built on this idea, drawing on research in evolutionary psychology and neurophysiology. He describes expectation as deriving from evolved adaptation and learned cultural conventions. The drive to anticipate is firmly wired into the brain, but the nature of what we come to expect is, to a great extent, shaped by the cultural context in which we grow up. Nonetheless, it does not take long to accustom the ear to a new syntactical form (Huron 2006). The same is not true for atonal music.

Introduced by Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951) in the 1920s, the serial approach sought to release music from its anchoring in a given key. The twelve notes of a chromatic scale were arranged in a sequence that must be played in full before it could be repeated; rhythm and the octave in which a note was played were choices left to the performer. Thus, no note was given more importance than another and so no tonic surfaced that could establish a home key or tonality for the composition. It was an attempt by Schoenberg (and other composers such as Anton Webern [1883–1945], who subsequently adopted the compositional approach, and Pierre Boulez [1925–], who developed further rules of rhythm and interpretative dynamic) to move past what they considered to be the exhausted clichés of tonal music. But, as Philip Ball (a science writer with a particular interest in pattern formation) notes, “this is the fundamental problem with it: for all the talk of liberation, it was in fact a system designed to *exclude*. What it wanted to banish was any vestige of tonality. And the reason for that was not musical, but philosophical – some might even say political” (Ball 2010, 130, emphasis in original). Huron undertook statistical analysis of Schoenberg’s tone rows and found that they contain fewer groupings that might suggest tonality than does a purely random sequence of notes. The music does not just disregard tonal grounding, it actively works against it. This led Huron to propose that, rather than atonal, the approach should more properly be thought of as *contratonal* (Huron 2006).¹⁶⁶

Atonal music has not received widespread acceptance, though for some who know the structural game, spotting the way in which tonality is actively avoided does offer a certain intellectual satisfaction. For the most part, though, atonal music in its purest form left audiences confused and disorientated – the music offered no way to participate in the process of listening and so failed to actively engage the cognitive and emotional faculties. Without tonal weighting, the music had no home key to which it might return and so define the melodic

166 It is a term which Schoenberg – who rejected the description ‘atonal’ since he was not indifferent to tone but actively sought to avoid any sense of tonal anchoring – might have approved.

journey. As the philosopher, Roger Scruton, put it: “when the music goes everywhere, it also goes nowhere” (Scruton 1997, 303).

For all its strictures of composition and execution, atonal music lacks the kind of evolved grammatical patterns through which we have come to communicate. “Although serialism has governing rules (and typically applies them inflexibly),” Ball writes, “They are not of the kind that permit a well-formed musical grammar. Syntactically speaking, this music is shallow” (Ball 2010, 374). It also casts itself adrift from its musical antecedence.

Good art works not because some theory says it should but because it is embedded in a web of reference and allusion, as well as convention – it takes what we know, and changes it. But it has to start from something we know, however iconoclastic. You can’t just make it up – or if you do, you can’t expect your new rules to be cognitively coherent. (Ball 2010, 135)

Pattern is important in music as in other forms of art, but that pattern must be perceivable and it must be relatable. That is, it cannot be so complex or abstruse that it defies detection (worse still that it abjures pattern altogether) and, once recognised, that pattern must be relatable to something already within our cognitive repertoire, otherwise there is no referent against which it cannot be imaginatively assayed. The process of imagination is not one of creation *ex nihilo*, but rather the creation of the new through a reconfiguration and synthesis of what is already known and felt. That is not to say that experiments such as Schoenberg’s are without use. While, in its pure expression, atonal music fails to engage all but a tiny audience of specialist cognoscenti, the ideas it raised were successfully incorporated into an *expanded* understanding of tonal music by composers such as Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992), Krzysztof Penderecki (1933) and Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971). Their success was that they found ways to develop musical expression by learning from serial techniques while anchoring the result in broadly tonal tradition.

Infolding and Connoisseurship

The brain enjoys engaging and ‘solving’ complex patterns. As Gerda Smet’s research shows, brain activity rises with pattern complicatedness, but only to a certain point. After that, the pattern becomes ‘noise’ or resolves into simpler patterns as the fine detail is lost, and brain activity drops off. The peak of that activity is ‘optimal complicatedness’, the most complex and most arousing challenge the brain can take on. This appears to remain steady for both the ‘arty’ group and the ‘average’. What changes is the level of subjectively preferred complicatedness, which is higher for the ‘arty’ group than the ‘average’ group, but still lower than the optimal complicatedness in terms of mental arousal.

This aligns with the tendency to novelty described in relation to dopamine rewards. As we become familiar with a subject, our appetite for increased stimulation goes up. I think there are links here to the level of ‘puzzle solving’ that an artwork demands of the viewer. Those who spend a lot of time with art tend to find greater pleasure in more complex puzzles, greater abstraction and so on. Jaron Lanier has noted that, to be successful, art needs to avoid visual fatigue (Lanier 1999). Colin Martindale has developed this further to describe a cyclical theory of art styles. He argues that every art style (from Greek vases and Gothic cathedrals to Pop Art and Postmodernism) increases in complicatedness, elaboration and emotional impact until it has been fully exploited. At this point, it gives way to a new style. He attributes this to two things: audiences who become bored with the familiar and the desire of artists for attention (Martindale 1990). The former tendency might be understood as the viewers’ growing connoisseurship. The latter may be seen as reflecting the artist’s struggle to maintain profile in the art market oligopsony, but, as I will discuss in the following chapter, it may also be more deeply evolved in the nature of being an artist.

However, I would argue that this pursuit of novelty in the new and increasingly complex is not, in itself, an indicator that more complex art or greater abstraction is *better*, simply that increased exposure tends to shift the optimal peak along that vector. This leads me to two tentative observations:

1. That the more complex and abstruse art enjoyed by connoisseurs is not necessarily an innovation that is 'ahead of its time', which will later become widely enjoyed and understood as superior to what went before. Rather, it is an escalating novelty and challenge that suits a particular kind of viewer.
2. Consequently, novelty and complicatedness cannot simply be accepted as correlates of worth. Picasso's Cubism was a particular form of increased complicatedness associated with non-naturalistic representation of a 'general view'. It is certainly more complicated to decode (but not necessarily more complex to create) than a Raphael portrait, but no one would suggest that Picasso was a better artist than Raphael, just different.



Figure 30. Raphael *Portrait of Bindo Altoviti* (1512–1515)
Collection of National Gallery of Art, Washington (left)

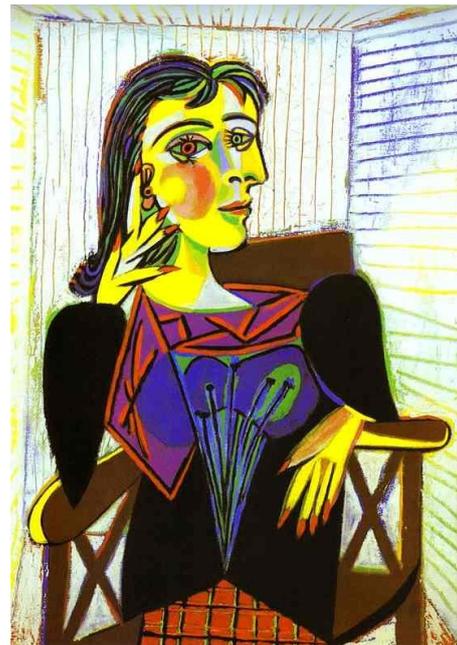


Figure 31. Pablo Picasso *Portrait of Dora Maar* (1937)
Collection of Musée Picasso, Paris (right)

The convolution exhibited in Cubism is of a type that is not 'built into' the adaptive human skill-set. We have evolved a very sophisticated ability to read and interpret facial expression. A substantive part of the brain is dedicated to this work and there are, as discussed earlier, strong adaptive benefits to having an insight into the mood and intentions of others. In that sense, the Raphael is the more complex painting, because of the high level of naturalistic emotional detail it portrays. But it is read holistically, since we no longer consciously break down how we view a face but rather respond intuitively to expression. We use our imagination to interpret those expressions in the hope of gaining an impression of the inner life of the person. As Stephen Pinker puts it: "when we perceive the products of other people's behaviour, we evaluate them through our intuitive psychology, our theory of mind. We do not take ... a work of art at face value, but try to guess why the producers came out with [it] and what effect they hope to have on us" (Pinker 2002, 412). This is mental processing that is only partly made available to our consciousness. Meanwhile, the Picasso shatters the 'whole' and in doing so demands that we become explicitly conscious of those intuitive skills, to play with them.

Arthur Koestler describes this kind of puzzle making as 'infolding' – the meaning of the work is folded up like a parcel and requires the active engagement of the viewer to unwrap and discover it. He suggests that this process is "the artist's struggle against the deadening cumulative effect of saturation" and that the viewer finds the meaning all the more luminous from having to work to discover it (Koestler 1964, 336). He argues that, for example, the melodramas of the Victorian age now seem grotesquely over-done because they lack this kind of in-folding of meaning (he did not live long enough to see *Desperate Housewives* or *The Bold and the Beautiful...*). But it is certainly not the case that all art becomes redundant with age: far from it. What tend to date are the stylistic forms of puzzle, which can become mannered once they have been decoded and revealed for what they are. They take their place in the history of art as moments in time,

but cannot regain the full impact of the puzzle when met for the first time (Koestler 1964).

Yet art has, since the Enlightenment, been increasingly focused on form. What began with Kant, found in arch-Modernists such as Clive Bell the opinion that true aesthetes are so focused on the form of a work of art that they should and do remain oblivious to its content. In his view, only aesthetically unsophisticated people talk about paintings or sculptures in terms of their subjects (Bell 1914). Such arguments underwrite the notion of art for art's sake, for if art has content it has interpretable meaning (even if different viewers come to different interpretations) and as such becomes part of understanding. That is, it has a use.

Content-based art tends to engage established modes of brain activity that, while complex, are embedded and intuitive. They are also more universally shared. Form-based art tends to take the viewer outside of that 'comfort zone'. That shift of perceptual viewpoint can be exhilarating and enlightening, but it is unlikely to have the same human connectedness. Rather, its stylisation is reflexive, making us *self-conscious* as to our own looking.

At the other end of the spectrum from form-based art is the conceptual; the idea stripped right down with as little formal wrapping as is feasible. Content-based art is not synonymous with conceptualism. Content is about more than just an idea, just as it is more than simply form. If form and concept are purified states then content-based art is a messy complex that brings into the frame not only form and idea but emotion and narrative, paradox and ambiguity, high ideals and base motives, longing, aspiration, suspicion, anxiety. It is, in a word, human. We respond to it because we are not ourselves simply our external features, nor wholly coherent in our ideas, we are much more complex. While pure form and pure idea can be bracing and edifying, they are also alien for those who have not trained their sensibilities to stand a little outside the human condition; to compartmentalise intellect from emotion, information from narrative, pattern from meaning, implication from intuition.

As I described earlier in this chapter, it is those visual stimuli that engage our attention but do not easily resolve which give us most sustained pleasure. Our brains have adapted to reward us when we attend to things that suggest they may have a direct bearing upon us, but which remain uncertain as to how; things that require further consideration and analysis. We concentrate our attention and, while that uncertainty remains, we feel the pleasurable sensations of attending to something significant. If the subject is so distanced from the things we intuit as important to ourselves then our attention will be slight. If the subject resolves quickly into information, the sense of pleasure will dissipate and our attention wanders.

Denis Dutton has argued that the psychological complexity of an artwork is bound up in the resonance it creates in us: the sense of empathy and interrelatedness with the subject of the image and so, perhaps, to the artist who made the work. As discussed earlier, there are clearly survival benefits to accurately assessing the emotional state and intentions of others and large amounts of the brain are given over to such analysis. We are well equipped for this kind of analysis, though we are also well versed in masking our emotions and intentions, so the subtlety of reading is highly refined. While resonance and interrelatedness lead to complexity, they do not necessarily simply create complicatedness – it might more accurately be thought of as a richness of emotional texture. It is our ‘instinct’ to seek insight into another person that drives our emotional investment to study the artwork closely (Dutton 2009).

For Brian Boyd, the ability of an artwork – be it an artefact, a melody or a story – to hold our attention is of central importance. For the individual, attention to one’s environment is essential for survival, but it is also important to gain some level of attention from one’s peers: to be recognised as part of the group or perhaps even to gain special status by commanding and holding the attention of others. But attention also has an important social function in the way it helps attune members of a group, to give insights into how others think and behave, building mutuality and tolerance to engender a sense of community. Finally, he

describes the way in which the attention focusing of art leads to the kind of creative analysis that empowers both individual and community: “Art develops habits of imaginative exploration, so that we take the world as not closed and given, but open and to be shaped on our own terms” (Boyd 2009, 124).

As I will explore in the next chapter, art making can be seen as a proof of fitness, a skill for its own sake demonstrating intellectual capacity and ability in excess of that required for mere survival. For the maker and the viewer capable of unravelling the puzzle, infolding can be seen as part of the tool-kit of such display. But, as Dutton has pointed out, art can also be seen as a way of gaining insight and even engendering empathy. There comes a point then when infolding and insight find themselves at odds. Are ‘art as a demonstration of fitness’ and ‘art as an expression of mutuality’ complementary or in conflict? Or perhaps they are simply two drives that are not always aligned, like a man who shows off his strength when what he seeks is compassion.



In this chapter I have described just some of the adaptive responses that come into play during aesthetic experience. They began randomly, took millions of years to evolve and only later, through processes of exaptation, came to be exploited as aesthetic ‘building blocks’. But, just as bricks do not *cause* a house, so these aesthetic propensities did not *cause* art as behaviour. If the creation of art is founded on the behaviour of ‘making special’ by doing more than is necessary for functionality; if beauty is associated with truth and not simply with fecundity; if culture can both elevate the individual and unite the community, how did this come about? In the next chapter I will consider art making as a behaviour arising from a different set of evolutionary processes, ones that involved choice and spread like wild fire.

CHAPTER 7

Taste and Survival

In her first two books – *What is Art For?* and *Homo Aestheticus* – Ellen Dissanayake draws the fundamental conclusion that art (in its widest meaning) arises as the act of ‘making special’. This can be the creation of ritual, the decoration of functional tools or the painting of the body. It is a process of elaboration beyond the minimum requirement for functionality. Such elaboration might be in the form of workmanship or decoration or by choosing some rare or hard-to-obtain mineral over more plentiful and equally serviceable materials close at hand. However, by elaboration, she is not limiting her description to that of the merely decorative, but rather to the process of making something more complex than is absolutely necessary. That is, it is a catholic term that does not seek to make a value-judgement between simple acts of embellishment and acts, such as ritual, that can take on a sense of the profound (Dissanayake 1988, 1992).

But natural selection is a parsimonious economy. It does not lead to waste and extravagance. Why make something special when at less cost it could be perfectly functional? How could natural selection have resulted in such a state of affairs? Yet much in the animal world, and the human, reveals phenomena that are as prodigal as they are pulchritudinous. A decade before he published *The*

Descent of Man, Charles Darwin was finding such excesses of the natural world troubling. “The sight of a feather in a peacock’s tail,” he wrote in a letter to the American botanist Asa Gray, “whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick!” (Darwin 1860). How could natural selection account for the peacock’s extravagant plumage?

The Peacock, the Bowerbird and the Proverbial Chicken

To answer this question, Darwin proposed a second evolutionary mechanism he called ‘sexual selection’. Here, adaptation is achieved not by the ‘blind’ iterations of random mutation and selective retention, but through the choice of sexual partner (Darwin 1871). Thus, it is argued, the peahen chooses to mate with the peacock with the longest, brightest and most symmetrical tail fan, consequently ensuring the genetic encoding for long and beautiful tails is preferentially carried forward over the genes of those peacocks with less impressive plumage. This is not as feckless as it might at first sound. While the tail feathers are an encumbrance, they demonstrate their owner has the necessary vigour to bear this extra unnecessary weight and the fortitude to stand out (the peacock tail is the very antithesis of camouflage). They show not simply that he can survive, but that he is excessively robust – so much so he can afford a handicap. (It is like the claim: ‘I could beat you with one hand tied behind my back’.) His tail is not only an ostentatious claim to fitness, it is a reliable guarantee (Zahavi and Zahavi 1997).

Indeed, Darwin already recognised not only that sexual selection could account for much that had initially disturbed him about the inefficiently decorative aspects of the natural world, but also contemporary human kind. He hypothesised that sexual selection could explain the development of body adornment in human society and he saw the visual arts as an extension of sexual selection mechanisms (Darwin 1871; Miller 2001a). Meanwhile, the nineteenth-century anthropologist, Herbert Spencer, believed that sexual selection could

account for much that we consider beautiful in the natural world and in the decorative and creative arts. However, by the turn of the century the theory of sexual selection had fallen from favour, partly because critics often confused sexual selection with sexual motives. The reasons for choosing a sexual partner are by no means always sexual in themselves.

More recently, sexual selection as an evolutionary driver has once more begun to be studied in earnest. Writers such as Geoffrey Miller and Denis Dutton have argued that sexual selection can explain not simply the development of elaborate and costly forms of body ornamentation, but the physical development of the human body itself (Dutton 2009; Miller 2001b).¹⁶⁷

Returning to the example of sexual selection and the peacock, feathers are not the whole story. Experiments using eye-tracking technology fitted to the heads of peahens revealed that while, at a distance, the peahen indeed looks at the showy upper part of the peacock tail and head crest, at closer quarters she focuses attention on the lower regions of the tail, body and feet during the courtship ritual (Yorzinski et al. 2013). This suggests that the peahen not only 'assesses' the inherited physical attributes of the peacock but also his ability to perform. Perhaps this inspection is to assess strength through grace. Is the considerable extra strength necessary to elevate the tail and make the characteristic rattling of the train something accomplished with apparent ease or

167 Geoffrey Miller, for example, building on research by the biologist, William Eberhard, has argued that the reason the human penis is significantly larger in proportion to the body than in other great apes is a result of sexual selection. Women chose men with larger penises for sexual pleasure. For this to occur there has to be a particular set of criteria. Firstly, the human ovulatory cycle is hidden; not all acts of sex result in pregnancy, so a man is unable to ascertain when impregnation might be most successful. Both men and women of the Pleistocene were, Miller argues, not limited to a single sexual partner. Women were therefore able to 'road-test' men without it always meaning they became pregnant and, he argues, all things being equal they selected their longer-term relationships from those that give them most sustained sexual pleasure. As a result, men with larger penises tended to produce more offspring. Male gorillas, on the other hand, strictly and violently guard their harems, developing powerful musculature while maintaining small penises. Miller makes a similar argument for the proportionately larger size of human breasts than in other apes: men chose women with larger breasts as an indicator they will be able to adequately feed their young (Eberhard 1985, 1996; Miller 2001b).

only after a struggle? While I wish, of course, to avoid any anthropomorphic overinterpretation of such data, this does suggest that fitness is associated not only with good breeding, but with skill and, perhaps especially, the grace of apparent ease.

One might sense certain resonance with the sphere of ballet, where extremely difficult and strenuous feats are executed without apparent effort, unlike the displays of, say, the carnival strongman, whose demonstrations require signs of stress to make them more plausible. In such a way of thinking, one might see a connection between sexual selection and the human arts not simply in terms of rarity and inherent talent, but in terms of the development of skills that display elegance while masking the true cost to the individual. This focusing of attention on those aspects of a display that are most precisely telling about the performer show a marked similarity to the criteria on which a connoisseur might judge the performance of a dancer or the execution of a painting. Reuvan Dukas points out that such behaviour in animals arises from the imbalance between the high rate in which information is encountered in the wild and the limited data processing in an animal or bird's brain. This, he concludes, has led to the development of attention mechanisms that focus brainpower on the most relevant information, which is in line with the mechanisms described in Chapter 3 (Dukas 2002).

While I would not suggest that a human connoisseur has the same limitations as a peahen, the evolutionary tendency to focus attention relative to a predominant concern is of interest, for it perhaps helps explain the difference in experience that a connoisseur might have when considering a given work or performance compared with that of a less specialist viewer. The connoisseur is making a critical analysis, which draws his or her attention to certain aspects of the work that are most difficult to achieve with apparent ease. The general viewer is more likely to be following the broader narrative and holistic sensual effect of the work. Indeed, as touched on towards the end of the previous chapter, there may come to be a tension between the aims of infolding and those of insight: between engaging the viewer with a puzzle and engendering a sense of empathy

(Dutton 2009). I am not saying this is right or wrong, but rather that it describes two different ways of looking, which might be traced back to the more fundamental evolutionary adaptation of selective attention.

Sexual selection focuses the genotype. When they mate the offspring of a peahen with a tendency to be impressed by a large tail and the genes of a peacock with a flamboyant plumage are both passed to the next generation. Thus, the female's taste and the male's prowess pass down in tandem and reinforce each other. This leads to a much more rapid evolution of traits than that associated with natural selection; so rapid that Ronald Fisher termed it 'runaway' sexual selection (Fisher 1930). Here is another quality that is in marked contrast to natural selection: sexual selection has its own momentum. Natural selection is a constant testing of often-marginal differences against environmental pressures. Sexual selection is a more self-contained process of choice. Sexual selection is purposive whereas natural selection is 'blind'.

The peacock's tail comes at a considerable cost for the peacock, it wastes resources in a way that demonstrates he has them to spare. While the traits may demonstrate fitness to survive, it must not so encumber his offspring that they fail to thrive. In periods of relatively plentiful food-supply and limited predation runaway selection can flourish, but there is always a risk that circumstances will change. As a result, such flamboyant creatures are more affected by the vagaries of environment than their less conspicuous, less encumbered neighbours. The spectacular comes at the cost of resilience to change. Runaway selection can come to a screeching halt or crash and burn. One advantage of the accelerating cognition that marked human evolution was that many sexual selection traits, especially those manifesting as proto-arts, were in the form of behaviours that were easily reversible. Temporary body adornment or crafted artefacts were easier to adapt or jettison when times took an unexpected turn, as they frequently did in the climatic vicissitudes of the late Pleistocene. Even so, it might be that in some cases the higher risk that attends particular displays evolved for

sexual selection could carry over into a sense that a certain kind of art-maker is a risk-taker and perhaps even a little dangerous.

Risk is one quality associated with sexual selection; prodigality is another.

One of the few animals to invest significant amounts of time and energy on making special displays beyond their own body is the bowerbird. A native of Australia comprising a dozen species, male bowerbirds construct elaborate courtship nests (or 'bowers') decorated with patches of colour provided by objects found and brought back by the male bird and arranged in groups to maximise their intensity. The male bowerbird is not demonstrating his home building prowess; these are more shag-pad than family residence, with the brightly coloured treasures analogous to the bachelor's proverbial etchings. Once copulation has taken place, the female departs to bring up the young in a nest of her own making, one considerably less showy and, consequently, safer and more practical.

Denis Dutton argues that the beauty of the love-nest of a male bowerbird in the judgement of a female is closely related to uselessness and costliness (Dutton 2009). Like the nouveau rich dandy, such displays are an overt statement of prosperity. It is not hard to see how this extends into the contemporary world of human society where a necklace of diamonds is considered more beautiful than one made of glass. Were diamonds as plentiful as sand and sand (from which we make glass) as rare as diamonds, we may well develop a preference for the aesthetic qualities of glass.

So, if peahens choose peacocks with the most flamboyant tails and elegant equilibrium, and peacocks that grow the finest plumage and make the best moves are more likely to find a mate, which came first: the male's plumage or the female's taste? Miller argues that in the case of the peahen and peacock, it is not that important. The point is that once those two tendencies had arisen and led to mating preferences, the genes for the taste and those for the tail mutually

enforced each other in runaway selection.¹⁶⁸ I would add that had the peahen developed a taste for mangy tails associated with feeble peacocks, that preference would have faded quickly under the exigencies of basic natural selection – the weaker stock would not flourish however popular it might be to a given generation of peahen.

What then of art? Who came first: the artist or the connoisseur? Does art service the connoisseur's tastes or are the connoisseur's tastes inspired by the artist's creation? Given the potential long-term cost of copulation is much higher for women than for men (especially if, like the peacock and the bowerbird, the male takes off after the sexual act and leaves home building and child rearing to the female), Miller argues that women choose and men display. Men therefore invent ways to draw attention to themselves, to demonstrate fitness and to engage the females of their choice. Women, having more to lose (or at least a much greater potential investment) select from amongst the men. Initially men do not need to know what appeals to women, the displays maybe random to start with, but once the trait and the preference are selectively passed down, the weighting in the choices made by future generations will ensure that the particular trait prospers and, once recognised, it might be reinforced by cultural tradition, further accelerating the runaway adaptation. Since what is successful is so for both sexes and since offspring share the genetic material of both parents even if they are brought up with the cultural traditions of just the mother, men and women tend to share the same tastes.

In the case of human sexual selection, it is not just the physique and decorative skills of the male that are in play. Miller goes on to argue that the evolution of the human brain was not simply about survival – though it clearly would come to have that benefit – as it evolved too fast to be a simple product of

168 In the case of the human penis it might be assumed that a more conscious choice was involved as women 'road-tested' men, choosing to copulate more frequently with those who gave them more pleasure.

natural selection. Nor was it simply a demonstration of fitness, though intelligence would certainly have a bearing on the ability to interpret and learn from experience. Rather, Miller contends, it was an instrument of courtship. Women tended to choose men who were witty and interesting company (Miller 2001b, Chapter 6). Dutton agrees pointing to the fact that elegant and accurate use of an extensive vocabulary goes far beyond what is required to be understood, suggesting that its intricacy is a demonstration of intelligence; one that is considered important, though one which has no obvious benefit in terms of survival. It is, more broadly, just such elegance in excess of necessity that, he argues, marks out good art from sham (Dutton 2009). Thus, in terms of 'making special', the process is more than just adding complicatedness for its own sake. Intricacy has to be executed in a way that is difficult and so tends to separate higher skill and intelligence from lower (Miller 2001b). While Miller and Dutton argue an adaptive logic relating cognitive intricacy to attractiveness, Stephen Pinker is sceptical, seeing it as a by-product of the kludge brain rather than a virtue in itself.

The psychology of art is entangled with the psychology of esteem, with its appreciation of the rare, the sumptuous, the virtuosic, and the dazzling ... The conviction that artists and connoisseurs are morally advanced is a cognitive illusion, arising from the fact that our circuitry for morality is cross-wired with our circuitry for status. (Pinker 2002, 412, 415)

I think this is only a part of the story. Pinker is right, of course, that virtuosity and morality are not automatic correlates, but more broadly, I do not think that intelligence and attractiveness are either. The intelligence of the maker is assayed by the intelligence and perspective of the viewer. Further, the viewer does not simply engage the intelligence of the artist as an abstract measure of fitness, but assesses the emotional veracity of his or her art. Does this *feel* true? Does this *feel* right? (Of course, it does not have to be *real* to feel true or right.) The heuristic intelligence of emotion comes into play and our affective responses

are not always tied to logic; as Hume proposed, moral sensibility is motivated by sentiment, not reason (Hume 1751). Returning to Dutton's point about vocabulary and grammar appropriately used, we may admire the elegance of a story well told, but that story must engage us emotionally for it to hold our attention and to make that elegance worthwhile. A story or image may be manifestly unreal, but it should be faithful to its own internal logic and carry within it an emotional truth.

A contemporary artwork (be it a painting or a novel or a musical composition) is most often encountered as an expression of intelligence and emotional truth, distinct and separate from the personal presence of the individual who made it. Our sense of the author comes to us solely *through* the artwork, which is neither amplified by such things as a pretty face nor diminished by other aspects of the human presence that one might find unattractive. That is not true of the performers who interpret artworks. They are very often known also as individuals, especially those involved in mass cultural forms such as cinema and pop music. The experience of their work is very often mediated by the sense we have of them as people, which is why the movie and music industries put so much effort into creating an 'image' for such stars; adding another layer of fictional value.

However, in traditional communities and in the communities of ordinary working people well into the nineteenth century, the experience of a work of art and a familiarity with the maker went hand in hand. The clothes one wore, the furniture in the home, the pictures on the wall and the music enjoyed all involved people one knew. In many cases, they were created by members of the family or oneself. But slowly, over the past few centuries, sheet music and printed books began to bring the creations of distant and somewhat anonymous figures into the domestic sphere. Etchings became increasingly popular among the better off. Industrialisation began to introduce a new type of art, mass-produced outside of the community and with a level of uniformity. But for the vast majority of the arc of human history, this had not been the case.

Such relationships extend much further than those associated with courtship. They extended out through the family and into the community. The

arts brought aesthetic pleasure and recounted stories that connected people, creating threads that enmeshed the community and drew its members closer together. Miller makes some interesting points and his arguments sustain their internal logic. However, they are hermetic; they constrain all motivations to one issue when the question of survival is multivalent and human relationships significantly more complex.

Self-Domestication

So, is art as behaviour primarily a function of sexual selection? Researchers such as Ellen Dissanayake and Kathryn Coe think not. They point out that simply achieving satisfactory impregnation is by no means a guarantee that one's genes will pass on in future generations. Between insemination and offspring of sexual maturity lie countless potential disasters, from miscarriage and maternal death to parental neglect and infanticide. This was further exacerbated by hominin anatomy as it underwent significant change during the evolutionary arc from clever apes to proto-humans. While, on the one hand, there are rapid increases in hominin dexterity, brainpower and creativity, on the other, the period of infant dependency is greatly extended (Dissanayake 2000; Coe 2003).

Neoteny and Intimacy

When hominins began to stand up and move around on two legs, the posture offered them better sightlines due to the added height and more efficient locomotion as they trekked over long distances in search of food. It also, significantly, freed the front limbs for the manipulation of tools. However, standing upright also tended to narrow the pelvis and so constrict the birth canal. Meanwhile, the hominoid brain was becoming larger and with it the skull. This created an adaptive predisposition for premature birth. (It also accounts for the phenomenon of the fontanelles, where the plates of the skull remain unfused and flexible to allow the skull to deform safely during the passage through the birth

canal.) For a human child to be born at the same development stages as an infant ape, gestation would have to be at least twenty-one months (Leakey 1994).

Childhood was further extended by a process of developmental retardation known as neoteny, which is dramatically increased in humans compared to other primates. This protracted development stage extends the period of neural plasticity. This is thought to explain why humans have much greater mental ability than chimpanzees, despite having very similar DNA. It provides more time to learn from the environment and to master complex skills such as language. However, these benefits are bought at the cost of extended infant vulnerability (Somel et al. 2009).

Dissanayake argues that this vulnerability creates an adaptive benefit for mutuality that begins with little rituals between mother and child, extending out over time to other members of the clan. In turn, these rituals of mutuality become the genesis of artistic process. In her most recent book, *Art and Intimacy*, she examines at length the forms of behaviour through which this mother-child mutuality is expressed and ritualised, and the striking similarity of these behaviours across all cultures and societies on earth today – from the most ‘primitive’ to the most highly ‘developed’. This mutual regard is hardwired in the baby, who begins staring into the mother’s face immediately after birth, a characteristic not found in chimpanzees (our nearest primate relations). While Dissanayake goes on to extrapolate these behaviours forward to contemporary society and the role and nature of the arts today, her focus is on hunter-gatherer cultures (Dissanayake 2000).

Kathryn Coe forges a much stronger link between the need to protect and nurture children and art in the modern world. She proposes an ‘ancestress hypothesis’ which sets out to directly challenge Miller’s thesis that art arose through sexual selection. She draws on the r/K selection theory developed by Robert MacArthur and Edward Wilson, which describes the strategies hypothesised for two contrasting environments (MacArthur and Wilson 1967). In unstable or unpredictable environments, the emphasis is on reproduction and

filling ecological niches when they appear. Strategies tend to be characterised by promiscuity, high fecundity, early maturity onset, minimal parenting and wide dispersal of offspring. There is little advantage to developing specific traits since the environment is changing and with it the conditions of survival. This strategy is called r-selection and, though he does not say so himself, Coe argues that Miller's thesis is founded on such an approach (Coe 2003).

In contrast, K-selection suits stable, predictable situations where the population is near the maximum that the environment can bear. Here, the emphasis is on survival. Characteristics of K-selection include the production of fewer offspring; offspring with a longer developmental phase in which they remain adult-dependent. This requires more intense and extended parenting, which is best achieved in an uncontested niche within a relatively settled environment.

Ecologies tend to be established by r-strategising species and then, when sufficient energy sources are available, dominated by K-strategising species (MacArthur and Wilson 1967). As discussed above, the extended period of infant dependency correlates with an extended period of learning so that, having reached puberty, the individual is better equipped to survive and successfully rear their own offspring.

Domestication and Collaboration

Dutton, drawing on Stephen Pinker's observations on the theory of group selection (whereby group attributes are established at a higher level than that of the individual) argues that art could not be one such process. However, while he gives amusing examples of groups that fail to make good art, or groups that make good art but have such antipathy for each other that they commune in no other way, he fails to make any general case. Indeed his examples – a dysfunctional opera company and a mutually hostile, but artistically brilliant, string quartet – would seem to be exceptions that prove the rule that masterpieces of theatre and brilliant musical performances tend to emanate from artistic teams that bond

closely. However, Pinker does sound a prudent note of caution in not confusing group selection with altruism. Individuals in a group support each other out of mutual self-interest. They can and do act as aggressively and immorally towards other groups as individuals one to another (think of the inquisition or the holocaust) and groups that bind through acts of mutual altruism can be aggressively selfish when dealing with outsiders (Pinker 2002, 2007; Dutton 2009). Coe acknowledges this, pointing to traditional arts that recount or represent violence towards outsiders (Coe 2003).

Sally McBrearty and Alison Brooks put forward a case that archaeological evidence suggests that higher-level social behaviour began much earlier than had been originally believed – more than 100,000 years before the present rather than 40,000–50,000 BP as previously supposed. They also hypothesise that the creation of aesthetic objects and body decoration began in order to establish clan membership and to help ‘lubricate’ social interaction, through the exchange of gifts, when times were hard (McBrearty and Brooks 2000).

Brian Boyd has developed a similar, but less hierarchically focused, theory of art as a form of group adaptation. He builds on Ellen Dissanayake’s exploration of making special and the intimacy that developed between mother and child as prematurity of birth and protraction of neoteny extended the period of infant dependency over many years. Where Dissanayake focuses on the specialness of the object or activity, Boyd focuses on the process of shared attention demanded by art. He argues that as hominins became more aware of past and future, of cause and effect, it became important for individuals not simply to focus on the here and now, but to direct attention to more distant and even unlikely possibilities. The key to this was *sharing attention* (Boyd 2005, 2009).

To work cooperatively, to plan and to resolve differences, takes sustained shared attention. The benefits are clear and, as with the adaptations for balance, visual binding and Bayesian logic, attention sharing has become linked to limbic rewards – it is pleasurable. The early domestication of dogs and later horses and cattle involved a process of conscious selection, which built increasing mutuality

into the relationship between human and animal. Frederick Turner argues that, in a similar way, “we domesticated ourselves” (Turner 1996a, 107).

Humans are intensely social. Sharing or being the centre of attention is pleasurable. To be cut off from the attention of others is a significant threat. It is the pleasure of shared attention that draws together mother and infant as they bond, and the childish babble is shaped into mature language. Clans that could share attention had better coordination than those that did not. Those that shared dress, dance, heroic legend or moralistic myth were more supportive of each other than those without.

The shared attention hypothesis emphasises the *process* of sharing over the exact nature of the things shared. I would liken this to conversation, which is important in itself regardless of the content of what is said.

The Sexual Versus the Social

While Miller considers the developmental arc of art under runaway sexual selection to be capricious, Coe ‘predicts’ that art styles will tend to vacillate between those that promote individualism and creativity and those that promote kinship and tradition. She sees this as a function of the socio-cultural moment: cultures with strong traditions of ancestors will follow the ancestress hypothesis; those who reject their ancestors will tend to be more individualistic and creative. Neither writer appears to consider environment a factor.

I would argue however that these hypotheses are neither mutually exclusive nor unrelated to natural selection. Indeed, that relation can help explain the uneven developmental arc of both the human brain and human culture. Traits that demonstrate fitness through conspicuous waste are always a form of handicap, one that proves the individual’s vigour only at great cost. When times are easy – food is plentiful, the climate is clement, predators are few – the handicap duly acts as a fitness indicator and attracts mates. But if the environment changes and food becomes scarce, the weather colder (or hotter

and drier) or new predators migrate into the region, then the encumbrance of, say, heavy and unnecessary tail plumage, becomes maladaptive in terms of natural selection and the individual's chances of surviving to reap the benefits of sexual selection diminish. In addition, for animals of higher intelligence (such as hominins) the now maladapted handicap would be a less attractive trait to pass on to children in these changed circumstances and so loses much of its sexual allure. Meanwhile, *r*-selection would tend to rise in such circumstances, with higher reproductive levels, greater promiscuity and less consideration of the relative fitness of any one particular mate.

Virtuosity and Sentiment

Coe suggests that the periods of creativity and individualism in art history – for example fifth-century Greece, Renaissance Italy and fin-de-siecle France – were times when people abandoned their ancestors and ignored their elders and, as result, art became more individualistic and creative. Conversely, periods when ancestors (or super-ancestors such as the Christian trinity) were held in high regard, art tended to the traditional and collective (Coe 2003). But it is not as simple as that. 5th-century Greece was not wholly about innovation and rampant individualism. Plato was certainly an innovator in terms of the way he developed the dialectic approach to philosophy that he inherited from Socrates. He reacted strongly against the traditions of Homeric storytelling, seeking to redefine the ancestors in terms of a new, integrated vision for the polity. Yet he also disapproved of artistic creativity, seeing it as dangerously misleading and illusory, and recommended an educational system that stamped out innovative tendencies in the young (Plato 1987, 377b; 1994, 510).

Renaissance Italy considered itself much more sophisticated and culturally inventive than the period it dubbed the Middle Ages: thus defining it as a low period between the achievements of the ancient world and their own period of artistic rebirth. However, the Renaissance did not witness a pursuit of rampant creativity in all directions; rather it reacted against the schematic symbolism of

medieval Christian art to pursue an increasingly detailed realism. Initially at least, their innovation was in form, not content. Subject matter continued to look backwards: to the traditions of Christianity and – shaped by the interests of the patron Medici in neo-Platonic ideas – to ancient pagan myths and Roman portraiture.

Creativity can and does exist within traditional cultures, just as strategies of competitive individualism often stay with the same trait expression, competing in terms of amplification but not form. Peacocks woo the peahen with a particular design of tail fan, the differences being measures in size, brilliance and graceful handling. Men may compete in terms of muscular biceps or penis size, but a man that develops muscular earlobes or a green penis, while certainly highly individual, would be unlikely to be considered particularly handsome or virile. Innovation and convention coexist in various admixtures in all forms of social and cultural behaviour.

Similarly, I would argue that the woman who is attracted to a man through his witty conversation and engaging manner is probably not simply thinking short-term. Rather, she is considering the kind of mate she wishes to share extended time with and, if prudent, looking for qualities of empathy as well as strength to ensure he might stick around and provide both security and company for mother and child. Indeed, sexual pleasure and intellectual pleasure are not always natural bedfellows. Lady Chatterley's affair with the gamekeeper Mellors is explored by Lawrence in terms of the quest for an accommodation between the physical and the cerebral that acknowledges that there are two sides to human nature and seeks to nurture both.

Comparing the 'attention-grabbing' hypotheses of Miller with the 'shared attention' of Brian Boyd and the 'mutuality' hypothesis of Dissanayake, I am aware that certain types of contemporary art activity tend to be characterised in terms of the first, when, if viewed through the lens of the second and even the third, might take on a different hue. To help demonstrate the relevance of these

evolutionary interpretations to the world of today, let me take the example of graffiti.

The conservative view of graffiti seems to lean towards the Miller hypothesis. Graffitiists are understood to be driven by the need to aggressively and competitively signal their prowess, if not as a sexual attractor then as a group-dominance signifier or to mark out territory. But, viewed in terms of mutuality, graffiti may be understood as a way to become part of the world rather than to stand out against it. (Even though those who dislike graffiti see it as socially negative – vandalism.) In talking with graffitiists informally they seem little motivated by a sense of aggression or of ‘getting back at society’. Rather, they consider the dangers they face from reaching the sites they work on – say, beside a busy railway line – or the hassle they get from the authorities as simply something to be surmounted in order to be able to create a piece that becomes a part of the city. Creation and mutual appreciation of the work are held in high regard (Lunn 2006).

Tradition and Innovation

If virtuosity and sentiment (skill and feeling) define one axis for considering art, tradition and innovation mark another. Art as heritage puts a strong emphasis on tradition, whereas contemporary notions of creativity tend to strive for innovation. In a period of turbulent change, both poles have their magnetic pull. Tradition helps anchor the community to a fixed sense of history and convention (a primarily conservative view) while creativity favours adaptations for flexibility and imagination in facing new challenges (which might be associated with a liberal outlook). While our drive for novelty will always lead us to seek some level of innovation, it is also the case that every artist stands on the shoulders of those who went before. How would we recognise an innovation that had no basis in what preceded it? There would be no frame of reference. Even the most radical changes are made in relation to the traditions they reject (Martindale 1990).

Coe tends to draw a harder distinction between tradition and creativity by appearing to confuse creativity with the avant-garde. She does not consider

creativity a quality of traditional cultures, but rather a display function of individualism and means of rejecting or breaking away from the ancestral past. Even the traditional pottery designs of the Greek geometric period, which seem to be so repetitive, do, on closer inspection, reveal the potter's subtle variations and embellishments on the basic theme. Similarly, the copyists labouring in the scriptoria of early medieval monasteries embellished the texts they transcribed with inventive and sometimes eccentric marginal illustrations of their own or their patron's devising.

Creativity, then, is initially associated with elaborating or refining form, which does not stand as a rejection of ancestors or the past, just a new more detailed way of telling. The radicality and confrontation associated with notions of the avant-garde are a function of modernism. Over the longer arc of art history and pre-history, content tended to change as a result of new circumstances or dialogue with other cultures, which arose from military expansion and mercantile networking. For example, the Hellenisation of Persia and the Indian sub-continent by Alexander and his subsequent Orientalisation of aspects of Macedonian custom (Green 2013). Similarly, the Italian Renaissance was influenced by the immigration of Greek Scholars fleeing the Ottoman Empire after the fall of Constantinople (Norwich 1998).

While art may not be predictable, neither is it random, nor, as Colin Martindale proposed, is it simply cyclical (see page 332). Rather it is an increasingly complex interaction between the deeply embedded traits of common humanity as encoded in genes – human nature – and the environment (physical, social, cultural): art as a behavioural phenotype. Nor is creativity limited to the individualism of sexual selection as Miller claims and Coe seems content to concede. The interplay of mother and infant is necessarily creative. It flows from the direct response of one with the other. If it is shaped by anything it is shaped by our genes not by our traditions, a point Dissanayake makes at length in her comparisons of mother–child interactions across a wide variety of cultures from hunter-gatherer to urban (Dissanayake 2000). This prototypical human connection

can be expanded to include the relationships within the band or clan, fostering the cooperation necessary to flourish as a group. That kind of creativity, I would agree, is of a different stripe to that which seeks to surprise, delight or even shock through radical innovation or excess. The former is a subtle creativity of interpersonal engagement that pursues a sustained relationship and encourages empathy, *shared* attention and collective action; the latter is a virtuosic innovation that stands out from the crowd, astonishes and draws attention to *itself*. Both are forms of 'making special': the one of relationships and mutuality, the other of the individuality and novelty.

Interestingly, Miller makes little clear differentiation between, say, body ornamentation as a form of attention grabbing, and courtship conversation aimed at drawing the listener closer and establishing an emotional bond. He sees both as arising from sexual selection. Yet, as Coe points out, much body ornamentation is about identifying kinship, not expressing individualism. As an example (one of many she gives), she quotes from observations made by Sydney Parkinson, the artist aboard the Endeavour when James Cook made his voyage of 1768–71. Parkinson noted that while men of the two tribes that occupied the shores of the Tunarganui inlet in New Zealand displayed facial tattoos, no male attempted to obtain tattoos that distinguished him as a unique individual (Parkinson 1773). Coe, drawing on the research of David Simmons, concludes that the majority of Maori facial tattoos described lineage, birth order, inherited job and so on, while few communicated personal achievement or individual prowess (Simmons 1997; Coe 2003). However, at another order of scale, they do differentiate one clan from another, so they share with the individualism of sexual selection the effect of demonstrating difference. Equally, the fitness displays of sexual selection do not so much mark the individual as unique so much as being a prime example of a type (the set of virile peacocks, for example).

The dichotomy between individual and group is not cut and dried. Group difference is simply reflected at a higher order of magnitude in terms of the dissimilarity of my group from all other groups, and, in the globalised world,

between my super-group (nation, culture, religion or whatever) and other super groups. These are, within the language of Desmond Morris, the 'tribe' (a mutually supportive group in which all members were known to each other) and the 'super-tribe' (in which an individual member no longer knows personally the members of his or her community and "artificial laws and codes of discipline" are required to maintain balance) (Morris 1971, 26). Furthermore, the super-tribe brings additional levels of stress and neurosis that go beyond the mechanics described by sexual and group selection. One might call this 'super-group selection'.

Coe and Miller do agree (as do Dutton and other writers) that the human brain is far more complex than life in the Pleistocene savannah would have required. Miller argues that the larger brain was an instrument of courtship: an 'entertainment machine' that advertised the owner's perspicacity and congeniality. Given genes passed down to offspring of both sexes the demand-side brain development of women and the supply side of men escalated in the thrall of runaway type selection. In a similar view, Dutton points out there are far more words in our vocabulary than are strictly necessary to communicate information and ideas.¹⁶⁹ He argues that the superfluity of language suggests that words developed not simply for communication, but overt demonstrations of intelligence. He points to the enduring tendency to mock unintentional malapropisms and be impressed by a large vocabulary (Dutton 2009). Pinker takes an inverted view that art is a "pleasure technology" akin to cheesecake for the brain. He argues that the brain did not increase in size and power to be entertaining, but art, music, pornography and other forms of entertainment arose as a by-products of brain size and previously evolved hard-wired pleasure-rewards

169 The average speaker of modern English knows 60,000 or more words. Yet 98 per cent of our everyday speech is accomplished with about 4,000 words. Indeed, in the 1920s, Ivor Richards and Charles Ogden developed an effective vocabulary they called Basic English that contained only 850 words. Their aim was to foster peace through greater understanding by making it easier for non-native speakers to communicate through what was becoming recognised as the universal language. Basic English has since been successfully used to write books on biology and astronomy (Ogden 1940).

(as described in the preceding chapter) (Pinker 1997, 525). Coe suggests that the large brain facilitated the more complex systems of human interaction and cooperation that arose within communities (Coe 2003).

To me, each theory seems to isolate an aspect of what is a more complex truth: that conversation is not simply a means to an end, but an end in itself. The words shared by lovers are different only in content from those shared by parent and child; neighbour with neighbour; colleagues or friends. In all cases, the use of words, grammar and intonation far exceeds the minimum required to communicate the core message. If the use of an extensive vocabulary adds to the persuasiveness of what we say, it is in large part to do with the status such vocabulary confers on its user (and to a degree the status of those who hear and comprehend). The English language has a very mixed lineage that has bequeathed a large vocabulary, including many synonyms. Nonetheless, while many words have similar meanings, they carry very different associations depending on their original source. Words deriving from Latin and Greek carry a sense of intellectual weight; words from Romance languages connote sophistication; while words from Anglo-Saxon suggest vulgarity. There are clear historical reasons for this as those etymologies were associated with different sections of society: literate and illiterate; coloniser and colonised; victor and vanquished. Just as there can be an association drawn between beauty and truth, so there can be between eloquence and truth; in both cases this is because the quality demonstrated is associated with fitness. In the case of eloquence of language, of course, rhetoric and the skills of sophistry have harnessed those associations, while untethering them from the imperative of truth. Even so, eloquence remains persuasive as the pull of those more fundamental associations remain in our genotype.

We converse because, for the most part, it is pleasurable in itself. Conversation involves listening and adapting to what is heard. It involves, as Brian Boyd describes it, a “shared attention” (Boyd 2005, 2009). While a military command or a business email may be terse and perfunctory, requiring no further discussion, conversation tends to reciprocity and embellishment. As the

economist, Richard Layard, emphasised (see page 266), human interaction is not just a means to an end, but an end in itself (Layard 2005a). Coe is right in that we are social animals, we enjoy the company of others we get along with and conversation is both the mode of that enjoyment and a means to get along. Of course, language can be used to construct conflicts and, through strategy or error, to make enemies. But, of all the conversations in the history of the world, most have grown from a sense of mutuality. Enmity arises, and is more efficiently maintained, by declarative monologue or hostile silence.

In illustration of the importance of linguistic elaboration in courtship Miller points to two fictional archetypes: Scheherazade (who escapes death because Shahriyar finds her stories more engaging than the novelty of a nightly change of bedfellow) and Rostand's Cyrano (who, despite his grotesque nose and attendant insecurities, woos Roxanne with his exquisite literary skill). Miller goes on to suggest that the fact that contemporary women complain that their men fail to sustain the engaging conversation once the relationship is established is a sign that (a) women universally enjoy continuing high levels of verbal courtship; (b) that this demands effort by men and (c) that the effort is exercised strategically – men turn on the charm only when it's needed to initiate a relationship. However, he seems to ignore the endless discussion of sport or fast cars or power tools in which men engage at the pub (or Proust, free will and string theory in the academic wine bar). Conversations may change their focus, but they do not close down as soon as they cease to be necessary for survival and procreation.

From r-Strategy to Open Selection

Given the considerable risk and investment in bearing a child and bringing the infant to sexual maturity, Coe argues that art became a way to establish and maintain kinship relationships, to build a community around the mother and child. Art was part of a K-strategy. This community of resident fathers, allomothers, protectors and, in time, allofathers ensured food, shelter, support and

protection.¹⁷⁰ Like Dissanayake, Coe sees the art of community-building beginning with the relationship between mother and child. The mother perhaps began arranging the child's hair in a particular way and, in time, this became a way of recognising her children. Her daughters continued the practice and hairstyle (or whatever form of ornamentation was involved) became a sign of kinship (Coe 2003).

I agree with Coe that, given extended neoteny and a longer period before sexual maturity, art could play an important role in bonding the community. However, the concept of r/K-selection and its application requires further refinement. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, sexual selection is a high-risk adaptation that finds the optimum between the benefit of an aesthetic attribute and the cost of sustaining it. The most successful male, in this theory, is the one who can support the showiest excess of decoration without faltering. It is an adaptation that sets the individual deep within a given niche leaving them with little capacity to accommodate sudden changes in the environment – for example, the arrival of a new predator or a change of climate. I would therefore argue that sexual selection is not an r-strategy at all, but one suited to a stable niche.

I would suggest that there is a third process in addition to sexual selection (with its display–discernment attributes) and group selection (with its emphasis on mutuality and tradition). This third process is based on the promiscuity and fast-cycle fecundity that is described in r-strategy: frequent sex with any and all available partners with multiple offspring per pregnancy, short gestation and rapid maturing of the young who then scatter. r-strategy is wasteful, many offspring will fail to find a niche, but the large numbers help to ensure that the species enjoys a rich mixing of genes while exploring the broadest range of

170 Alloparents are individuals, other than the parents themselves, who help to look after a child (Williams 1975). While alloparents are more usually female, in some societies male alloparents can include possible fathers and their kin (Hrdy 2000). They are also known as 'aunties' and 'uncles', a term my family used when I was growing up to describe friends and neighbours who helped look after my sister and me. Auntie is, of course, also a term used in Australian Indigenous communities to describe similar matriarchal roles, often extended to the wider community.

environments. Low odds are balanced by high birth rate; changeable environment by diversification of the gene pool. As such, r-strategy offers a reasonable probability of success in finding the right gene-mix and new environmental niche. In such a process, the selection is in terms of outcome. Sexual selection works within a given set of traits that are 'known' in advance by both the owner of the trait and those whom the trait is aimed to attract. Group selection encourages mutuality and shared attention through established forms of inherited interaction. In contrast, r-strategy is more random. The selection process is a matter of luck, as an attribute and a benefit are found to coincide. For the purposes of identification, I will call this 'open selection'.

I must emphasise here that this is a speculative category. It is based upon observation of the present rather than analysis of the past. It is, I believe, a tendency that arises with self-belief; a confidence in one's ability to manage the outcomes of trial and error. This may not be a true belief, but confidence rests on personal conviction without necessarily relating this to an accurate assessment of circumstance.

While this is essentially my own hypothesis, based on ideas that arise from the theories of r-strategy, it does share some aspects with Karl Popper's concept of 'active Darwinism'. Popper laid out his idea in the first Medawar Lecture delivered to the Royal Society of London in the summer of 1986. He argued that the classic description of natural selection, which saw mutations arise randomly and succeed or fail in the testing ground of the environment, put too much emphasis on the environment and too little on the individual. He considered the idea that the environment is the arbiter of some kind of 'fitness test' was essentially teleological – replacing one external agency (God) with another (natural selection).¹⁷¹ Thus, in his view, such interpretations (he called them

171 In his Medawar lecture, Popper noted that Darwin introduces his theory of natural selection after discussing the conscious selection undertaken by cattle breeders and the like. This may lead to a mistaken overloading of the concept of natural selection with a sense that nature has some kind of (*this note continues at the foot of the next page...*)

‘passive Darwinism’) were fundamentally unscientific. In contrast, Popper argued that the individual organism is not passive, simply waiting for the judgement of the environment, but instead participates in its own selection by seeking out the most appropriate environment or finding ways to modify or move away from inclement ones. In this way, the organism and the environment each play a role in the shaping of the other. The organism evolves through many small acts of trial and error – essentially the same contingent process that Popper proposes for societal change by ‘piecemeal reform’.

Very early in the history of life living organisms acquired, by way of mutations organised by selection pressure, certain behavioural traits: they became active explorers, actively and curiously searching for new environments ... and especially for trial behaviour. (quoted in ter Hark 2003, 185)

In this view, the individual organism actively seeks new ways of living and being; searching out new ecological niches. It is a view of the evolving organism as both proactive and experimental which, in my view, seems reasonable when considering higher lifeforms and especially hominins. Popper’s view is, however, reached by other means of argument than those I am describing here.

Returning to my own line of thought: in simple organisms, open selection and natural selection are one and the same thing. But for higher animals, and especially humans, choice comes into play. Such choice is, however, doubly contingent. First, it is contingent upon changing circumstances and so the choice made is not fixed or associated with a given pattern, but rather it depends on the judgement of the individual in the context of the specific environmental circumstance. Second, it is not possible to change the nature of gestation and infant maturity at short notice. The extended dependency of hominin infants is a

intention. “Of course Darwin makes it perfectly clear that nature has no such aim in mind. Nature does not select at all” (Popper 2014, 121).

given. If open selection leads to greater sexual promiscuity and less sustained parenting, this will be severely balanced by the success or failure of each new generation to survive the period of neoteny to go on to reproduce. However, as discussed above, sexual selection and group selection extend beyond the specific question of choosing a sexual partner to encompass the wider modes of social competition and cooperation. In the same way, by open selection, I am suggesting that the mechanisms of r-strategy might evolve to shape wider social and cultural processes. While in humans open selection may apply in a limited sense to mating and the raising offspring, I am tempted to argue that it has a role in the evolution of art as behaviour. The strategy of open selection would neither emphasise tradition nor would it focus on difficult-to-sustain excesses of display, but rather on a spirit of frequent trial and error.

Such trial and error is related to another important skill: divergent thinking. The rapid generation of concepts and potential connections in divergent thinking is understood as beneficial in ideation and problem solving in ways that a wholly logical convergent way of thinking might not achieve. Divergent and convergent thinking are not antithetic: once identified by divergent thinking, novel ideas can then be tested and refined using more conventional convergent thinking. But divergent thinking allows for emergent cognitive processes that build complex conceptual models from the uninhibited flow of simpler ideas. As such it is closely related to creativity, though it is not itself a synonym (Runco and Acar 2012).

While r/K-strategy was an influential concept in the 1970s and 1980s, it has since been shown to be an incomplete description of actual behaviour in relation to environment, with r-type strategies occurring in relatively stable environments and K-type strategies maintained in changing ones. The simple theoretical structure of r/K-selection has been replaced by the more complex concept of panarchy, which describes multiple systems bound in continuing iterations of adaptation and renewal (Gunderson and Holling 2001). This is not to say that r-type behaviour and K-type behaviour do not exist but that, in any given set of environmental circumstances, they do not always play out in the clear-cut, either–

or way suggested in the original theory. In this context, sexual selection and group selection should be seen as responding in different, more or less efficient ways in the face of change, rather than being polar opposites. To this, I am proposing the addition of frequent and widespread trial and error of open selection as a third variable.

In periods of rapid change, group selection could still prove a useful strategy in maintaining solidarity in times of hardship, perhaps to work together defending the group from predators or competitors. If, in order to find sufficient resources under changed circumstances, the group must divide into smaller bands that go separate ways, the mechanisms of group bonding would still help tie the new, smaller communities together, with the benefits of collaboration that come with cooperation. Traits associated with sexual selection that put an especial drag on the reserves of the individual would become maladaptive to changing circumstances, but the kind of adaptations developing in humans – larger brain, decorations that were added to the body not bred within it – would not present such an impediment. Indeed, the increased brain size – whether or not it is a biological entertainment machine as Miller proposes – would be very useful in adapting to change and decorative enhancement of the body with paint, costume and jewellery is easily modified or discarded should it prove necessary. Meanwhile, the more experimental approach suggested by open selection could discover useful innovations. Although the haphazard nature of such trial and error would be quite wasteful, the benefits of useful innovation could be high. Human beings, then, had developed to a stage where they could harness aspects of all three types of selection as these were increasingly manifest in their social and cultural expression.

Hominins stood upright on two feet, leaving their hands free to perform complex tasks. Their brains grew fast opening up an awareness of past and future, of cause and effect. The concomitant narrowing of the birth canal and increasing size of the infant skull had led to neoteny and extended parenting which favoured mutually supportive communities. Cooperation allowed the group to achieve

more than the individuals could alone. Cultural activity became more complex, pulled in various directions by the processes of selection: competitive individualism, cooperative mutuality and open-ended experimentation. While trial and error carries significant risk, it offers the possibility of innovation that would not arise from the behaviours associated with sexual selection or group selection alone. How could those benefits be maximised while reducing the risks? To answer this, one must return to the internal workings of the rapidly developing brain and its propensity for constructing narrative.

The Organising Mind

Aristotle, Aquinas, Locke and others considered the mind at birth to be a 'tabula rasa'. However, the evidence from evolutionary biology tells a different story. As described in Chapter 6, we possess a set of inbuilt aesthetic responses that have been 'hard wired' in the brain during the evolutionary process. Stephen Pinker has mounted a particularly strong case against the idea that the new-born mind is a blank slate (Pinker 2002). This is not to say that our human nature is fully worked out at birth. The human brain is considerably more complex than that of our primate cousins. A single mutation in a gene that regulates neural cell division has come to ensure that the human brain is equipped with many more neurones than that of a chimpanzee (Sapolsky 2006). Those neural divisions continue after birth, with rapidly increasing brain size. Consequently, the evolutionary psychologists, John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, argue that economies within brain development leave aspects of human nature to develop in the period of extended neoteny that characterise human maturation. Thus, genes are set to program neural development to a given plan that is subject to environmental triggers (Tooby and Cosmides 2001).

Our genes, while they do not define us in total, do set limits and guides that we might think of as determining the human condition. They are qualities we share and, because we share them, they are points of interconnection, of

mutuality. In a modern society, a taste for sweet things may not be the unquestionable advantage it was in the savannah of the Pleistocene, but chocolate is still a welcome form of gift because we know that sweetness is agreeable and through the gift, we offer both symbolic and gastronomic pleasure. (Indeed chocolate has the added bonus of stimulating the release of serotonin and dopamine.)

Tooby and Cosmides outline two principal modes of neurocognitive adaptation. The first directly relates to the evolutionary benefit it bestows: our visual apparatus scans and analyses our surroundings; the peacock's tail attracts a mate. This is the '*functional mode*'. The second mode sets the individual up to *construct* the adaptation. It acts not in the external world but in the subtle and complex networks of the brain. For example, the ability to use language is shared by all humans, but the vocabulary employed is not. Rather, the mode of infant babbling is inherited and language itself develops in the individual's interaction with adults who reinforce certain sound patterns and not others. This, Tooby and Cosmides call the '*organisational mode*' (Tooby and Cosmides 2001).

Tall Tales and True Lies

Play, pretending, storytelling, fantasy and even dreaming can be categorised within this organisational mode. The usefulness of play and make-believe lies not in itself but in how it prepares us. Throwing rocks at pinecones is not functional in itself, but it prepares the individual for when throwing rocks at a predator might be lifesaving. Chasing games are universal in children, laying down the strategies of avoidance and escape for when an enemy is at one's heels (Symons 1978).

Thus, while agreeing with Pinker (and by extension with the arguments of Dutton, Grinde, Ramachandran and Hirstein, Zeki and others I have outlined in Chapter 6) that some aspects of the arts are technologies that have harnessed pleasure circuits previously adapted for quite other reasons, Tooby and Cosmides argue that there are other aesthetic pleasures that have a directly adaptive function in terms of mental organisation. These they term "brain targeted

aesthetics". Just because these behaviours are inward-focused does not mean they cannot be adaptations and must be exaptations. "The lack of correspondence between aesthetically driven behaviour and useful outcomes in the external world is exactly what you would expect if the system driving the behaviour is designed to produce adaptive internal changes" (Tooby and Cosmides 2001, 16).

Edward Wilson argued, "the dominating influence that spawned the arts was the need to impose order on the confusion caused by intelligence" (Wilson 1999, 250). This awareness of the complexity and interrelatedness of the world – of life outside of the present, of past and future, of contingent relationships, of cause and effect and of the benefits of accurately anticipating the intentions of others – demanded an expanded portfolio of strategies, which in turn greatly increased the possibility of disastrous misapplication. Play, make-believe, fiction and fantasy extend our awareness of causality and the variety of possible outcomes in relative safety. Tooby and Cosmides continue:

These are the new worlds of the might-be-true, the true-over-there, the once-was-true, the what-others-believe-is-true, the true-only-if-I-did-that, the not-true-here, the what-they-want-me-to-believe-is-true, the will-someday-be-true, the certainly-is-not-true, the what-he-told-me, the seems-true-on-the-basis-of-these-claims, and on and on. Managing these new types of information adaptively required the evolution of a large set of specialized cognitive adaptations. (Tooby and Cosmides 2001, 20)

Of course, it is important to differentiate between 'what if...' and 'what is...'. Tooby and Cosmides describe two mental systems: that of emotion and that of action. In normal life the emotional response triggers an appropriate action. I feel fear: I prepare to fight or I run away. They argue that in fiction, make-believe and play, the brain is equipped to 'decouple' the action systems from the emotional. Thus, we feel the feelings, but they do not trigger the action.

This decoupling allows us to solve problems by supposing and by reasoning counterfactually: evolved inference engines can be vigorously applied to propositions, and possible outcomes evaluated, without the risk that either the counterfactual premise or any conditional downstream inferences will be stored in our encyclopaedia of world knowledge as unqualifiedly true. (Tooby and Cosmides 2001, 20)

Decoupling allows the organisational processes in the brain to explore novel scenarios and propositions and work through possible outcomes. It allows full rein of the emotional responses, learning from what is experienced while quarantining that information from things learned by direct empirical evidence.¹⁷² Tooby and Cosmides continue: “Such falsities can convey truth because they are not processed as propositions with truth values, but as an experience whose false particulars are (in effect) thrown away. The truth inheres in what the experience builds in us” (Tooby and Cosmides 2001, 24). By freeing the organisational mode of adaptation from the functional and applying it to the arts, in particular those aspects of the arts that deal with the fictional and the imagined, new light is shed on a number of the qualities shared by many art processes.

So, there is a link between art and truth. It is not that all art is true or even that artists have a clearer view of truth, but that the process of decoupled narrative experience allows us to explore what *might* be truthful, and to do so *before* the fact. Mark Turner describes this as “the fundamental instrument of thought”, going on to define it as “our chief means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining”. In particular, he points to parable, which, he suggests, intricately combines narrative with the cognitive and emotional projection that allows us to understand the story in terms of our own situation. He believes that it is a combination that produces “one of our keenest mental processes for constructing meaning”, which has evolved (as I described in Chapter 6) as an inevitable outcome of the nature of our neurological systems of conception (Turner 1996b, 4-5).

172 To quote Picasso: “Art is a lie that makes us realise truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand” (Zayas 1923, 315-329).

Some aspects of art may seem to be without use or purpose, but this is only when viewed narrowly in terms of the functional mode because that mode is focused on achieving adaptations that function in the external world. (Of course, sexual and group selection would account for other aspects of the arts that *do* function in the external world, such as attracting a mate or uniting the clan.) Aesthetically driven behaviour that is inwardly focused in the organisational mode is a longer-term investment in the development of the individual. Innate concepts such as food, mother, male, female, exchange, cheating, belief, predator and so on are incomplete ideas that are ‘fleshed out’ in the aesthetic processes of the organisational mode. “In this process of incarnation,” Tooby and Cosmides write, “humans, being social and communicative organisms equipped with decoupling, are no longer limited by the slow and unreliable flow of actual experience. Instead, we can immerse ourselves in the comparatively rapid flow of vicarious, orchestrated, imagined or fictional experience” (Tooby and Cosmides 2001, 23).

This is a view also emphasised by Brian Boyd in his exploration of the evolution of narrative. Stories are not simply entertainment or even instruction; they engage the listener in actively expanding his or her interpretation of the world. “Art develops in us habits of imaginative exploration, so that we take the world as not closed and given, but open and to be shaped on our own terms,” Boyd writes. “In and through art, we readily turn the actual around within the much larger space of the possible, the conditional and the impossible. ... By fostering our inclination to think about possible worlds, art allows us to see the actual world from new vantage points” (Boyd 2009, 124).

This leads Tooby and Cosmides to a second observation: that we learn best from direct experience. Art, like play, becomes a simulation of experience that we are prepared to ‘believe’ emotionally, while decoupling the normal action responses.¹⁷³ “People prefer to receive information in the form of stories” and

173 As an aside: this is very much like the theory of theatre and cinema I deduced, and was powerfully affected by, when I was in my late teens. It was the way in which, as an adolescent, I (*this note continues at the foot of the next page...*)

they tend to self-identify within the stories (Tooby and Cosmides 2001, 24). There is no extrinsic reason for this; it arises from the nature of the mind itself, not the world outside. Intuitively though, this certainly makes sense and echoes the ancient Chinese proverb: “tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember, but involve me and I will understand”.

Dutton describes the “disinterestedness” discussed by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) in terms of the uncoupling of the language of fiction from that of factual communication (Dutton 2009, 174). However, it is surely the emotional response involved in the remaining aspect of the decoupled mode against which Kant was arguing. Art, in a Kantian view, should abstract its subject in order to isolate it from the world so that it may be considered with a disinterest unclouded by personal emotion. Miller is of the view that the idealised intellectual position Kant described was a “figment of [his] imagination” because, if we can find an evolutionary provenance for an aesthetic taste, it must, by definition, be ‘interested’ (Miller 2001b, 283).

Kant did, however, write frequently of play. Though he did not advance it as a theory as such, he was an influence on the poet, Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), who developed what Julius Elias has called “the most important theory in the entire history of this topic [of art and play]”. Schiller considered play to be the essential mediating impulse between the abstract structures created in the mind and the nature of material experience (Elias 1974, 106).

A brief review of storylines in popular culture might cause us to question the relationship between such narratives and possible real-life experience. While some films explore the subtle workings of human interaction that have relevance today, others focus on much more extreme and unlikely scenarios. Tooby and Cosmides point to this “overrepresentation in popular media of such things as attacks by predatory nonhumans, chase scenes, physical violence and blood revenge”.

began to learn more about what makes people tick and how actions can lead to unexpected consequences.

These are, as they note, of no practical use in a contemporary society where such creatures no longer exist, and legal and policing systems make wanton violence counterproductive (Tooby and Cosmides 2001, 22). I would go on to note that this taste for monsters, violence and chasing is even truer when one considers the highly interactive sphere of video gaming. Here, the direct interplay of the viewer with the narrative is of a higher order than that of the passive viewer of a cinema film or reader of a book. Of course, films and books engage our imagination, but video games involve both the mind and the body through the operation of a control console or keyboard and mouse. The addition of physical interaction seems to amplify the prehistoric 'memory' further. As Tooby and Cosmides explain: "It is important to recognise that our developmental adaptations may not be able to detect what experiences are actually organising in the modern world – only what experiences manifest the cues that would have made them organising in the environments that we evolved in" (Tooby and Cosmides 2001, 22). Just as our preferences in landscape appear to be shaped by primordial experiences of environment, so our narrative forms echo our Pleistocene past.

Empathy, Memory, Priority

It is important for the wellbeing of individuals that they only focus on the organisational mode when they are safe, fed and have no other pressing functional needs. It may be fun playing tag with my siblings, but if a wild beast is bearing down on me it is important that I stop playing and flee. Thus, while natural selection tends to evolve pleasure responses that reward brain-developing behaviour it does so in a competing emotional economy with more instrumental body-targeted and world-targeted behaviour. Consequently, as Barbara Fredrickson has observed, aesthetic brain-organising activities such as story-telling and play-acting tend to take place in down-time: after dark when it is not possible to work; when one is fed and safe so that hunting, gathering and defence are not pressing needs (Fredrickson 1998). This is a very different view of the relationship between art and leisure from that proposed by Thorsten Veblen, where art is

associated with the luxury of a permanently leisured class of warriors-in-waiting that is separated from the class of workers and maintained by the surplus that those workers are able to provide (Veblen 1899).

There is, of course, one stage in life when we have more leisure and the greatest need to engage the organisational mode: childhood. The extended period of dependency of children upon their adult carers that arises from neoteny, corresponds to a period of great neural plasticity. As discussed above, there is a trade-off between extended vulnerability and significant expansion of cognitive capacity as the neural programming inherent in the brain at birth engages the environment to build knowledge. Children have a propensity for creative play. They immerse themselves deeply in make-believe and storytelling and spend long periods engaged in it. They are naturally adept in the organisational mode, not only displaying great creativity in their thinking, but also self-confidence in that creativity.

Brian Boyd takes issue with these conclusions and believes they demonstrate an error in Tooby and Cosmides' theory because their proposal would suggest that as we get older we engage less in art. Boyd rejects this (Boyd 2005). However, I would suggest that while we engage in art with greater maturity as we age, our openness to new forms and ideas does decline. As we get older we tend to stick with tastes established in our youth, as one would expect if the organisational processes of the brain work to build the architecture of the mind – the more developed the architecture, the less flexibility remains in the system as a whole. This may also go some way to explain why adults appear to lose the self-confidence in their own creativity that they displayed as children. Yet, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 9, in the modern world this phenomenon may also arise from the contemporary educational system and so constitute an important additional external factor to be considered (see page 449 et seq).

Denis Dutton has pointed to a likely correlation between periods of artistic blooming in the Pleistocene and periods of relative ease; a period when the

weather became warmer and food supplies more plentiful, while the hominin population remained relatively low. This, in turn, would reduce the likelihood of conflict between bands. Such circumstances would have reduced the functional mode behaviours and allowed extended periods for aesthetic brain-organising activities.

However, Kate Wong, drawing on work by Christopher Henshilwood and Curtis Marean, argues that the arts could and did flourish in periods of potential stress, when changes in climate resulted in greater competition for resources. Under such conditions, she suggests, art objects helped to lubricate interactions between competing groups (Wong 2006). Even when resources became scarce, there were benefits from developing friendly relationships with other bands as it opened up the possibility of extending the gene pool. This need not, of course, be a conscious decision – there would certainly have been no concept of the gene pool – but rather that those bands that did intermarry would tend to avoid the weaknesses that arise through closed interbreeding.

Henshilwood and Marean have pieced together evidence that suggests that peaceful cooperation between groups in Middle Stone Age Africa was facilitated by the exchange of gifts made special by their non-local materials and careful workmanship. As such, this represented an early example of the symbolic behaviour of gift exchange (Henshilwood and Marean 2003). The symbolic value of the artefacts exchanged would have been a function of their artistry and the difficulty of their creation – that which made them special.

There can be a tendency when considering evolution to characterise it as an unending battle. The term ‘the survival of the fittest’ (which was coined by Herbert Spencer after reading Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*) encourages us to think in terms of winners and, especially, losers (Spencer 1864). The popularity of Richard Dawkins book *The Selfish Gene* further exacerbated this sense of conflict. However, Dawkins later went on to explain, it “could equally have been called *The Cooperative Gene* without a word of the book itself needing to be changed.

Indeed this might have saved some misunderstanding ... Selfishness and cooperation are two sides of a Darwinian coin” (Dawkins 2004, 158).

While sexual selection is an individualistic and competitive mechanism, the mutuality and shared attention described by Coe, Dissanayake, Boyd and others emphasise the benefits of cooperation and connectedness. To these qualities Boyd, Tooby and Cosmides, and Henshilwood and Marean would add two important qualities that inhere in the arts: their role in engaging the imagination and the concept of symbolic value. Meanwhile, making art can be understood as an adaptive behaviour. The impetus for aesthetic evolution is manifest in a variety of situations that prioritise its modes differently. There is no simple ‘on–off switch’ for the arts based on a single criterion such as available leisure time. Rather, the imaginative and narrative tendencies of the brain facilitate human cognition, as the plasticity of our neural networks is shaped in the ‘organisational mode’ of affect decoupled from action.

It would seem then that art evolves as a multifaceted, perhaps protean, behaviour or portfolio of behaviours. It can distinguish and celebrate individuality and it can help us build interpersonal relationships by cultivating mutuality and focusing shared attention. And it can facilitate inter-group diplomacy through the exchange of gifts with symbolic value.

So, what exactly is this thing we call art? How can a single idea describe so many different modes and outcomes?

Families not Relatives

There is an old Indian fable about six blind men who, never having been near an elephant before, finally have an opportunity to lay hands on one. After touching the flat, flappy ear of the animal, the first blind man exclaims that the elephant is like a fan. The second, running his fingers along the pachyderm’s tail, concludes the elephant is like a rope, while the third pats its leg and declares, no, it is like a tree trunk. The other three men variously disagree: it is “... like a wall”, “... like a

snake”, “... like a spear”. A noisy argument ensues, waking the elephant’s owner who asks them what the dispute is all about. After each blind man has made his case, the owner responds. “The elephant is a very large animal. Its side is like a wall. Its trunk is like a snake. Its tusks are like spears. Its legs are like trees. Its ears are like fans. And its tail is like a rope. So you are all right. But you are all wrong, too. For each of you touched only one part of the animal. To know what an elephant is really like, you must put all those parts together” (Backstein 1948).

In the theories of the evolution of the arts outlined above, the tendency is for any given writer to champion one cause as the principal impetus for art as behaviour and to construct arguments that diminish other explanations, invest them with other meanings or relegate them to special cases. However, my sense is that they fit together and that an understanding of art as an evolutionary behaviour sheds light on the often-conflicting concepts of art as a contemporary practice: its function and how it is valued.

In my view, it does not make sense to suggest that one aspect of the development of art trumps the others. Of course, focusing on the development of one or another aspect of the story may help bolster a present-day argument as to what art should or should not properly be, but in that sense it is simply being ideologically selective and strains the wider evidence. Understanding the diverse threads that are woven into art behaviour does give us insight into anomalies and contradictions that lie beneath the fabric of contemporary art as it is understood from political, commercial, institutional and community perspectives; perspectives that in turn yield such divergent interpretations and value sets.

The importance to my overall argument of disentangling and assaying these evolutionary processes is in understanding the variety of drivers for art and the shifting hierarchies of ascendancy of those drivers. All too often, art is defined in terms of a narrow set of qualities – beauty, connoisseurship, cost, criticality, dogma, elitism, functionlessness, instrumentalism, luxury, rarity, rigour, taste, transcendence and so on – which may even be claimed as inherent and immutable. My argument for a more democratic approach to art is not that one

size should fit all, but that art is and has always been many things; many processes with many ends. Here I borrow Wittgenstein's idea of *Familienähnlichkeit*, which proposes that things that are understood to belong to a larger type or descriptor do not do so because they all share a common feature, but because they are connected by a range of overlapping 'family likenesses' (Wittgenstein 1953).

As an example, Wittgenstein takes the word 'game'. Clay pigeon shooting, football, charades and solitaire are all games, yet it is hard to say what quality or feature links them together and why. Clay pigeon shooting is a game but military target practice is not. Charades is a game, but theatrical improvisation is not. Football and charades are competitive and solitaire is not, while clay pigeon shooting may or may not be depending on the context. If we add tag, tiddlywinks and tossing the caber to the list, we begin to see how diverse the things we understand as games can be. Yet we have no doubt about the things that are not games, even when they are of a very similar nature.

It is also the case that the values that one associates with one game may not be shared by another. Winning may be all-important in a World Cup football final or a head to head between Bobby Fischer and Boris Spassky. But winning is usually not the focus in a game of charades; it is about having fun. And with solitaire or patience, the player has no opponent, although there is still an element of challenge.

Words also rarely translate precisely from one language to another. The job of the translator is not simply to replace each word in the text with its equivalent in the new language. If it were so, the nascent Google translation system would be a simple system to program. Each language contains words with their own set of family groupings. For example there are many more kinship terms in Chinese than in English; they depend not simply on the relationship, but who is speaking and their relative age and status (Research & Education Association 2003). Even where a language is shared, different cultures can come to apply the same word in subtly different meanings or groupings of meaning. (For example, contemporary vernacular French uses the English imported word 'footing' to

mean what the English call 'jogging'.) This is not to say that the things described – the feelings, tendencies, practices or phenomena – are different, only that they are linguistically (and culturally) aggregated in differing ways. This is not just true of different languages, but also the way different social-cultural groups set value systems and, through these, revise definitions. The thing itself is not culturally relative, it is simply the way in which it is categorised and described. While that can certainly shape the way it is thought about, it does not change the thing itself. A painting does not change as it is viewed by different individuals, but the interpretation of the painting and the meaning attributed to it will almost certainly do so. Drawing on Wittgenstein's idea of 'family relationships' I would suggest the following analogy.

A student researching her family history might aspire to noble blood. She explores her antecedence and, finding a royal ancestor, she constructs a family tree that demonstrates her lineage to the regal forebear. In doing so, she will see a definitive set of relations. Her brother may seek to understand his artistic sensibility by researching the professions of his predecessors and any artefacts or documents handed down through the generations. His family tree would seek to demonstrate the inheritance of creative talent. The two family trees illustrate quite different results, yet brother and sister share exactly the same ancestors. What separates them are the different value systems through which the information is filtered and these, in turn, influence what is considered significant.

It is important then to separate the phenomena from the words used to describe them. As discussed in Chapter 1 (see page 38), every known culture includes at least some of the practices that we in the West call 'art', yet many languages do not have a specific word for art in the western sense. When anthropologists argue that art is a European invention, and archaeologists and ethologists that art is universal, they do so because the former is describing the set of phenomena grouped under a linguistic label and the latter are describing the products and practices themselves. The practice and phenomena we know as the arts are universal; but their grouping and valuing under the heading of 'the

arts' is culturally relative. The mistake is to assume that the practices and phenomena themselves are relative when in fact they are founded on the shared universal of human nature.

In fact, even within the European tradition, the term 'art' has been understood to encompass a changing family of practices. For the ancient Greeks, poetry and drama were central and visual arts, except sculpture, were peripheral (and sculptors themselves were considered lowly manual workers even while their sculptures were venerated) (Hauser 1951). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gardens were considered major artistic works,¹⁷⁴ while in medieval times music was considered a branch of mathematics.¹⁷⁵ If we look outside the European tradition, the range widens further. High Islamic art includes calligraphy, carpets and coins. Swords and teapots are prized aesthetic objects in Japan. Definitions and hierarchies within the family resemblances encompassed by the word 'art' change with shifting social values, just as my exemplary brother and sister created different family trees that underwrite their personal aspirations.

It is not simply what is or is not gathered into the definition that changes value (and changes with evaluation); words take on different qualities in different contexts, even when they describe the same phenomena. To go back to Wittgenstein's example of the word 'game': to evoke the nature of games in the wider sphere of life can carry very different valuations. On the one hand, it can point to a philosophical profundity or a strategic advantage. The poet, Henry Newbolt, famously drew a parallel between the stoicism and team spirit learned on the school cricket pitch and the endurance and camaraderie demanded of a soldier in battle. Both must "play up, play up and play the game" (Newbolt 1892).

174 In 1770 Horace Walpole wrote "Poetry Painting and Gardening, or the Science of Landscape, will forever by men of Taste be deemed Three Sisters, or the Three New Graces, who dress and adorn Nature" (Ross 2001, xiii).

175 In medieval pedagogy, music was taught within a group of subjects that also included arithmetic, astronomy and geometry (together known as the quadrivium).

In the field of applied mathematics, game theory is an important and widely used tool of strategic analysis employed in disciplines as diverse as economics, engineering, biology and international diplomacy. On the other hand, however, to be accused of game playing by a colleague, a police officer or a lover would suggest a lack of seriousness or even duplicity.

So too, the term 'art' describes not only a set of practices, but also a set of values (good or bad) associated with it. Defining what is and what is not art is rarely done through consideration of generic types; rather, it relates to perceived quality. Bad art is not really art at all. To be arty could mean to be creative, or it can be used dismissively (as in arty-farty). Artful can be accomplished and elegant or cunning and untrustworthy (as with Dickens' Artful Dodger). Values attaching to the family name of 'art' not only vary from culture to culture, but also within a given culture from one context to another.

I emphasise this point because sometimes in the discussion of art and its role in the wider life of society, the definition can slide back and forth between generic descriptor (art is the product of artists, be it good, bad or indifferent) and qualitative valuation (art as a significant expressive achievement of humankind; bad art is not, in fact, art at all), without acknowledging this change of use.

Evolved Drivers of Art

Why is it useful to examine the art of Palaeolithic times and speculate upon the context of its making in relation to contemporary arts policy?

In looking to find ways to build a fairer and more egalitarian approach to arts policy-making we come up against the challenge of diversity: cultural, educational, familial, economic and so on. In a multi-cultural democracy, how do we lay down the foundations for a fair approach? One way is to ask if there are shared human traits relating to the arts that run so deep as to be considered 'pre-cultural'; more fundamental than the many differences that have arisen as cultures diverged and consolidated, and social and economic strata emerged. I

suggest that there are, and that these traits may hold the key to understanding the things that human beings share while still avoiding an overly deterministic notion of how diverse cultures are conceived and expressed today.

In Chapter 6 I explored some of the neurophysiological responses that evolved through natural selection and were later exapted as fundamental components of aesthetic response. Many of these are closely associated with paying attention and shared attention. That is, they do not shape the meaning derived from what is looked at, heard or touched, but they reward the focusing of attention and the closer interrogation of the subject to discern its relation to the viewer, listener or toucher. Importantly then, the pleasure 'reward' comes with paying attention and not with finally discerning or defining meaning.

I demonstrated that we share a common perception of colour, due to the physiological and nervous structures involved in sight and, while these may be (and are) interpreted differently by different cultures, the general weighting of colour sense is a shared human universal.

Finally, there is a relationship between complicatedness and attention, with rising cognitive load engaging the mind progressively until a point is reached where overload means that the detail is lost and a new lower order of complexity is perceived or we simply construe the pattern as 'noise', with, in both cases, a falling away of attention. The response to complicatedness and the level at which increasing detail and irregularity becomes less able to hold our attention varies from person to person. The more familiar one becomes with engaging and analysing complicatedness, the higher the level of complicatedness one can tolerate or even enjoy before it is perceived as simply random noise. That said, those differences due to experience appear to sit between limits defined by our general human faculties. It is also the case that the human mind is much more attuned to some kinds of subtle complication than others; the fleeting micro-expressions of the human face being one such example. Here, there are cogent adaptive reasons why such a skill would have evolutionary benefit since, as a social species, understanding the mood and intentions of others is important for

an individual's success within the group and in relation to outsiders from other groups. This is especially true because, as a species, we have learned ways to mask those feelings and intentions when it suits us.

If natural selection has bequeathed us as a species with such aesthetic building blocks, those forms of evolutionary selection which are about choice, albeit choices influenced by other inherited traits, have tended to shape values we now associate with the arts as a discrete area of human activity.

I would argue that the mechanisms of sexual selection and group selection described in this chapter contribute to the way we conceive of, and attach value to, the arts. In this case it is not the outcomes of these forms of selection (the equivalents of the peacock's tail and bowerbird's nest) that are most significant, but the mechanisms themselves and the values that accrete to those mechanisms. Sexual selection and group selection offer two broadly opposing value systems that inform choice: the one focused on competition, individualism, waste, spectacle and discrimination; the other on cooperation, community, economy, shared attention and mutuality. As such they offer, I believe, models on which two distinct ways of conceiving and valuing the arts are based: the one of art of exceptionality – the rare, 'useless', precious, spectacular creations of inspired 'genius'; the other of art as an expression of the life of a community, as John Dewey put it, with an emphasis on participation, interpersonal connection, intensification and empathy. These models and their associated value sets are, of course, extremes. They define polar opposites located at either end of a continuous scale.

Art markets tend towards the end associated with sexual selection. I would suggest that this is to be expected, since the market trades art as a luxury object, and luxuries are by definition uncommon. Being uncommon, they become symbolic of status, with the 'exceptional' qualities attributed to the work perceived as transferable by association; to be acquired by – and so be understood to attach to – the owner. Much of the emphasis of arts council policy is towards this form of art and the idea that monetary value is an adequate metric

for cultural value and artistic worth. For those areas of funding that do address the community, such funding is seen instrumentally as a way of solving a problem. As such, community art becomes a form of therapy for the disadvantaged, the troublesome and the dispossessed. There is, of course, nothing wrong with seeking to engage these groups with art, but why isolate them from the wider community while doing so? Why not work to engage the wider community actively in the arts *including* those who are disadvantaged, troublesome or dispossessed *within* a comprehensive concept of interconnectivity: a conversive community?

Puzzles for Profit

In contemporary society, fine art has increasingly become a luxury commodity and status symbol. These, as I have suggested, are qualities associated with the evolutionary processes of sexual selection.

Damien Hirst's diamond-encrusted skull, *For the Love of God* (2007), caused a sensation in the artworld when it sold for fifty million pounds, becoming the world's most expensive piece of contemporary art (Byrne 2007). The life-sized platinum cast of a skull encrusted with 1,106 carats of diamonds is a display of ostentation no peacock could match and, as it turned out, no buyer could afford. The work was purchased by a consortium including the artist and his dealer, with an investment bank chipping in some sixteen million pounds which, it is surmised, would about cover the cost of manufacture (Luscombe 2012). *For the Love of God* was a demonstration of fitness in which the art object (like the peacock's tail) is not important in itself, but rather as a guarantee that the owner is so 'fit' as to be capable of such an excessive display. And the fact that the artist and his business associates bought their own work was a sign he could not afford to be seen to fail in the act of fiscal consummation.

For much of the twentieth century, the division between high arts and popular culture was marked by a recalibrating of relative values. Popular culture could no longer be thought of as low culture because greatly improved production

values generated ever more affective content. Good was no longer extraordinary and, as Pierre Bourdieu describes, notions of excellence in contemporary art shifted from skill and rarity to complicatedness (Bourdieu 1979). We live in very different times from the small, egalitarian bands that roamed the inhospitable landscapes of the Pleistocene in search of food and shelter. Today, the individual can feel adrift in the seas and oceans of national and global economies. Perhaps inevitably there is a tendency to erect barriers and wedge open fractures to distinguish tribes with which to identify, defining others as in some way oppositional, justifying one's rejection of them and so 'simplifying' one's relation to the world.

In such cases the focus of art appears to abandon the field of the things we share, to focus instead on difference; not as the source of richness and understanding, but as a means to segregate and judge. Wendy Steiner has argued that such strategies tend to welcome the controversy of scandal in the interests of fomenting sensation rather than seeking truth. She expresses despair that "in the shrill, scandalous, often *unenlightened* history of modernism, [in which] the rewarding values of aesthetic experience – communication, mutuality, understanding – are seldom in evidence. Instead, our attention is focused on social fault lines, differences in belief and behaviour dramatised by sublime scandal" (Steiner 2001, 94, emphasis in original).

Living in the twenty-first century is, of course, a complex undertaking. An elegantly conceived work of art can, if executed well, bring a useful degree of emotional and perhaps intellectual insight to such complexity. Art which addresses complexity with a view to opening up a clear field for shared attention is undoubtedly a valuable and useful thing. But, at the other end of the spectrum, is complicatedness for its own sake or perhaps even as a means to segregate; a complicatedness that lacks or perhaps even rejects the shared inheritance that "tugs at our very core", as Guthrie puts it (Guthrie 2005, 12). Steven Pinker, an advocate of evolutionary psychology and an outspoken critic of the excesses of the contemporary artworld, takes a hard line: "The dominant theories of elite art

and criticism in the twentieth century grew out of a militant denial of human nature. One legacy is ugly, baffling and insulting art. The other is pretentious and unintelligible scholarship. And they're surprised that people are staying away in droves?" (Pinker 2002, 416).

One may ask why anyone bothers if this is the case. The answer lies in the context in which many of these puzzles are operating. In artworks with a high degree of infolding, the key to determining meaning may not in fact be located in the artwork or in the cognitive skills of the viewer, but in what is already known about the artwork by those within the artworld: what the catalogue essay tells us, what we remember of the strategies of the artist, what we read online, what we heard over cocktails... It is a puzzle for which the crib sheet is posted in plain sight for those in the know. This can tend to three problematic concomitants. The first is that the complexity of the wrapper does not need to have any clear mechanism for its unfolding. Obfuscation is sufficient since the intended meaning is available without the effort of unfolding, though knowing the meaning can suggest that the viewer did indeed solve the puzzle. If the enfolding is so complex, so tight, so dense as to render it unopenable, then this may be portrayed as a demonstration that the viewer who knows the meaning is of exceptional intellect and sensitivity. The second concomitant is that the puzzle does not need to have a very compelling solution, or even a coherent one, if we already know what the answer is supposed to be. The third is that, once untangled, the answer is often banal: 'sexism is bad', 'racism is bad' 'relationships can be messy' and so on... As Steven Pinker has observed: "the political messages of most postmodern pieces are utterly banal ... but they are stated so obliquely that viewers are made to feel morally superior for being able to figure them out" (Pinker 2002, 416).

If the language used to discuss contemporary art has become excessively complex, this may not simple be pretentiousness or complicatedness for its own sake, but a more disturbing function of language used to disenfranchise. The Canadian writer, John Ralston Saul (who is currently the president of PEN

International, the worldwide association of writers), is clear about the insidious nature of such a linguistic shift:

The wordsmiths who serve our imagination are always devoted to communication. Clarity is always their method. Universality is their aim. The wordsmiths who serve established power, on the other hand, are always devoted to obscurity. They castrate the public imagination by subjecting language to a complexity which renders it private. Elitism is always their aim. The undoubted sign of a society well under control or in decline is that language has ceased to be the means of communication and has become a shield for those who master. (Saul 1992, 8-9)

As the educationalist, Paulo Freire, emphasised, knowledge emerges only through the restless process of invention and re-invention that demands the active involvement of the learner in partnership with the teacher. It cannot simply be deposited from 'one who knows' to the empty cognitive 'bank account' of one who does not; such a process constitutes not the education of the learner in any true sense, but, as Freire makes clear, their oppression (Freire 1970).¹⁷⁶ As such, a language of mutual understanding must be used if that partnership is to be real and the quest for new understanding true.

In other contemporary art strategies, images from popular culture are gathered up and re-presented in the gallery, the idea being that the aesthetically and intellectually focused cultural context will lead the viewer to question and deconstruct the ethical issues that such images evidence. Adam Gopnik, writing in the *New Yorker*, was of the view that such work

is intended to be socially therapeutic: its aim is to make you face [these] socially constructed images ... so that by confronting them – or, rather, seeing artists confront them on your behalf – you can make them go away. The trouble is that the entire enterprise of 'disassembling social images' rests on an ambiguity in the way we use the word 'image'.

176 See page 171 et seq for further discussion of Freire's ideas.

Mental images are not really images at all, but instead consist of complicated opinions, positions, doubts and passionately held convictions, rooted in experience and amendable by argument, by more experience, or by coercion ... The view that visual clichés shape beliefs is both too pessimistic, in that it supposes that people are helplessly imprisoned by received stereotypes, and too optimistic, in that it supposes that if you could change the images you could change the beliefs. (Gopnik 1994, 138-139)

One reason for the success of this kind of work is that much art is made for the market or with public funding. It is difficult for artists to make any really powerful political statement, since he or she cannot afford to alienate the source of income. Hito Steyerl is of the view that “radical art is nowadays very often sponsored by the most predatory banks or arms traders and completely embedded in rhetorics of city marketing, branding and social engineering” (Steyerl 2010). And so an elaborate dance is performed in which those that pay tolerate a mild chastisement, which ultimately demonstrates that they are big enough to be open to criticism while releasing them from the need to change; meanwhile, the artists adopt the moral high ground and appear to have something useful, perhaps even profound, to say about the world. This adds to the value of the work and the kudos it brings to the owner. It is a process that plays to the strengths of the market and the weaknesses of the customer.

But then satisfying the weaknesses of the customer is becoming disturbingly prevalent in the marginal upper reaches of the art market: the globalised art fairs. These extravagant jamborees are currently rising on a bow-wave of money accruing to the already rich through the neoliberal redistribution of wealth. In the past ten years, the number of people in the world with liquid assets of \$30 million USD or more has risen from some 77,500 to 211,000, while, over the same period, sales of contemporary art at auction have risen fivefold (Maneker 2014). It might be said that, in this dizzyingly rarefied environment, money and the power it brings have become the new artform. Benjamin Genocchio, reporting on the 2014 Art Basel in Miami concluded that “art sells in nanoseconds at art fairs to people who not only don’t understand it, but really

don't care. The juice comes from the emotional rush of the competition for the purchase, plus bragging rights at dinner afterwards; it's not the physical object that's exciting" (Genocchio 2014). This sounds a lot like the displaced values of sexual selection which interpret showy waste as signifying exceptional fitness, where such showy waste is of no intrinsic interest in itself, since it has no adaptive benefit. Indeed it makes the individual significantly less resilient in the face of change. The spectacular inherited trait may attract another generation of mate, but if and when the environment shifts it could well become a millstone, just as the inflated price tag on an overhyped artwork may plummet as fashions change taking status and equity with it. But perhaps this risk simply adds piquancy to such plutocratic pastimes.

Such desultory phenomena are, thankfully, restricted to the hyper-wealthy, although, in a culture besotted with celebrity, these are often the players and artworks that receive the greatest media coverage.

The Disenfranchised Community

For the past half-century, the arts arising from the evolutionary process of group selection – with their emphasis on shared attention, participation and empathic connection – were either delivered through mass media to a largely docile audience or relegated to the domain of the hobbyist.

Community arts on the other hand, place the individual at the creative centre, giving him or her 'a voice'.¹⁷⁷ The focus is towards the exploration of one's place within the community and the celebration of the individual's skills of making. For much of the postwar period, community arts were restricted to the

177 I am using the term 'community arts' here to describe those arts that arise from and operate within communities. I am not limiting the discussion to those forms currently defined under that heading by various arts councils or other limited notions of community arts, which tend to focus only upon certain specific groups defined by special needs and operate in an overtly instrumental way. And, as I have emphasised before, I use the word 'community' as a flexible, multivalent term to describe the way in which human beings conceive of themselves in social groups, across a wide range of scales.

sphere of the needy amateur and as a form a therapy for the debilitated. However, the beginning of the twenty-first century has seen a growing interest in and the valuing of community arts, the pro-am and the skilled amateur. Bill Ivey, a former head of the NEA, has proposed a useful way of thinking about culture in terms of the 'expressive life' of the citizen and the community.

Our expressive life is made up of two equally important components: the history, community connections and shared knowledge that give us a sense of belonging, permanence and place – our cultural heritage – and the counterbalancing area of accomplishment, autonomy and influence: our individual voice. (Ivey 2008, 285)

I would argue that this concept of an expressive life of the individual within the community draws on the qualities of mutuality, bonding, shared attention and active participation that arise from group selection. However, it involves more than simply expression for its own sake because, as the evolutionary psychologists, Tooby and Cosmides, propose, it is in the process of active imaginative engagement that one comes to understand the new (see page 366 et seq). To be actively engaged in one's culture is to hone the skills of understanding and adaptability by having the confidence to take hold of and shape one's own sense of self and one's sense of locatedness in the life and history of the community. As such, it has the capacity to help citizens to become more resilient in the face of change and more assertive in their active participation in collectively shaping the outcomes of change.

In 1996, the NEA ran a series of six forums across the United States to explore in detail attitudes to the arts. In his report of the forums, *American Canvas*, Gary Larson emphasised a theme that resonated throughout the six discussions.

In enshrining art within the temples of culture – the museum, the concert hall, the proscenium stage – we may have lost touch with the spirit of art: its direct relevance to our lives. In building an intricate network of public and private support, the thousands of institutions over

the past four decades, we may have stressed the specialised, professional aspects of the arts at the expense of their more pervasive, participatory nature. In the process, art became something that we watch other people do, usually highly skilled professionals, rather than something we do ourselves. (Larson 1997, 59)

Consequently, as Henry Moran, executive director of the Mid-America Arts Alliance, conceded: “We may have nipped off the very grass roots of support that we need now and that may have come about from our fascination with the role of institutions within the cultural ecology” (Larson 1997, 59).¹⁷⁸ The Los Angeles attorney and cultural activist, Alberto Duron, shared this concern, emphasising that this was not simply about strategies of survival for the not-for-profit arts sector but, more pressing still, the disconnect between the arts community and the wider society in which they live and work, and claim to serve.

The arts can't help to ensure liveable communities for tomorrow unless the arts establishment undergoes a wholesale overhaul. From the teachers, schools and student bodies in art schools, to the staffs at art museums and performing arts centres, and the gallery system, all these institutions must be opened up to the communities which they now claim to serve but don't. ... And until it addresses its own failings, the arts community will be powerless to effect any real change in the larger society. Until arts institutions begin to forge closer ties with the communities around them, in other words, they will remain largely irrelevant, just so much costume jewellery on a body politic that has its mind on other, more pressing, concerns. (Larson 1997, 76-77)

Has the current division between maker and consumer generated a situation where art now seems like a decorative addition to life and not a necessity for its flourishing? Are the creative practices and experiences of ordinary people to be construed as irrelevant to our creative culture; unworthy of

178 Established in 1972 and based in Kansas City, the Mid-America Arts Alliance is one of six not-for-profit regional arts organisations funded in part by the NEA. Its remit spans Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas, but the organisation also operates beyond state boundaries to include national and international programs and arts activity.

the nomination of art? If so, then we have, in attempting to maintain the value of art through insistence on professionalisation, reduced it to the base materiality of a commodity. It is in the connecting of art with life as it is lived – of a culture with its people – that we are enriched and mutually engaged. In that case, art is valued not by its price tag, but much more highly, for its essential place in daily life. In the words of Bill Ivey:

The benefits of a vibrant expressive life – the autonomy, engagement and achievement over a lifetime that can only come from music making, painting, writing or acting – can't be reserved for the super-talented few. It is not enough for the rest of us to be passive consumers; rather, we must assert our right to the knowledge and skills needed to make art and live the creative life that sustains us over a lifetime. (Ivey 2008, 97)



In this section, I have looked at the biological, evolutionary and sociological ideas as to how aesthetic behaviours and systems of value might have arisen over the long arc of time before recorded history. I am not seeking to dismiss complex affective human responses by demonstrating that they have an electro-chemical basis, but to emphasise just how deeply these aspects of aesthetic feeling are embedded in all of us. They are not the temporary subjective response of individuals shaped by the blandishments and threats of a hegemonic power (although, of course, they can and do become subject to attempts by such powers to manipulate the *meaning* associated with those responses, all too often successfully). Neither are they borne of the refined taste acquired through 'good breeding' and education (although as one learns more about an art one may come to appreciate it in a different way, and upbringing can certainly influence if and how that might happen). Our aesthetic sensibilities are founded on experiential qualities held in common. The fundamental building blocks of art are shared.

My research in this area suggests that aesthetic feeling and human engagement in art are fundamental and universal: that art is interpersonal,

beginning either as the expression of mutuality or as a call to attention, both of which are based in the act of 'making special' through which symbolic value accrues to the artefact (or activity); that beauty is founded in the material universe and embedded in our own evolution, and not simply a relativistic and subjective construct. However, the association of art with, on the one hand, luxury, display, individualism, elitism and 'uselessness', and on the other, community, connectivity, mutuality, empathy and intensity creates a paradox that can be hard to resolve.

Given the diverse range of objects and ideas that cluster under the rubric of 'art', could it be that most of these hypotheses are in fact right, at least to an extent? There is no prototypical 'first artist', no aesthetic Adam or Eve from which art can trace its lineage. Art is a diverse set of practices in which we see Wittgensteinian family resemblances in a family tree that diverges as we look back or project forward. One could ask why we more readily understand art to be in the gallery and museum and not the home and neighbourhood. One could also ask whether other cultures would draw this family tree differently. Such questions engage the way in which an individual or a culture discerns meaning within aesthetic form, enshrining it as 'special'.

How did the aesthetic traits described in Chapter 6 (the 'building blocks') and the art behaviours described in this chapter come together? What was the motivation to 'make special' and how were the products of art first used and interpreted? And what, if anything, can we say about the evolved psychological and neurophysiological processes that unpin art activity within the community? I will explore these questions in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8

The Palaeolithic and the Present Day

One November day in 1879 a Spanish nobleman and amateur archaeologist called Marcelino Sanz de Sautuola (1831–88) and his eight-year-old daughter, Maria, were exploring their estate at Santillana del Mar in Cantabria, northern Spain.¹⁷⁹ They went to see a cave that had been exposed a year or two earlier when heavy rains had caused a landslide. The father had visited before, looking for archaeological artefacts among the debris on the cavern floor, but this was the first time that his daughter had come along. Arriving at the cave they lit their charcoal lanterns and climbed in. De Sautuola began to fossick among the litter on the ground, hopeful of finding arrowheads or prehistoric tools. But while he looked down, Maria looked up ... and exclaimed “Mira Papá, son bueyes!” [Look,

¹⁷⁹ Reports differ on Maria's age, which varies from source to source between five and nine years old, however those who offer a precise age agree on eight years old.

Dad, they're oxen]. They were in fact steppe bison (*Bison priscus*), painted sometime between fourteen and twenty millennia ago during the Upper Palaeolithic (Kuhn 1955).¹⁸⁰

Altamira

The discovery of the cave paintings of Altamira astounded the late-nineteenth-century scientific and artistic worlds. De Sautuola excavated the cave and concluded that the paintings dated back to the Reindeer Age.¹⁸¹ With the support of an archaeologist from the University of Madrid, Juan Vilanova y Piera, he published his findings the following year; to initial acclaim, subsequent scepticism and ultimate ridicule. The artistic quality of the work and its state of preservation lead to accusations of forgery. Surely, the paintings must have been made by a contemporary artist on de Sautuola's instruction. Many thought that, from their artistic style, they were no more than twenty years old (Freeman 1994).

Certainly they sparked more than purely scientific interest. Over the years a number of contemporary artists made a pilgrimage to the caves, among them

180 The Palaeolithic describes a period of human history extending from a little over two and a half million years to 11,700 before the present (BP), marked by the development and use of primitive tools. The Upper (or Late) Palaeolithic begins with an increasingly sophisticated use of tools and ends with the advent of agriculture. It was a period subject to repeated glaciation that ran from 50,000–10,000 BP, during which time all humanoid species became extinct except *Homo sapiens*, which spread out to every continent except Antarctica.

181 The Reindeer Age was a nineteenth-century term for the Upper Palaeolithic, so named because of the large number of reindeer found at that time in northern and eastern Europe. They flourished in the cold climate of the last glacial age (20,000–17,000 BP) and were first domesticated towards the end of this period. Wild horses and mammoths were also prevalent. Hunting became a major source of food as well as providing substantial quantities of bone, horn, skin, sinew and, while the mammoth lasted, ivory. These materials were used in new technologies and arts, replacing wood (which would have become scarce) and flint (which, at cold temperatures, becomes brittle making it a less efficient material from which to manufacture tools.)

Miquel Barceló, Joan Miró and Henry Moore. Pablo Picasso is said to have visited and declared: “After Altamira, all is decadence!”¹⁸²

The suspicion in the scientific world arose from four fundamental concerns:

1. The cave paintings were unique, nothing like them had been seen before.
2. During the nineteenth century a number of archaeological hoaxes had been perpetrated that included laying false evidence at sites of excavation.¹⁸³
3. Evolution was considered a linear process, with innovations building gradually from one age to the next, and yet these paintings appeared to possess an almost Modern sensibility.
4. Perhaps most profoundly, art in the late nineteenth century was seen as a sophisticated expressive aesthetic form created by highly cultured and uniquely talented individuals for its own sake. How could our ancestors, barely more than ‘intelligent apes’, have made such images before the dawn of civilisation?

As the century came to a close, three more painted caves were discovered and slowly scientific opinions changed.¹⁸⁴ The problem of ‘uniqueness’ faded, and interpretations of the paintings turned from the decorative and expressive to the mystical. Palaeolithic artworks were explained as “the object of worship”, liturgical icons before which prehistoric men performed ceremonies to ensure

182 This quote may be apocryphal as there is no record of Picasso’s visit in the Altamira guestbooks; however his admiration for Ice Age art has been noted by acquaintances including Brassai and André Malraux (Keats 2013).

183 For example, according to the *Times*, London, of 19 March 1867, ‘Flint Jack’ (Edward Simpson) was imprisoned in 1867 for faking fossils, flint arrow-heads, stone axes and other imitation antiquities.

184 All three caves were discovered in south-west France: La Mouthe, Dordogne (1895), Pair-non-Pair, Gironde (1896) and Marsoulas, Haute-Garonne (1897).

good hunting in the belief that an animal must stay close by the place where it is represented pictorially (Reinach 1903, 257-266).¹⁸⁵

The study and interpretation of cave paintings in western Europe was, for many years, dominated by one man: Henri Breuil (1877–1961). Abbé Breuil was a priest who, with the permission of the church, devoted his life to the study of prehistory. He had a talent for drawing animals and made many fine sketches from Palaeolithic art, becoming a world authority who few could gainsay (Pfeiffer 1982). He firmly believed that the images of animals in the caves were created for sympathetic magic whereby the behaviour of animals to be hunted could be influenced through their representation in image form. This he saw as a kind of proto-religion and, in the dark mysterious chambers of the deepest caves, he sensed the pre-echo of ecclesiastical space (Hitchcock; Pfeiffer 1982; White 2003).

Thus, the theory of art for art's sake was replaced by another explanation for cave painting: that it was art with a use, and that use was practical magic (Richard 1993).¹⁸⁶ The explanation was attractive because it proposed a direct link between the paintings and day-to-day Palaeolithic life and survival. It also harmonised with the ideologies of many of the archaeologists working in the late nineteenth century. On the one hand, it suggested a supernatural dimension that might be considered the first budding of formal religion, on the other, it associated art making with work, a strong ethical and motivational concept in the high-industrial age. Thus, two views of the mystic symbolism of cave art developed in the first half of the twentieth century: that it was a form of

185 "These paintings formed the object of worship, dedicated to the species over which they (prehistoric human beings) wanted to have power and influence simply by the representation of these individuals. ... the ceremonies (by prehistoric human beings) taking place in front of these paintings were probably aimed at ensuring the proliferation of elephants, wild bulls, horses, deer as their usual source of food; it was also to attract as many of them as possible close to their cave, from the principle of wild physics [Reinach's term for sympathetic magic] consisting of influencing a spirit or an animal in recognising the representation of their body and deciding their place of residence accordingly" (Reinach 1903). [trans. Noella Lopez]

186 The theory that parietal art was used in magic had been first formulated in 1880, but so strong was the current idea that art was made for its own sake that it did not gain widespread acceptance until the turn of the century (Le Pôle International de la Préhistoire).

sympathetic magic to bring good fortune in the hunt (Breuil 1952); and that it sought to enhance fertility or fecundity (Laming-Emperaire 1962; Leroi-Gourhan 1964).

As the century progressed opinions came to settle on explanations of sympathetic magic, often strongly held. Writing a little after the Second World War, Arnold Hauser asserts "All the indications point ... to the fact that [parietal art; ie: cave painting] was the instrument of a magical technique and as such had a thoroughly pragmatic function aimed entirely at direct economic objectives ... Any other explanation of Palaeolithic art, as, for example, decorative or expressive form, is untenable" (Hauser 1951, 4-5).

Hauser's hypothesis described a less 'religious' and more directly supernatural interpretation of the painting, not as ritualistic symbols but as pragmatic acts of magic. "When the Palaeolithic artist painted an animal on the rock, he [believed that he] produced a real animal. For him the world of fiction and pictures, the sphere of art and mere imitation, was not yet a special province of its own, different and separate from empirical reality" (Hauser 1951, 4).

However, this leads him nonetheless to argue that art making was a specialism that led to professionalisation. He echoes the idea prevalent in the mid-twentieth century that the finest of the paintings were so good that one must inevitably conclude they "were done not by dilettanti but by trained specialists ... who formed a professional class of their own." The many lesser works also found in the caves are interpreted as "pupils' drawings" which Hauser proposes – quoting research by Miles Burkitt and Hugo Obermaier – point to "an organised educational activity at work, with schools, masters, local trends and traditions." He concludes that "the artist-magician, therefore, seems to have been the first representative of specialisation and the division of labour" (Hauser 1951, 17-18; Burkitt 1933; Obermaier 1931).

Hauser suggests the emergence of a professional or institutional hierarchy, with art making as the defining skill, supported by sufficient surplus of food to relieve that individual from the tasks of hunting and gathering. He goes on to

speculate that it is around this time that art divides into the “sacred and profane”. The religio-magical creations of the former becoming the province of men, while the “merely decorative” crafts described by the latter “probably lay entirely in the hands of woman and may have formed a part of the activity of the home” (Hauser 1951, 18).

So, returning to the fin-de-siecle debate about the authenticity of cave art, this new mystical explanation found favour, linking as it did the instrumental and the metaphysical; the animist and the economic; the institutional and the domestic. It was an attractive argument in harmony with prevailing notions of art, spirituality and human evolution, not to mention gross gender stereotyping. This explanation, along with the discovery of Palaeolithic polychrome paintings at the caves of Font de Gaume at Les Eyries in the Dordogne region of France in 1901, won over all but the most recalcitrant of the scientific community. At the congress of the French Association for Scientific Advancement held in Montauban on 14 August 1902, the authenticity of parietal art was finally accepted by the great majority of those attending (Bahn 2001).

Enter the Alaskan

Seventy-seven years after that historic meeting in Montauban, Dale Guthrie stood up to speak at a symposium on Palaeolithic art in Sigriswil, Switzerland. Guthrie is a palaeobiologist from Alaska with an interest in archaeology and ethology, he is also a sculptor and recreational hunter, and he drew on all of these skills in preparing the paper he was now presenting, which hypothesised non-magical interpretations of cave paintings. As he spoke, he was surprised to sense the room become “taut” with what appeared to him “an unaccountable underlying tension”. Echoing the earlier divergence between the aesthetic-expressive and the mystic-instrumental interpretations of cave painting, the room polarised, as Guthrie puts it,

“along a dividing aisle as in C. P. Snow’s *Two Cultures* (1959)”.¹⁸⁷ In this case, two distinct paradigms: the one interested in “the symbolic significance and spiritual motivations” of art and the other seeking, within the artworks, clues to the life of our ancestors (Guthrie 2005, viii).

Guthrie undertook a detailed study of the Palaeolithic art of northern Spain and southern France looking not only at the most sophisticated paintings, but at the many less perfectly formed drawings. His focus was not so much on the virtuosity of these images as on the clues they offered about the human context of their making. As a naturalist, he views humans as evolving organisms like any others, with “a core adaptive nature and an array of propensities through which learning is modulated” (Guthrie 2005, 4). His training gave him a familiarity with recent ecological and evolutionary theories that had been largely ignored by anthropologists in the twentieth century. In his examination of the evidence, he applied forensic techniques to find out more as to the nature of the art-makers, while his background as a sculptor and a hunter brought practical insights into the making of art and the psychology of hunting (Guthrie 2005).

At that time, many anthropologists assumed a correlation between living nonliterate tribal cultures and our Palaeolithic ancestors. In contrast, Guthrie argues that present-day tribal culture, with its mystical and often opaque symbolism, is quite different from that of the Upper Pleistocene era of Palaeolithic peoples. The present-day cultures studied by anthropologists as analogous to those of Palaeolithic peoples – Inuit, Bushman and Aboriginal – have already undergone the cultural and economic changes brought on by the post-Ice Age environment with its shifts in the relative dominance of certain flora and fauna. During the Pleistocene,

187 Charles Percy Snow, a British physicist and novelist, argued in his Rede Lecture of 1959 that there had been a damaging breakdown between the sciences and the humanities. It has been a controversial view, but the phrase ‘two cultures’ is popularly used (as perhaps Guthrie is doing here). Simon Critchley has suggested that the division echoes that between the romantic and utilitarian positions of Coleridge and Bentham, as described by John Stewart Mill (Mill and Bentham 2004) and, more recently, that between analytical and so-called ‘continental’ approaches to philosophy. A division that he sees as peculiarly English, although he recognises that there are different forms of this division that are distinctly American, Canadian or Australian (Critchley 2001).

human groups remained very small and scattered. Survival depended upon “exquisite attention to one’s natural surroundings” (Guthrie 2005, 404). They were less concerned with considerations of the future and had little need for internal organisation, characteristics which become much more prominent in the larger tribal groupings of the post-Pleistocene. The Palaeolithic groups were, essentially, small bands of people living in relative harmony with each other and relative isolation from others (McClellan and Dorn 2006).

A band constitutes the simplest form of human society, usually no larger than an extended family or clan (Kottak 2010). They tend to be egalitarian, characterised by loose organisation and consensus decision-making (Erdal and Whiten 1996). Their survival, which would have focused firmly on their relation with the natural world, was a result of adaptations to “a fundamental human ecological niche”; a niche that demanded, not religious mysteries, but a “close approximation between the outer reality and our inner perception and interpretation of reality”. While supernatural themes may have been included in the mix, Guthrie argues they did not dominate, but were only a part of the cultural “mosaic” (Guthrie 2005, 10).

These Palaeolithic paintings include a significant level of naturalistic detail, much more than in the mythograms of later tribal art. The archaeologist, Jean Clottes, France’s Inspector General of Decorated Caves, concluded from this that the makers may have been motivated by creative enjoyment and pleasure in a skill executed well (Clottes 1989). Though this is not a view shared by many others with regard to Palaeolithic art, it does pre-echo Richard Sennett’s view that craftsmanship is “an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake” (Sennett 2009, 9). And it chimes with Ellen Dissanayake’s research which led her to conclude that art has its deepest roots in the act of ‘making special’ which, she claims, is “as distinguishing and universal in humankind as speech or the skilful manufacture and use of tools” (Dissanayake 1988, 92).

Guthrie is a naturalist in both the sense that he studies nature and that he holds to the view that the world should be understood wholly in natural terms, without recourse to supernatural explanations or spiritual forces. In explaining the strong support for the mystical view of Palaeolithic art, Guthrie points to the context in which many of the first cave discoveries were made. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the church still played a significant role in academic institutions. Most of these early Palaeolithic finds were made in countries that were predominantly Roman Catholic and a number of the key archaeological scholars of the time were members of the clergy.¹⁸⁸ This context tended to predispose the interpreters to animist explanations and to feel within the dark, imposing caverns the presence of the sacred, which they then projected onto their Palaeolithic ancestors. However, just because the remnants of Palaeolithic art are to be found in caves sealed from the environment for millennia does not mean that this was the only place they were made, but rather that these are the only examples sufficiently well protected from the elements to remain intact. The descriptor ‘cave art’, like that of ‘cave man’ or ‘cave lion’, describes where the archaeological evidence was preserved, not the limits of their day-to-day location at the time (Guthrie 2005).

Guthrie concludes that “many Palaeolithic works do not seem to bear any obvious imprint of ritual or magic but, rather, express more casual and earthy themes” (Guthrie 2005, ix). His forensic research suggests that both sexes and all ages were involved in making such pictures. He hypothesises that much of this work is in the nature of storytelling, of tall tales of the hunt and of adolescent sexual fantasy. Far removed from the rituals of the shaman, many of the works seemed more akin to graffiti. As outlined above, he draws a clear distinction between Palaeolithic art and present-day ‘tribal art’. One should not confuse the description

188 The dominant figure was Abbé Henri Breuil, but other priest-archaeologists included: Abbé Bayol, Abbé Bouyssonie, Abbé Cau-Durban, Abbé Glory, Abbé Landesque and Abbé Lemozi in France, and Abbo Carballo and Abbo Sierra in Spain (Guthrie 2005).

of late Pleistocene humans as having modern physiologies with a suggestion that they also had the kinds of modern behaviour found in present-day tribal communities. As the anthropologists, Sally McBrearty and Alison Brooks, warn:

our lists of modern behaviours are derived from populations living today or those alive in the relatively recent past, who all are or were products of their evolution and history. Past human populations were products of different histories, and the qualities stressed in our lists of modern behaviours may have had little relevance for our ancestors. (McBrearty and Brooks 2000, 534)

Rightly, I think, Guthrie sees the relationship between industrial and post-industrial societies and latter-day tribal communities as divergent evolutionary developments from common Pleistocene forbears. They should not be interpreted as relative stages along a notionally shared trajectory of 'progress' which would somehow construe tribal culture as 'primitive'. Indeed, from this perspective, he suggests that the modes of expression in Pleistocene art are much more open to our modern comprehension than the complex symbolic languages of tribal cultures today simply because the contemporary cultures have taken divergent paths from what was an earlier shared ancestry (Guthrie 2005).

Guthrie offers an alternative interpretation of cave art; one which is not always palatable to the received wisdom of those disciplines which have tended to hold sway over earlier interpretations: archaeology and art history. Indeed, as the natural historian, Joanne Cooper, notes, "Guthrie frequently offers practical insights [which are] outside the experience of most palaeontologists and archaeologists" (Cooper 2007, 209).

Aldona Jonatis, Director of the Museum of the North, University of Alaska Fairbanks, acknowledges the "meticulous scholarship" of Guthrie's research, which she considers "provides a great deal of accurate and valuable information about European Palaeolithic" arising from "an anthropological rather than art historical perspective" (Jonatis 2007, 127-130). However, she is concerned that Guthrie places too much emphasis on the testosterone-driven imagination of

young men caught up in the thrill of the hunter's chase and not enough on a spiritual understanding of the cave art. She questions how much one can impute about the behaviour of people in the Pleistocene from contemporary ethnographic observation. I would agree that this may well be a failing and, in my view, it is the same failing that projects spiritual and religious meaning onto artefacts from the Pleistocene. As Cooper points out:

Given the ritual religious background of most of our historic European art traditions, it is to be expected that we try [to] interpret Palaeolithic art in a similar way; this is our dominant inherited cultural perspective and is what we are used to doing when we see art. We can try [to] overlay that perspective on Pleistocene culture, but it is always going to be an uncomfortable fit. (Cooper 2007, 209)

Testosterone, however, is a physiological substance, albeit with a psychological effect. Given what we know about human evolution, it is more reasonable to assume testosterone operated in similar ways as it does today given that the brains and bodies of *Homo sapiens* in the later Pleistocene were essentially those of modern humans (Bradshaw 1998; Junker 2010).¹⁸⁹ Of course, we cannot be sure the psychological effects were the same, but it seems reasonable. I would suggest that it may be more reasonable than projecting cultural constructs of spirituality, or intellectual ones of cosmology, when attempting to interpret the archaeological evidence.

What the archaeological record currently available does indicate is that evidence of art activity predates the earliest forms of religious ritual by many millennia. Evidence of aesthetic activity is first found at least 100,000 BP (Henshilwood, d'Errico, and Watts 2009). If one includes Acheulean hand axes made with greater refinement than that required for simple functionality and in sizes too large for practical use – things 'made special', to use Dissanayake's

189 DNA analysis of remains suggests that anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) arose around 200,000 BP (Bradshaw 1998).

phrase – then that date pushes back to at least 240,000 BP (Currie 2011). It may even reach back as far as 400,000 BP (Consoli 2014). Meanwhile, the earliest ritualised burial so far discovered – an infant interred with perforated *Conus* shells – dates back no further than 70,000–80,000 BP (Grün and Stringer 1991; Coe 2003).

Indeed, Boyd is of the view that art must have preceded religion, since it was dependent on the development of narrative invention. He argues that stories, if they are to hold a listener, must do something more than describe the everyday.

To merit attention, stories select the striking, unusual characters or events or both. Recent research shows we remember best those stories with characters that violate our categoric expectations, crossing one animal and with another, or combining human and animal, or separating the psychological from its usual physical constraints (Atran 2002). (Boyd 2009, 115)

Drawing on the work of a number of researchers (Boyer 1994, 1996, 2001; Barrett 1996, 2004; Kinderman, Dunbar, and Bental 1998; Atran 2002), he goes on to point out that “we make an early and lasting distinction between agents and nonagents, between the animate and the inanimate, and we are prone to overattribute agency: it is safer to suppose a bush is a bear than the other way around” (Boyd 2009, 115). Thus, he argues, it is the imagination borne of a growing art sensibility that makes it possible to entertain notions of the magical and the spiritual. “Religion ... needs art as a precursor” Boyd writes. “Without the existence of stories that diverge from the true, without the first fictions, religion could not have arisen. Religion depends on the power of story” (Boyd 2009, 115).

Exit the Neanderthal

Guthrie’s description lays emphasis on the tendency to sharing and mutuality rather than appeal to an external, perhaps supernatural force. He and other writers, such as Dissanayake, consider that Palaeoart played an important role in developing the sense of mutuality upon which community and cooperation is built

(Dissanayake 1988, 1992, 2000; Boyd 2009; Dutton 2009). Indeed, Boyd argues that the ability of art to engage attention is of considerable evolutionary significance, since it is how we involve others in play. Play is, of course, important in cognitive development and, in many ways, Boyd builds a detailed evolutionary rationale around ideas that go back to Friedrich Schiller's concept of a 'play drive'. However, lone play – play only directed inwards – would not be useful or healthy.

Without shared attention, the sustained self-stimulation of cognitive play could lead into hermetic private worlds ... that would be disastrous for creatures whose strength lies in their sociality. But *with* the force of human shared attention, the benefits of cognitive play ramp up in powerful ways, social and individual, to produce a plethora of functions. (Boyd 2009, 100, emphasis in original)

Objects that had been 'made special' (to use Dissanayake's term) and commanded attention (as Boyd argues) would have acquired a significance beyond the ordinary; symbolic value. As such they would have been useful in processes of diplomacy; smoothing meetings between bands and helping to oil the wheels of trade. Portable objects such as carved bone and tools made from unusual minerals were exchanged as ways to develop mutual respect between bands as a prelude to trade and barter. Rahul Oka and Agustin Fuentes have argued that the development of this kind of economic reciprocity was what allowed *Homo sapiens* to survive, while *Homo neanderthalensis* became extinct. They propose that changes in climate did not put humans and Neanderthals in direct conflict, but rather that both species were in 'scramble competition'.¹⁹⁰ While there is some evidence of localised and infrequent exchange in Neanderthal society, Oka and Fuentes conclude, citing research by Horan et al, that "the volume of this exchange as shown in the archaeological record is miniscule compared to that for

190 'Scramble competition' describes a situation where limited resources required by more than one group or species results in the survival of those who best adapt to accessing those resources. This contrasts with 'contest competition', where groups or species are in direct conflict with each other to win all such resources.

modern humans [*Homo sapiens sapiens*]” (Oka and Fuentes 2010, 15; Horan, Bulte, and Shogren 2005).

The success of humans over Neanderthals was by no means assured. Neanderthals were built more compactly and robustly, and so physically better adapted for the changes in climate. Some writers, such as Jared Diamond, have suggested that a violent and aggressive human nature drove our ancestors to exterminate Neanderthals (Diamond 1992). However, this view is challenged by Donna Hart and Robert Sussman who have proposed that in fact hominins were not natural predators given to excessive violence. Quite the reverse. They were, it is claimed, a prey species. As such, it would be important that they had strong social and cooperative behaviours combined with subtle and perceptive understanding of the behaviour of others, including other species. The well-developed social and cooperative behaviours of *Homo sapiens* gave them an advantage (Hart and Sussman 2011). Adrian Treves and Paul Palmqvist, working independently from Hart and Sussman, draw a similar conclusion, stating that early humans “would have adopted more cohesive and calmer social organisation to maintain vigilance and reduce conspicuousness to carnivores” (Treves and Palmqvist 2007, 370).

While it is now understood that Neanderthals made tools (Rossano 2010; Douka and Spinapolice 2012), had the necessary morphology and genes for speech to have been possible (Albanese 1994; Barney et al. 2011; Bannan 2012; Roberts, Dediu, and Moisik 2014) and even had rudimentary forms of art (Zilhãoa et al. 2010; Peresania et al. 2011; Finlayson et al. 2012; Rodríguez-Vidal et al. 2014), the archaeological evidence indicates they were less cooperative and had many fewer reciprocal relationships with other Neanderthal bands than humans had with human bands (Horan, Bulte, and Shogren 2005). Humans, being the more social species, developed the behaviour of art making as an expression of mutuality, imbuing certain artefacts with symbolic value (making them special) (Dunbar 2003; Gamble 2011; Pearce, Stringer, and Dunbar 2013). These artefacts

were exchanged with other bands in the process of establishing reciprocal networks, many of which extended over long distances.¹⁹¹ Such relationships not only allowed them to trade commodities, but also share genes and knowhow, making them more rapidly adaptive and more resilient in the face of change. That resilience lay not in their physique, but in their subtle mutuality and strongly cooperative strategies, cemented and maintained through art making and exchange (Horan, Bulte, and Shogren 2005; Economist 2005).

The fields of archaeology, anthropology, ethology and Palaeolithic economics are wide, and many theories and much evidence has been put forward regarding the origins of art making as a human behaviour. But, among the more recent literature, the central role of mutuality and reciprocity has become increasingly evident. Within this framework, art is seen neither as a form of instrumental magic nor simply as a way of conveying meaning, but as a way of *connecting*. As such, I would argue, it was important that artefacts and images, while they had significance and represented familiar subjects, were valued precisely because the process of creating meaning was *shared* with the recipient. This helped to attach to the artefact a sense of personal significance, one which connected the inner experience of the individual with the collective experience of the group involved in its making.

Combining a multi-disciplinary training (natural history, anthropology, ethology, archaeology, forensics, ecology and so on) with his personal experience of art making and hunting, Dale Guthrie is able to make the imaginative leaps to a new, more naturalistic and ultimately more human interpretation of the fragmentary clues from our ancestral prehistory. He is trying to understand who we once were in the knowledge that with each fresh insight into our past we come to reappraise who we are today. The qualities that cement these disciplines

191 There is evidence of regular exchanges over 200 kilometres and some of up to 1,000 kilometres (Soffer 1985; Oka and Kusimba 2008).

and lubricate the movement of ideas across the intellectual plane are his humanity and his modesty in situating our species amidst, and not above, the rest of the living world. Guthrie expresses it this way:

Our humanness arises from and exists in an earthly context, and we share with Palaeolithic peoples many evolutionary constraints, strengths and propensities. We can track a tentative route between the late Pleistocene and the present, despite the yawning differences, because evolution is our loadstar. Our shared evolutionary past makes for a common relief in our topography; we share behavioural propensities, learning some things with downhill ease and others with tremendous uphill effort. Under our quilt of cultures, similar genes influence our learning and guide our diverse experiences. We do not always conform to these slants and tilts, but we feel their tugs at our very core. (Guthrie 2005, 11-12)

Thus, Guthrie concludes that there are underlying tendencies in our genetic hardwiring which form the foundation on which our cultural structures are built in all their rich diversity and the experience of the individual is connected at a deep level with that of others. The forensic analysis provides some evidence that the behaviour of Palaeolithic image making was something that involved all members of the band – or at least representatives of all types of member: young and adult, male and female, skilled and naive. It would appear that, in its naissance, art was a collective enterprise whose object was building mutuality.

Mirrors and Pictures

Guthrie has pieced together evidence that sheds useful light on the context of the making of Palaeoart and suggests something of the impetus to make images, but he does not deal in any depth with the process by which the *skill* of scratching, drawing or painting images might have emerged. The cave paintings of northern Spain and southern France display a level of sophistication – indeed this was one of the reasons it was initially hard to accept they had been made so long ago. Examples of simple scratched shapes and lines have been found that go back

much earlier than these works, but they do not suggest a gradual conscious process of learning ‘how to make art’. What mental and manual skills were needed to create this work and how were they first acquired?

As I will demonstrate, that question leads to something more than a single description of the evolution of a skill in drawing, to suggest much deeper mechanisms in play that are essential to the life of a social animal such as *Homo sapiens* living in a community.

Derek Hodgson has proposed a mechanism for the development of art as interplay between certain psychological traits and peculiarities of the environment. Central to this hypothesis is to argue that Palaeolithic hunters saw, in the contours of the cave wall and roof, shapes that reminded them of animals encountered when hunting. That is, art began not as the direct leap to representation, but as the intensifying of shapes in nature that suggested a potential representation.¹⁹² The initial phase of the skill of image creation would have been to amplify that shape and add to it. This in itself is not a new idea. A number of those analysing parietal paintings have noted the synergy between the line of the artwork and the formations of the rock surface. Picasso was of the view (presumably based on research at the time) that:

If it occurred to man to create his own images, it's because he discovered them all around him, almost formed, already within his grasp. He saw them in a bone, in the irregular surfaces of cavern walls, in a piece of wood. One form might suggest a woman, another a bison, and still another a demon. (Brassai 1966, 70)

And the world historian, William McNeill, in considering Guthrie's ideas, was prompted to speculate that “the paintings and engravings – maybe not all of

192 E. O. Wilson suggests that this process might be akin to what Gregory Bateson and Tyler Volk call ‘metapatterns’ – simple patterns in nature that help us to recognise more complex objects (Bateson 1988; Volk 1995; Wilson 1999).

them, but many – weren't adding animals on top of the rock but were a means of pulling out of the stone the animals that were already there" (McNeill 2006).

What Hodgson does, however, is to build a much more detailed and cohesive description of the psychological and neurological processes of such amplification and embellishment. His hypothesis also offers an explanation as to why parietal art should focus to such an extent on large and ferocious animals; doing so without demanding the development of a cognitive rationale linking animal, maker, image and some desired outcome. His proposal has three elements.

First, drawing on the work of a number of researchers, he establishes that there is a common neurophysiological mechanism that underlies mental visual representation. This is true whether it involves perceiving, remembering, thinking, imagining or dreaming (Shepard 1984; Kosslyn 1996; Farah 2000).¹⁹³ The neural structures dedicated to the visual perception of actual events are also harnessed in visual imagining and remembering (Kosslyn and Thompson 2003). This, Hodgson notes, is consistent with our understanding that visual perception is a product of top-down "visual memory templates" and bottom-up sensory input, with the former being of greater influence (as described in Chapter 6, see page 292) (Hodgson 2008, 342).

His second point is that memory is laid down parsimoniously and unevenly, with an emphasis on salience. Events of great stress or excitement are retained vividly, but selectively. For example, people in danger tend to focus on the source of the danger and not on peripheral details, a phenomenon known as 'weapon focusing'. In such cases a witness to an attack may be able to give clear and accurate description of the weapon used, but be vague about other information

193 Interestingly, this latter-day description resonates with the Aristotelean concept of *phantasia* (φαντασία), which he proposes to account for the nature of perceptual experience beyond simple sensation, extending into memory, dreams and desires. It should be emphasised here that *phantasia* is *not* fantasy or imagination or even an image in the 'mind's eye'; it does not describe more modern notions of creativity or visual invention. As Victor Caston explains it "has more to do with things appearing a certain way in experience than with our inventing imaginary scenes" (Caston 2009, 323). Indeed, Aristotle argues repeatedly in *On the Soul* and again in *On Memory* that we inevitably use *phantasia* whenever we think.

such as the face of the assailant (Schacter 2008). As outlined in Chapter 6, this correlates with the way in which noradrenaline, released in times of intense stress, strongly focuses attention, while stimulating the laying down of memories (see page 300). Consequently, Hodgson argues, it is the outline and bulk of the animal that is remembered, as one would expect in the fray of bringing down a large beast. These are the salient cues on which the hunter must focus while assessing the fast-moving and dangerous struggle to bring down a large animal, if he is to avoid being butted or crushed. Thus, as one would expect in paintings and drawings made from the memory of such an experience, Palaeoart tends to focus on bulk and outline of the body and head of the large animals represented, and less upon the legs and feet, which are often disproportionately small when compared to skeletal remains (Hodgson 2008).

Finally, Hodgson goes on to describe the phenomenon of ‘hyperimagery’, a term he uses for a perception that blends real and imagined in an apparent whole. While, as described above, this may not be accurate in a naturalistic sense, he considers that it stops short of being hallucinatory. Rather, it is a subjectively weighted recall. Again, this is a function of the way in which sight is a hybrid of top-down ‘visual memory templates’ and bottom-up sensory input.¹⁹⁴ Such phenomena can arise in contexts in which external sensory inputs are reduced while internal arousal is either heightened or significantly reduced from normal levels. This leads to a shift in dynamic in the mechanisms that balance the relationship between internally generated visual memory templates and externally perceived visual stimuli (Horowitz 1975). The reduced inputs, due, for example, to low lighting conditions or featureless surfaces, create ambiguity. Meanwhile, the raised or suppressed level of arousal either promotes activity in the visual systems of the

194 Aristotle describes *phantasia* as the subjective reassembly of the trace or echo of perceptual experience (Caston 2009).

brain or leaves them to 'free wheel'.¹⁹⁵ Such changes in level can result from long periods of concentration or anticipation and from fatigue and sleep deprivation; the kinds of situation which might arise during or immediately after a long hunting foray. Hodgson goes on to argue that such hyperimagery may also be influenced by the condition of the individual at the time. For example, hunger would tend to lead to a focus on food, anxiety to a concern about predators, sexual arousal to erotic imagery and so on (Hodgson 2008).

According to this description, the process of early image making did not begin as a conscious act of recalling a memory in order to reconceive it in terms of line and colour, subsequently rendering those lines and colours through the adept and dexterous use of tools. Rather, it was the amplification of what the maker perceived in the blend of memory templates and evocative contours and cracks in the rock. Perhaps, in my words not Hodgson's, this is more akin to tracing and colouring than drawing and painting as we understand them today. But those simple acts of tracing and colouring depend on sophisticated, if not consciously revealed, psychological connections, of which the strongest is between the subjective experience laid down as memory and the interplay of that memory with a heightened, but incomplete, visual perception of the environment sometime later.

Ahmed Achrati has built on Hodgson's hypothesis to propose that 'mirror neurones' play an important role in the neurophysiological mechanisms that led to cave painting and, more generally, the visual arts. Drawing on a wide range of examples of Palaeolithic art from around the world, he describes the importance of mirror neurones in the cognitive functions of imitation and empathy (Achrati 2013).

Mirror neurones were first identified in the early 1990s and are known to exist in higher primates including humans. The term describes neurones that not

195 If one feels anxious while walking alone in the dark, one tends to sense every slight visual and aural stimulus and interpret it as potentially dangerous. There are, of course, sound evolutionary reasons for such an adaptation; better to be over anxious than foolishly insensitive to possible danger. On the other hand, if one is relaxed and not thinking about anything in particular, one's mind will wander and daydream.

only respond when one performs an action or feels an emotion, but also when one *observes* that action or emotion in another. Marco Iacoboni has argued that, for social animals such as upper primates and humans, mirror neurones play an important role in detecting and interpreting the actions and intentions of others (Iacoboni 2009). It is the particular quality of mirror neurones that they affect not only perception, but action. That is, the perception of an action or emotion in another can trigger motor neurone signals that create a somatic 'experience' in the viewer that echoes that in the viewed. While the motor signals may produce a *sense* of action, they usually stop short of initiating the action itself. Nonetheless, the sensation of a physical or emotional experience passes into consciousness and is felt as though the viewer is sharing bodily what is happening to another. This happens before the viewer consciously begins to analyse what is being witnessed and so any rational analysis of the situation is already coloured by a somatic intersubjective sense of how he or she would respond if experiencing the same situation personally. (Achrati 2013)

To illustrate this, Achrati refers to experiments conducted by David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese in which subjects were assessed for their somatic and emotional responses to Michelangelo's marble sculptures *The Captives* or *Prisoners* (1520–23 and 1530–34) and Goya's series of aquatint prints *The Disasters of War* (1812–15). Freedberg and Gallese describe the responses of their subjects as follows.

[I]n the case of Michelangelo's *Prisoners*, responses often take the form of a felt activation of the muscles that appear to be activated within the sculpture itself, as if in perfect consonance with Michelangelo's intention of showing his figures struggle to free themselves from their material matrix... In looking at scenes from Goya's *Desastres de la Guerra*, bodily empathy arises not only in responses to the many unbalanced figures, where viewers seem to have similar feelings of unbalance themselves, but also in the case of the frequently horrific representations of lacerated and punctured flesh... In such instances, the physical responses seem to be located in precisely those parts of the body that are threatened, pressured, constrained or destabilized. Furthermore, physical empathy easily transmutes into a feeling of empathy for the

emotional consequences of the ways in which the body is damaged or mutilated. Even when the image contains no overt emotional component, a sense of bodily resonance can arise. These are all instances in which beholders might find themselves automatically simulating the emotional expression, the movement or even the implied movement within the representation. (Freedberg and Gallese 2007, 197)

This somatic involvement felt when viewing an artwork is called 'embodiment' and is, importantly, considered to be a sensorimotor process and not a conceptual one (Arbib 2010).

Our capacity to pre-rationally make sense of the actions, emotions and sensations of others depends on embodied simulation, a functional mechanism through which the actions, emotions or sensations we see activate our own internal representations of the body states that are associated with these social stimuli, as if ... we were engaged in a similar action or experiencing a similar emotion or sensation. (Freedberg and Gallese 2007, 198)

Such neurophysiological responses create a powerful sense of intersubjective connection through the somatic simulation of an experience, which engenders a sense of empathy in the viewer.

Simulation is a kind of imitation, emulation is another; but they are not the same. As Achrati notes, simulation is distinct from emulation in that emulation is task-oriented, with the emulator working out his or her own means by which to achieve that particular end. Simulation involves engaging with the way it *feels* to perform the action, somatically and emotionally, but may well not include the enacting of the action itself. Thus, there is a clear distinction between the imitative responses of embodiment (the somatic and emotional mirroring of that which is observed in another) and the imitative process of, say, drawing (Achrati 2013).

However, Achrati argues that this difference narrows significantly when one considers self-imitation. Self-imitation also involves mirror neurones "helping to monitor one's own actions so as to learn how to deploy motor skills efficiently"

(Achrati 2013, 8). Thus, returning to the description of parietal art, Achrati describes a process by which the image-maker might progress from amplifying a hyperimage to the more controlled act of drawing. Achrati argues that this progression is driven by a powerful sense of intersubjectivity associated with embodiment *combined* with a reflexive iterative process through which novel actions are refined and laid down as a reliable repertoire of skills. Both processes involve mirror neurones and so, he concludes, are closely linked. If true, this would suggest that empathy and the skill of art making are intimately related in the wiring of the brain.

The subject of mirror neurones remains open, but may prove to be a useful field to watch in terms of the insights into the relationship between empathy and art making it might offer at a neurological level. While many scientists do now agree that mirror neurones exist, the exact way in which they operate is still debated. However, many of the phenomena observed, such as the subjects' responses to certain artworks described by Freedberg and Gallese, while they may not yet be precisely understood at neurological level, do point to strong correlations between viewing and somatic feeling. Whether this is brought about by mirror neurones or by more complex conceptualising mental processes, those responses are deeply embedded within us.

I believe there are good reasons to consider this to be more likely than not. First, the intense connection between mother and baby described by Dissanayake and others, which is essential in ensuring the commitment of parent to child during the extended period of neoteny, would reinforce the mechanisms of empathy from birth. Second, the tendency to feel shared emotional states with other members of the band would have helped cement social cohesiveness. Third, the ability to sense the emotional state of, and anticipate the actions of, others would have had an adaptive benefit in terms of more effective group cooperation, especially in high stress situations such as hunting big game. Fourth, similar skills would ensure the effective reading of situations of trade or conflict with strangers. And finally, when empathy is extended to other species, it may have

played an important role in anticipating the behaviour of prey or predators and, later, in the domestication of animals such as dogs and horses, where an intuitive bond can develop between human and animal.¹⁹⁶

The field of mirror neurones and the neurophysiological mechanisms of empathy are still in their infancy, but in time they may prove fertile areas for future research into the complexity of the human mind, our sense of empathy and the cognitive and emotional mechanism of aesthetics. For now, my concern is less with defining the exact neurophysiological process involved than with emphasising the universal and embedded nature of those responses; responses which many in the field believe to be innate. If this is the case, then empathy should be understood as a basic human quality and not an acquired sensibility.

The association of art with empathy is, of course, not a new idea.

Art and Empathy

Etymologically, empathy derives from the Greek word *empathēia* (ἐμπάθεια), which translates literally as ‘in suffering’ or ‘in passion’ (‘en’ meaning ‘in and ‘pathos’ meaning suffering or passion). In the writings of Aristotle and Plutarch, the term is understood to mean ‘being influenced by’. In 1873, the word was adapted from the Greek by the philosopher, Robert Vischer (1847–1933), to coin the German term *Einfühlung* (to feel within) to describe aesthetic sympathy or the way one might project or connect one’s own feelings into a work of art. In his lectures on experimental psychology of 1909, Edward Titchener translated the word *Einfühlung* as empathy (Titchener 1909; Wispé 1987).

The concept was criticised by Berthold Brecht as naive, as he considered that it led to an uncritical immersion in an artwork, which encouraged complacency in the audience rather than motivating them to press for social

196 While empathy is usually understood to be restricted to animals of the same species (conspecifics), in humans it has been shown to extend to animals (de Waal 2010; Edgar, Nicol, and Clark 2012; Parviainen 2003).

change. In contrast, Brecht developed a theory of *Verfremdungseffekt* (a defamiliarisation effect or estrangement effect) (Brooker 1994).¹⁹⁷ Brecht described *Verfremdungseffekt* as “playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience’s subconscious” (Brecht 1964, 91). To some extent, Brecht is acknowledging the original meaning from the Greek that is carried inside the modified meaning of *Einfühlung*. That is, to feel an emotional connection – to equate the feeling one perceives in another as a feeling in oneself – is to open oneself to being influenced by emotions that are not fully rationalised. To set this within Hume’s moral epistemology that ethics are a product of sentiment – of the way we feel about something – the danger is that simply feeling empathy could confirm or influence an ethical assessment without sufficient conscious consideration of its implications.

My own position is to stand back a little and see empathy as means. The end to which it is put can be good or bad, that depends not only on how it is employed, but on the ethical beliefs of the one making the assessment. Empathy does not always confirm the comfortable prejudices of the viewer. In his serialised stories, Charles Dickens described, and helped to engender a sense of empathy for, the less fortunate members of Victorian England. His motivation was social change and empathy proved an effective way in which to penetrate the bourgeoisie carapace of comfortable self-satisfaction. His novels had the capacity to evoke a powerful concern for his characters. In 1841, a British cargo ship carrying the fortieth and final instalment of *The Old Curiosity Shop* caused a riot when it docked in New York as a horde of readers desperate to learn the fate of the tale’s protagonist, Little Nell, stormed the wharf (Baddeley 2012; Garber

197 While *Verfremdungseffekt* is often translated as ‘alienation effect’, Peter Brooker considers this in error, arguing that a more accurate term might be ‘de-alienation’ (Brooker 1994).

2013). Dickens was passionate about social change and his novels created powerful empathic connections in the reader that did more than simply evoke an aesthetic reflex for a fictional character; it shed light on the real and present plight of the weak and impoverished by asking the reader to stand in their shoes. Karl Marx declared that Dickens “issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together” (Kucich and Sadoff 2011, 141).

In terms of the argument I am proposing, empathy is an important intersubjective ‘carrier’, a means by which emotional insight can be gained by experiencing, as a simulation within oneself, what one perceives in another. Because the process is non-literal, it avoids the deconstruction of the perceived feeling into abstract concepts (and then symbolic form) in order to transmit them from one person to another. Even in literature (as demonstrated by Dickens) the words describe a situation or a character; metaphorically they ‘paint a picture’. Our empathic response draws on what we perceive in the totality of that word-picture as drawn in the mind’s eye. Dickens does not tell us what to think, but rather constructs a narrative filled with characters that enact what we then imaginatively perceive and with whom we come to relate and perhaps even identify. Of course, a novelist can present evidence that is not available to the individual in day-to-day dealings, such as insights into the thought processes of a given character. The writer can also amplify certain aspects of the depiction and minimise or ignore others. Empathy in art is not naturalistic, but it is, I would argue, *human*.

Empathy does not necessarily mean that you take ‘what I say’ in exactly the terms of ‘what I mean’, but rather that the ‘what you say and what I understand you to mean’ is received, assessed and shaped in a dialogue with ‘what I feel and remember about the world’. Your communication of experience interplays with my experience, and the result is a perception and, from that, an idea, a feeling, an evaluation ... and this, through the artwork, connects us.

Beyond the Cave

We build our understanding of prehistory from fragments which we piece together in the imagination as best we can. In 1994, a further cave was discovered at Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc in the Ardèche region of southern France. Radiocarbon dating has shown that the paintings were made 32,000–31,000 years ago, establishing them as some of the oldest yet discovered (Klein and Edgar 2002). At the current stage of knowledge, the archaeological finds from the Upper Palaeolithic peoples of western Eurasia are the earliest undisputed examples of representational art that offer something of a coherent picture.¹⁹⁸ Upper-Palaeolithic artworks demonstrate two striking qualities. First, they are distinctly different from those made by present-day nonliterate tribes. Second, despite the many scattered bands that are likely to have existed at the time, the artworks display a remarkable unity of form, style and subject matter that spans some 30,000 years. While this could simply be the slow transmission of an acquired style across the long periods of time involved, it does suggest that the making of art grows as an expression of something within and not simply as a formula passed from one band to another either as a conscious transfer of skills or as a copying of styles found by others in the caves.

One must be careful, of course, not to argue that because something has a historical precedence, or occurs naturally, that it is necessarily right. Such a line of argument would involve a naturalistic fallacy. My method is to *begin* with the view that, in a democracy, our visual culture (at least that part which is funded by government using tax income) should be open to the many, not the few. Art is a

198 Boyd and others argue that given the quality of execution of the most accomplished of these cave paintings one must assume that they represent an already well-established art practice that could go back another thirty millennia (Boyd 2009). McBrearty and Brooks eloquently dismantle the 'human revolution' theory that 'modern' humans evolved in a sudden acceleration around fifty to forty thousand years ago (McBrearty and Brooks 2000); a 'revolution' that Kevin Greene sees as a romantic attempt to find the 'spark' – the 'soul' – that distinguishes human beings from the rest of nature (Greene 1999).

sphere of intercommunication that is different from, and complementary to, that of spoken and written prose. It is not an intellectual plaything or a luxury commodity, but a profound expression of our humanity that seeks to connect the internality of personal experience with that of others and, through this, establish a sense of empathy. It is the way we speak to ourselves of ourselves.



In Part One, I discussed the development of art as a ‘public good’ in the context of a representational democracy. At its heart is a paradox that in a period of history when universal suffrage and human rights were becoming established, contemporary art – the art made in the present – appeared to be removing further into the hands of the few. The art critic, John McDonald, in reviewing the 2014 Sydney Biennale, was of the view that the selection of work by the artistic director, Juliana Engberg, “suggests the contemporary art scene is an exclusive club open only to those who show their allegiance to certain values – a facile political belonging, a professional ethic that recognises the mechanisms of celebrity and the marketplace, and a cynical relationship to the art of the past” (McDonald 2014, Spectrum 19).

This is not a new idea of the twenty-first century. In a quotation attributed to Pablo Picasso, the artist is said to have declared towards the end of his life:

The people no longer seek consolation in art. But the refined people, the rich, the idlers, seek the new, the extraordinary, the extravagant, the scandalous. I have contented these people with all the many bizarre things that come into my head. And, the less they understand, the more they admire it. By amusing myself with all these games, all this nonsense, all these picture puzzles, I became famous ... I am only a public entertainer who has understood his time.

While this quotation is widely referenced, it is not certain the artist said exactly that. Louis Wright considers it a misattribution (Wright 1968), but it was quoted in a number of magazine articles published at the time (the early

1960s).¹⁹⁹ Juliet Reynolds considers such statements reflect the artist's conflict of affiliations: "Picasso's failure – in fact, a tragedy – was that he became an icon in a grand bourgeois society whereas he was temperamentally built and driven to represent ordinary, simple people" (Reynolds 2003, 55). To me, it is perhaps less important to establish whether or not the often outspoken Spanish artist actually said those words than it is to recognise the way in which they touched a nerve in the wider communities of Europe, North America and as far afield as North-East Asia. In 1965, the quotation was presented in evidence during the congressional hearings into the establishing of a National Endowment for the Arts (US Government 1965, 254).

In my view, these concerns, which are pervasive outside of the inner circles of the artworld, arise because there has been a tendency to neglect the human interconnection between artist and viewer, and the open nature of each encounter; an encounter in which the viewer's experience of the work is shaped by the memories and inner life of the individual himself or herself. In its place has arisen a more didactic notion of art as critique – art with a meaning – with that meaning flowing one-way, from maker to viewer. The viewer's role becomes passive. Yes, the viewer must unfold the puzzle and 'get' the meaning, but this becomes like a riddle rather than a conversation; and a riddle with a crib sheet at that.

Puzzles can be popular: crosswords, Sudoku and Kakuro all regularly feature in our daily newspapers. But puzzles have a solution. Solve it, pat yourself on the back and move on. They can be used to gain our attention and hold it for a while, but not in the way I am describing in relation to art. A puzzle contains the answer like a nut within a shell or the endgame programmed into an interactive video. Art draws and holds our attention because it is not a kernel closed within a shell, but

199 Among the publications reporting this quotation and attributing it to Picasso were *Paris Quarterly*, the US newspaper supplement *Parade* (3 January 1963) and the Japanese magazine *Origin* (No. 12, 1964).

half of a conversation that engages our own interior self. The answer to a puzzle is singular and universal; the fruits of engaging an artwork are diverse, personal and ongoing.

How, then, can something so personal be engaged on a collective scale? How can it be deliberated within the frame of public policy formation?

CHAPTER 9

Policy Frameworks

On Friday 2 August 2013, the world's largest arts festival opened in Edinburgh with a speech by the playwright, Mark Ravenhill. He did not pull his punches. The arts in Britain had lost their way and it seemed quite possible that public funding might very soon come to an end.

We need to have a Plan B. What if the public funding of the arts ... was a passing moment in British life? After all, it didn't even begin until the 1940s, had its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s and has been eroded and shrinking since the 1980s. Historically, that's a very short period of time. Business as usual would be the arts operating entirely within the marketplace with patrons and sponsors. Can you in any way see yourself making your work and speaking to an audience in that context? Or is that so abhorrent to you that you will enter into a massive fight for public investment in the arts over the next few years? And if you are going to enter into that fight – what are you really saying art is for to your community? (Ravenhill 2013)

In Ravenhill's view, the arts had been colluding with a corrupt system in collapse. Artists had tried to be "the best friends of the super-rich and the most disadvantaged at the same time" and the public had begun to smell a rat. He saw

a certain clarity in the harshness of austerity (it established a government “we can properly hate”); a chance to throw off the seductive, but debilitating, rhetoric of New Labour’s ‘scientific’ management techniques and ask what art is for and where an artist’s constituency is to be found (Ravenhill 2013).

Ravenhill’s comments were not the only point of controversy as the Edinburgh Festival Fringe opened; an article written the year before by the comedian, Stewart Lee, remained a hot topic. In his opinion piece in the *Guardian*, Lee had argued that the strength of the Fringe as an open-access forum for artistic experimentation and risk-taking was being undermined by the exploitative commercialisation of the four largest presenters. These multi-platform venues had seceded from the Fringe four years earlier to rebrand as a separate, cotermporal Edinburgh Comedy Festival. While each of the ‘big four’ had a reputation for comedy, their programs encompassed a much wider range of genres making the new festival’s name both confusing and misleading. What was clear was that these highly commercial, heavily sponsored venues were, through their media-schmoozing machinery, beginning to eclipse the thousand or more performances per day taking place across the Fringe (Lee 2012).

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is a completely open event. There is no content filtering: if you can find a venue, stage a production and afford the registration fee to be in the program, that is all that is required.²⁰⁰ For many years this permitted a remarkable array of the good, the bad and the downright bizarre in an environment in which audiences welcomed risk-takers and sought out experiences that would have had no commercially viable future. At its heart, the Fringe was pro-am and amateur. In Lee’s view, it had “been built up, collectively, over six decades, by the work of many hands, mostly unwaged, and if it belonged to anyone, it belonged to the public and performers who had floated it with their own funds for sixty-one years”. The Fringe, he argued, was threatened by an “oligarchy” that was dragging it

200 The fee for 2015 is £295 for the full run and as little as £96 for a short run of just one or two performances (Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2014).

into “the deregulated free-market phase of late capitalism”. It was not that the performers in the big four venues were making a fortune: Lee asserted that many would “agree to shed upwards of £10,000” just to be there, because those venues, with their lavish marketing machinery, were seen as the potential route to a television contract (Lee 2012). The festival was becoming a trade fair, and the ones making the money were the middle men and women – the “new cultural intermediaries” in Pierre Bourdieu’s description (Bourdieu 1979). In an insidious process of commercialised gentrification, those who had built the festival and given it its distinctive character – one that, over the years, has been much copied around the world – were being priced out of the game.

It can cost so much to perform in the Edinburgh Fringe now, and the very people being deterred by these costs are just the sort of independent minds we used to value as a society; the same people now, demonstrably, priced out of further education. It’s another example of the erosion of access, the reversal of social mobility, the entrenchment of privilege, and the gradual silencing of diverse voices. (Lee 2012)

Within the microcosm of debate about the current situation and possible future of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe lie some of the key questions facing the larger community with regard to our cultural life. A cultural life that is not merely a decorative optional extra, but the means by which we come to better understand ourselves and seek to better understand others; the foundations on which we build identity and recognise difference; a field of radical and adventurous thinking and not simply a marketplace of overpriced luxuries and slick mass-produced commodities.

In the preceding chapters, I have traced the development of the arts council movement as the primary means by which public funding has come to support the culture of the community in a number of Anglophone countries. In doing so, I have argued that active participation was initially, and should remain, the underlying principle of such a mechanism while demonstrating the level to which this has been suppressed by the bureaucratic machinery of the institution and the

values embedded in the movement at the point of its final creation. A set of values that took the movement off on a tangential trajectory to the one it had been following in its formative stages.

The advent of the internet and the development of highly interactive social and broadcast media online have facilitated a renewed emphasis on active participation by making available the means to communicate widely and freely. The significant resulting shift in how culture is conceived and who is considered to be a creator of that culture has put substantial pressure on both the arts council systems and on the kinds of institutional networks through which it operates. It has also come to challenge the dominant position of intermediaries, be they recording companies or museum managements; news media or entertainment moguls; critics or curators. Governments have developed ideological conceptions of culture to help them delineate what should and should not be supported. With the persistent rise of neoliberalism since the 1980s and the gravitating of all major parties to a centre right position, emphasis has been placed upon the creative arts as means to generate wealth and a way to resolve social problems more cheaply.

How then might a policy framework be shaped that can better serve the cultural needs of the community now and in the future? How can we go beyond the over-simplified binary opposite of a Left and Right that jostle for much of the same ground under the increasing influence of global corporations? Can we find another dimension to collective valuation and investment; one which, ideally, harnesses the considerable resource within our communities while avoiding the dangers of elitism or the pitfalls of groupthink? How can we recognise that there is not one community, but a community of communities and that any one individual will be a member of a number of these communities at different times and in different contexts? How can we encourage active citizenship and a strong sense of identity that respects and celebrates the enrichment of diversity?

In this final chapter, I will draw on some of the alternative frameworks for cultural policy formation currently under discussion or already in place in certain communities. This will involve not only exploring how decisions are made, but (as

Lee hints at in the extract from his article quoted above) how we approach the important issue of education. How do we encourage creative thinking in young people and help them maintain it in adulthood?

In looking at these options, I will build on the ideas raised in Part Two of this thesis. As discussed in Chapter 7, I believe we can usefully consider the correlation between the two main preference-based mechanisms for evolution and the polar values that mark the extremes of a scale on which art value is defined. Those preference mechanisms set showy, wasteful display as proof of fitness, at one extreme, against the connectedness of communities as a means to defensive sustainability, at the other. In times of uncertainty and rapid change, the former can quickly become a liability, whereas the latter can provide a level of collective resilience greater than that of any one of its individual members alone.

Meanwhile, as we come to understand more about the way the brain evolved and how it functions, we find that many of the pleasure responses associated with aesthetic experience relate not to the determination of meaning, but to the act of paying attention. If aesthetic responses arose through the re-adaptation, or exaptation, of existing traits to new ends – ends better suited to the increasingly complex social interactions of evolving hominins – then, as Brian Boyd has argued, we may consider an important function of art to be the way it encourages shared attention without demanding shared interpretation. This has a direct survival benefit. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the advantage of collective ideation is that it generates a range of possible responses to a given problem, providing a much richer range of options from which to generate the best solution. Recent research into the function of mirror neurones and the apparent involvement of motor neurones in empathic response also leads to the possibility of a strong sense of somatic intersubjectivity between individuals, without necessarily resulting in identical cognitive interpretations of what is felt.

We have the ability to share attention and empathise while retaining a level of independence as to how we respond as individuals. How then do we develop mechanisms for collective decision-making that harness our ability to collaborate while respecting differences in interpretation?

Five Spheres

The arts environment in the twenty-first century can be divided broadly into five spheres, each operating within its own socio-economic ecology: the high-art patrimony, the contemporary art market, commercial mass media, the not-for-profit sector and the communities of pro-ams, volunteers and amateurs. There is a degree of osmosis between these spheres, but, at their core, they are distinct and distinctive, each with its own motivations and populations.

Patrimony

First, there are the arts of the past, which, in the fields of music and performance, require latter-day interpretive artists in order that they might be presented, but which are essentially the cultural patrimony. These forms (to personify a class of art as if it were a class of person) constitute the 'aristocracy'. They sit at the top of any list of the arts simply by virtue of longevity and pedigree. They have been sifted by history and they are deeply woven into our sense of nation and culture. They are, by and large, also aristocratic in that their original creation was at the behest of the temporal and spiritual elites of their day; little in the high-art patrimony arose from the wider community – what remains of their cultural production is more likely to be in a museum of anthropology or social history than in a gallery of art. But, over time, familiarity through recording, broadcast and the provision of public museums and national performing arts companies has helped to bring these aristocratic forms within a larger perception of shared ownership, even for those who do not themselves attend. The aristocratic arts are primarily

sustained by public money augmented by private philanthropy and certain kinds of cache-enhancing sponsorship.²⁰¹ While some areas of theatre also earn a substantive part of their revenue from ticket sales, such earnings are disproportionately low in super-large industrial forms such as opera and symphonic music, and negligible in those areas of the visual arts that are made available to the visitor free of charge.

'Contemporary'

Then there are the arts of the super-rich that circulate in the oligopsonistic contemporary art market to be subsequently showcased in contemporary art museums by their wealthy owners as a form of reflexive public spiritedness. In this sphere, cultural worth and monetary value become interchangeable metrics of status. The media report on art in terms of the size of the price tag. Ironically, at their highest level, the prices achieved at auction for works that are barely a decade old, untested by hindsight and lacking the guarantee of rarity bequeathed by an artist's death, exceed those paid for old masters on the more limited occasions that such historical works come to auction.²⁰² It is a rarefied atmosphere that seems to create a degree of giddy light-headedness in which, more than the art, the bidding contest becomes a narcissistic gladiatorial game and, at the same time, a spectacle of mass entertainment. There is growing criticism of this system and the practices it sustains, with, for example, the writer

201 The recent controversy over the scale and necessity of sponsorship of the Tate galleries (Tate Britain, Tate Modern, Tate Liverpool and Tate St. Ives) by British Petroleum demonstrates the way in which a global corporation with a poor environmental record buys respectability for a very small price. A freedom of information request made in 2012 and subsequently enforced in a court of law saw the gallery finally disclose the amounts involved, which were approximately one half of one per cent of the gallery's annual budget. Anna Galkina, a member of Platform, one of the groups who put pressure on the Tate Gallery to reveal the sums involved, commented: "For nearly a decade, Tate provided a veneer of respectability to one of the world's most controversial companies for [as little as] £150,000 a year. The figures are embarrassingly small for Tate to go on justifying its BP relationship" (Brown 2015).

202 In January 2015, Christies New York recorded its worst old master sales result for more than a dozen years, with lots reaching, in total, less than a quarter of the upper pre-sale estimate (Boucher 2015).

and academic, Suhail Malik, arguing that art (as a more general and open concept) “must leave the field of Contemporary Art” (the label he reserves for commodities in the current neoliberal free-market for the arts of the super-rich) (see page 219).

Mass Media

At the other end of the free-market spectrum are the commercial arts of mass media culture. These are the arts that have mushroomed since the end of the Second World War: television, video, computerised gaming and, to a lesser degree, a resurgent cinema. They have become highly sophisticated while encouraging evermore-passive engagement. In recent years, attempts have been made to create a sense of participation – the possibility that the viewer or listener could shape what is being witnessed. But, for the most part, these are slight modifications at best; a desperate attempt by the mass media’s corporate interests to maintain their grip on entertainments that were once hard, firmly defined cash-generators, but which now drain from their grasp in the free flow of amateur and pro-am online production and sharing. As the role of intermediaries, broadcasters and distributors diminishes, the corporations they have spawned are seeking ways to control and profit from the content circulating online, much of which was made for free. While the corporations are big and powerful, the internet is highly dispersed and protean. If an area becomes too heavily controlled, the hackers who drive much of the internet substructure develop alternatives. They do so in an open way, without a leader or a plan: the wisdom of crowds keeping – so far, at least – one step ahead of the avarice of corporations.

Not-for-Profit

Then there are the not-for-profit arts, supported primarily by government subsidy in countries with high taxation or by a mix of public funds and philanthropic donation in countries where taxation is lower. These are the art forms that grew up with the arts council movement and are sustained by it. They might be thought of as the courtier class of arts, dependent on the patronage of government bureaucracy and wealthy donors. It is an area coming under increasing pressure from several sides. On the one hand, the art-as-industry model adopted by

neoliberal governments demands that art be made within the framework of 'scientific' management techniques with measurable outcomes that should be predetermined. It is a rhetoric employed to suggest an efficient route to, and focus on, innovation; but it is an effective way of ensuring no real innovation is achieved.²⁰³ For all their creative-industries spin, governments and bureaucracies mistrust new ideas, not least because they are hard to control. Rather, the business model provides a paper trail ensuring that, if and when things do go wrong, no one in government or the bureaucracy can be blamed. On the other hand, during a relatively brief period in the 1960s and 1970s, an emphasis on new ideas encouraged by increasing public funds laid an emphasis on radical experimentation, while placing much less on the degree to which such activities could engage an audience. A new generation of artists and arts professionals arose and it was imagined that they would, having cut their teeth in the small-to-medium not-for-profit area, move on to present their work or develop their directorial–curatorial careers in the museum and established performing-arts sector. This was not to be – the pyramid of progression tapered dramatically and narrowed further in the 1980s and 1990s. Instead they stayed in the sector, effectively blocking the way for new generations of artists and curators while maintaining a philosophical disregard for the wider public that was to become increasingly out of step with the times. Analyses of this sector in both the United States and the United Kingdom suggest that this is currently the sector least well adapted to the changing ecology of policy, funding and audience (McCarthy et al. 2004; Ivey and Tepper 2006). Indeed, analysts such as John Knell have suggested that parts of this sector must be allowed to die if new growth and new ideas are to find their developmental niche (Knell 2005).

203 Galbraith wrote of this phenomenon in describing an underlying resistance to change among the political Left in the United States and United Kingdom: "To proclaim the need for new ideas has served, in some measure, as a substitute for them" (Galbraith 1958, 8).

Community

And finally, there are the arts that operate, for the most part, outside of the commercial or funded systems: the domain of the pro-am, the volunteer and the amateur. As discussed in Part One, this segment played an important role in the arts prior to the establishment of the arts council movement and has been once more on the rise since the advent of the internet, though by no means limited to working with online and digital technologies. Indeed (as discussed in Chapter 4), many of those who might be thought of as denizens of the not-for-profit sector are in effect volunteers and pro-ams, undertaking activities with a high degree of skill for which they receive little or no financial reward. Historically, a large part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe belonged to this group. They invested their time and talent in building the festival, using the platform to extend the boundaries not only of who could be involved but also the variety and inventiveness of what might be presented.

Individuals, of course, can be members of a number of different communities at the same time; active within a number of these socio-economic ecologies, or just one, or none at all. But policy cannot deal with citizens on an individual basis, and so my focus is on communities as the most human way of considering what, if any, the collective role in culture might be and what, if any, the specific role of government might be as the representative of the people. To begin to answer these questions I will explore the idea of distributed culture and the processes of deliberative democracy. But first, to set a wider frame of reference I will discuss an approach to government which focuses not on the individual (as with liberalism) or the state (as with conservatism), but on the community.

Communitarianism and Distributed Culture

Communitarianism is a political philosophy that places emphasis on the community. While it recognises the importance of the individual, it understands

that individuals live in, grow from, and are inextricably bound to, communities. The term communitarianism was coined in the nineteenth century,²⁰⁴ but it was only in the later decades of the twentieth century that it came to be applied in the way it is currently understood. Communitarianism encompasses a broad range of approaches and opinions. The ideas on which it is founded reach back through the writings of Ferdinand Tönnies and Hegel to Aristotle's *Politics* (Muirhead 2013; Etzioni 2014). Aristotle argued that what separates humanity from the animals is its sociality. In discussing the governance of the city as a community of citizens he wrote:

That a city then precedes an individual is plain, for if an individual is not in himself sufficient to compose a perfect government, he is to a city as other parts are to a whole; but he that is incapable of society, or so complete in himself as not to want it, makes no part of a city, as a beast or a god. (Aristotle 1912, 1253a)

Contemporary communitarianism is closely associated with philosophers such as Charles Taylor (Taylor 1979), Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre 1981), Michael Sandel (Sandel 1982) and Michael Walzer (Walzer 1983), though not all adopt the name communitarianism for their ideas. More recently, as these ideas percolated into sociology, writers such as Amitai Etzioni (Etzioni 1993) and Robert Putnam (Putnam 2001) became important figures. These writers reject what they consider to be the atomising character inherent in the social contract of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke and the view of human beings espoused by liberalism that their 'natural condition' is individuated, originating prior to and outside of the community.

John Rawls, in constructing a liberal view of justice, argues that laws should be created behind "a veil of ignorance"; that is, when formulating laws those

204 John Goodwyn Barmby (1820–1881), a leader of the British Chartists, first coined the term 'communitarian' to describe the philosophy of the socialist utopian communities founded by Robert Owen (1771–1858).

involved should do so as if they did not know, or were unaware of, their own gender, class, ethnicity, income and so on; thus being able to make unbiased decisions as to what is just. In this way, Rawls argues, laws could be created that were rational whilst leaving the individual unencumbered by the values of the community (Rawls 1971, 118 et seq). Communitarians argue that such a mental state is impossible. Michael Sandel, for example, observes:

To imagine a person incapable of constitutive attachments such as these is not to conceive an ideally free and rational agent, but to imagine a person wholly without character, without moral depth. ... As a self-interpreting being, I am able to reflect on my history and in this sense to distance myself from it, but the distance is always precarious and provisional, the point of reflection never finally secured outside the history itself. But the liberal ethic puts the self beyond the reach of its experience, beyond deliberation and reflection. Denied the expansive self-understandings that could shape a common life, the liberal self is left to lurch between detachment, on the one hand, and entanglement on the other. (Sandel 1984, 90-91)

That said, it would be inaccurate to construe communitarianism as being in direct opposition to liberalism. It shares with liberalism the view that all people should be protected by certain rights, but it goes beyond liberalism in arguing that those rights should come with corresponding responsibilities. As liberalism took on a more extreme form in neoliberalism, the construct of the unencumbered individual became paramount and notions of community were dismissed as fictitious. This was a view promoted by Margaret Thatcher, who was firmly of the opinion that society does not exist, but rather there are only separate individuals and their immediate family (Keay 1987). It is a line of argument that, at an extreme, can be found in Ayn Rand's Objectivist philosophy, which pushes liberal rationalism towards a wholly material understanding of human relations in which there are simply an individual's rights and all property is privately owned. In her book in praise of capitalism, Ayn Rand refutes the possibility of rationally considering notions of community, society or the public good:

'The common good' (or 'public interest') is an undefined and undefinable concept: there is no such entity as 'the tribe' or 'the public'; the tribe (or the public or society) is only a number of individual men. Nothing can be good for the tribe as such; 'good' and 'value' pertain *only* to a living organism – to an individual living organism – not to a disembodied aggregate of relationships. (Rand 1967, 13, emphasis in original)

Communitarianism, on the other hand, argues that what is good and of value can only be determined within the ethics and values of a community; and communities differ one from the other. The objectivity supposed by Rand is impossible since, as human beings, our experience is wholly subjective. Communitarians do acknowledge with liberals that there are certain overarching truths or rights, but these are understood as minimal or 'thin' concepts compared to the 'thick' concepts that arise from the community.²⁰⁵ While liberals see those thin concepts as fundamental, upon which more localised ethics might be founded, communitarians consider such thin concepts to be derived from commonalities identified in a range of thick concepts as they arise across many communities.

Although communitarianism is a relatively small school of philosophy, centred mainly in the United States and United Kingdom, it has recently had an influence on US and European politics: in the United States with Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton;²⁰⁶ in the United Kingdom with both Tony Blair (initially, at least) and David Cameron; in Europe with Jan Peter Balkenende (Dutch Prime Minister 2002–2010), Germany's Neue Mitee party and a number of

205 A 'thick' concept is one that combines a descriptive aspect and an evaluative one. 'Thin' evaluative concepts are general (for example 'good' or 'bad'); 'thick' concepts are specific because they combine not only an evaluation, but a description (for example 'kind' or 'cruel'), which set the general concept within a specific context and attach to that context an evaluation.

206 Hillary Clinton famously quoted the African saying "it takes a village to raise a child" in the title of her 1996 book, in which she emphasises the importance of the wider community on a child's wellbeing, advocating policies that create the best social environment to meet each child's needs (Clinton 1996).

parties in Sweden, Denmark and other Nordic countries. More problematically, certain tenets of communitarianism have also been linked by some commentators to the authoritarian regimes of Park Chung Hee (Prime Minister of South Korea 1961–1979), Lee Kuan Yew (Prime Minister of Singapore 1959–1965) and Mahathir Bin Mohamad (Prime Minister of Malaysia 1981–2003), where the emphasis in each case was on social obligation with little consideration given to individual autonomy and rights.

Over the last three decades, communitarian ideas have been taken up by both Left and Right in British politics. Prior to the 1997 election, UK Labour was seeking a fresh political formulation that pursued a ‘third way’ between, or alternative to, socialism and neoliberalism. In so doing, they actively (even enthusiastically) engaged many of the ideas of communitarianism (Driver and Martell 1997; Levitas 2000). As a political philosophy, it offered, on the one hand, an emphasis on social responsibility that might counter the rampant *laissez-faire* economics of neoliberalism, while, on the other, a way to temper post-war socialist concepts of rights (which were by then considered to be politically untenable) by tying them to concomitant responsibilities. However, having come to power, these communitarian approaches were abandoned in favour of a focus on free-market economic solutions and a top-down authoritarian attitude to personal responsibility. Under Tony Blair, New Labour did not embrace community-led policymaking, but instead centralised the formulation, means and delivery of policy at the level of the state, making little or no reference to the institutions of civil society (White 2000; Daguerre and Etherington 2009).

In 2005, David Cameron became leader of the UK Conservatives. From the outset, he sought ways to distance the party from the harshness that had been associated with Thatcherism and lend it a more compassionate aspect. His emphasis was on social cohesion, introducing discussions of social justice that had not been a feature of UK Conservatism for several decades. At this stage, his rhetorical focus was on ensuring high quality public services such as healthcare and working to strengthen the institutions of civil society, especially the voluntary

and not-for-profit sector (often referred to as the ‘third sector’). Ahead of the general election of 2010, these ideas were brought together under the banner of the ‘Big Society’. Conservatives criticised Labour for Big Government, which they held to be responsible for a raft of social problems and excessive spending. In contrast, the Big Society sought to reinvigorate civil society and devolve responsibility for many social issues to the community (Wiggan 2011). The concept was met with initial scepticism and subsequent derision, with one leading commentator declaring it a “national joke”. Many on the Left saw it as a cynical way of cutting public spending by offloading the responsibilities of the state onto voluntary and not-for-profit groups in the community. In a *Times* newspaper poll, two thirds of respondents considered the Big Society was simply a way “to put a positive spin on the cuts” (Toynbee 2011). Nonetheless, once in power, Cameron began initiating the policies of the Big Society that were, in some of their aspects, a refreshing new form of social Conservatism. It was not to last and, as the punitive strategies of austerity began to bite, the rhetoric of the Big Society came to sound ever more hollow.

Meanwhile, once more in opposition, Labour spent the winter of 2010–11 rethinking the social-democratic agenda. A group formed, led by Maurice Glasman (an academic and Labour Life Peer) who coined the name ‘Blue Labour’ to describe the think tank’s particular form of conservative socialism. Along with Jonathan Rutherford (Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Middlesex), Marc Stears (Professor of Political Theory and Fellow of University College, Oxford) and the political theorist, Stuart White, they published their ideas in *The Labour Tradition and the Politics of Paradox* (Glasman et al. 2011). Their agenda had two main aspects. The first was a turn away from the managerial and bureaucratic methods emphasised by Tony Blair to return to an older socialist focus on the reciprocity and solidarity that had seen the formation of mechanics institutes, mutual societies and trade unions. The second was to reaffirm the need to protect institutions which promote the public good and to reject the market expansion and commodification associated with globalisation (common to the administrations of

both Blair and Cameron) where these were damaging to more fundamental issues of community wellbeing.

Both the Big Society and Blue Labour draw on communitarian thinking. However, it is in its emphasis on protecting communities from the damaging effects of globalisation that the Blue Labour approach diverges most strongly from that of the Conservative's Big Society. Daniel Sage, in analysing the similarities and differences between the two, concluded that Blue Labour has the greater potential to succeed.

Unlike the Big Society – which faces quite profound ideological challenges from within its own political community – Blue Labour confronts challenges that are more of style than of any greater political contradiction. If it can overcome these challenges, it may be able to offer a powerful centre-left, communitarian riposte to the existing neoliberal consensus. (Sage 2012, 377)

However, there were potentially more significant problems with Blue Labour; if not the theory, then with its high profile champion. Baron Glasman proved to be an intemperate interviewee, prone to sweeping statements and the confusion of personal prejudice with potential party policy. In an interview in the *Daily Telegraph* of 18 July 2011, he expressed the view that immigration to the UK should be halted, at least temporarily, saying “we have to put the people in this country first” (Riddell and Whitehead 2011). Outraged by this, Jonathan Rutherford publically dissociated himself from Glasman and from the Blue Labour project.

All political ideologies come with attendant dangers. In championing the rights of the individual, liberalism can result in the atomisation of the community and the imperatives of ‘everyone for herself or himself’. The emphasis of conservatism on maintaining the structures of society can lead to authoritarianism and reaction. The social democratic drive for a progressive development of universal welfare and collective bargaining can lead to top-heavy bureaucracy and a centralisation control that denies the plurality of communities. A danger in

communitarianism can arise with the normalisation of self-interested reaction, resulting, for example, in the kind of nimbyism that rejects an initiative in one's own community because one does not wish to bear the disadvantages, while being happy to enjoy the benefits if the initiative is realised somewhere else. However, in its more recent 'responsive' form, communitarianism seeks to establish mechanisms by which such narrow self-interest is balanced with broader responsibilities.

In his book *The New Golden Rule: Community and Morality in a Democratic Society*, Amitai Etzioni argues that compared with liberalism (which normalises the principles of liberty and individual rights) and conservatism (which normalises the principles of authority and social order) communitarianism requires a dynamic process involving multiple normative principles. In this view, a 'good' society must recognise that it will always comprise such variety and that a degree of conflict between the normative principles of different communities is inevitable. This should be welcomed because it is in the carefully balanced negotiation of those conflicting interests that the common good might best be served. Given that the environment is itself in a continuing state of flux, rebalancing must be active and ongoing (Etzioni 1998). It is consequently a deliberative method that, while it involves people at community level, does not allow the maintenance of unexamined prejudice or deafness to the perspective of others. This echoes the point made by Cass Sunstein that, in healthy public discourse, it is important that there be both diversity *and* dissent (see page 248 et seq). In short, and in the terminology I coined in Chapter 2, Etzioni is describing something very close to the conversive community: one that is communicative, adaptive and interconnected.

The emphasis of communitarianism, as with the concepts of James Surowiecki's 'wise crowd' and Charles Leadbeater's We-Think, is that it involves the many. It promotes an active citizenship which not only generates expanded cognitive resources, but, by engaging the community in the decisions that directly affect them, can identify solutions better suited to that community's evolving needs, while encouraging a greater sense of co-ownership of those ideas. In so

doing, it taps into deeply evolved socialising tendencies in human beings as an effective means to survival; creating a sense of connectivity while encouraging the pooling of skills and resources in finding solutions to shared problems and the most effective ways to realise opportunities. Leadbeater argues that such an approach does not necessarily mean a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, but it *is* in marked contrast to the impersonal machinery of the globalised corporation.

The impatient, flexible corporation carelessly writes off people, relationships, experience and community. We-Think offers a way for capitalism to recover a social – even a communal – dimension that people are yearning for. (Leadbeater 2009, 90)

In the field of arts funding and policy development, François Matarasso and John Knell have argued for mechanisms of ‘distributed culture’ (Matarasso 2010; Knell 2010). Under such a system, money to fund the arts is distributed locally so that the community may decide how it is to be allocated. The benefit is that public policy can be developed in ways that meet the particular needs of a given community, rather than constraining communities to a one-size-fits-all decision-making process. It was a subject discussed in some detail at the Culture and the Policies of Change conference in Brussels in 2010. The conference was run by the Council of Europe’s CultureWatchEurope Initiative (CWE), an ‘observatory’ that maintains an overview of cultural, heritage and media developments across Europe.²⁰⁷ In the conference session addressing new management and governance models for culture, a distributed-culture approach was put forward as a way in which European cultural life might flourish in the coming decades. This would require less focus on centralised institutions, with the development of models akin to the new ‘smart grid’ system of electricity supply, which uses two-

207 CWE places a particular emphasis on values of democracy, transparency, participation, diversity, intercultural dialogue and cultural rights and a praxis based on evidence and flexibility.

way power and information flows to ensure local needs are served with minimum wastage (Brumen and Gardner 2010). In Knell's view, distributed-culture mechanisms by which the public actively shape art and cultural provision will be a key trend in the current decade, with "a move towards more active participation and consultation models" (Knell 2010, 12).

It is not a wholly new approach. In Norway, democratic decentralisation has been the foundation of cultural policy since 1945. In 1986, this was developed further with the introduction of measures which devolved cultural funds from central government to the county (*fylker*) authorities and municipalities (Bakke 1994). This saw, by 1987, fifty-seven per cent of cultural funding decided at community level, with thirty-eight per cent administered centrally by the state and five per cent regionally (Mangset 1992). In this way, a flexible adaptive cultural provision was established that could be shaped to meet specific local needs and conditions. Meanwhile, larger institutions such as big theatres, orchestras and art museums were divided into three categories defined by their service area: those of national standing were funded centrally by the state; those of supraregional importance were supported through a mix of state and regional funding; leaving local and regional cultural institutions to be financed locally (Paic 2005).

Since the publication of the first government report on culture in 1973, Norwegian cultural policy has maintained a strong focus on the role of the arts as agents of enlightenment. It is an idea captured in the concept of *folkeopplysning*, which can be interpreted in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it can mean 'enlightenment *of* the people' and, on the other, 'enlightenment *by* the people' (Vestheim 1995). In the 1970s and 1980s the weighting was towards the latter, with an emphasis on participatory and 'amateur' art making. However, since the 1990s, there has been a shift of emphasis towards the civilising effects of exposure to the 'professional arts'.²⁰⁸ Some commentators have interpreted this

208 In the Norwegian discourse, the 'professional arts' have been defined primarily by what they are not (they are not popular, participatory or commercialised) rather than by any very clear definition of exactly what they are.

as part of a general move in western Europe towards a more market-oriented view of culture, with an emphasis on instrumental metrics (Duelund 2003; McGuigan 2009). However, Egil Bjørnsen, who undertook a detailed analysis of Norwegian government policy reports since 1973, disagrees arguing that the evidence points to a continuing “abstract faith” in the intrinsic qualities of the arts as civilising agents. There is no requirement, for example, for the inclusion of arts in the school curriculum to be justified by correlative outcomes such as a reduction in bullying or improved academic achievement. Indeed, far from waning, he sees this “civilising mission as a rationale for cultural policy” in Norway, if anything, “intensifying” (Bjørnsen 2012, 400).

Back in Britain in 2006, the arts council was celebrating its sixtieth birthday and, as discussed in Chapter 4, facing growing questions of legitimacy. To mark the anniversary and to begin to address the unrest, Arts Council England (ACE) initiated a ‘public value inquiry’: a large-scale program of research, consultation and debate to explore what it was that people valued about the arts. Among the range of projects and events, a series of deliberative research workshops were held in four English cities (Bristol, Leicester, London and Newcastle-upon-Tyne) with a subsequent plenary meeting in London. The meetings involved both arts professionals and representatives of the general public, carefully selected to match the demographic profiles for each city. Many of the findings were qualitative, but one quantitative measure that was taken concerned the desirability of involving the general public when making decisions about which arts projects should receive public funding. By the end of the workshops, eighty-two per cent of the public representatives felt that they should (with just seven per cent thinking they should not) and, perhaps more surprisingly, seventy-three per cent of professionals also agreeing (with seventeen per cent disagreeing). Support for more distributed cultural decision-making seemed strong, but how might mechanisms for a distributed culture be established?

While there is likely to be a clearer understanding of local issues at a local level, simply bringing decision-making to the community does not, in itself, guard

against bias and the disproportionate influence of elite groups. A technocratic solution would be to create small bureaus staffed by those with administrative expertise who would make decisions, effectively creating mini-arts councils at the local level. If the issues are considered to turn not on matters of administration, but on artistic excellence, might it be best to have decisions made by a group of professional artists and arts experts? Another option might be to establish volunteer committees either selected by the local authorities or by the national arts council. Alternatively, such committees might be selected by some system of voting, whereby the elected volunteers are understood as representatives of the public interest, much as we assume within the larger representational democracy.

The problem with establishing another layer of bureaucracy is that it is not only a drain on resources, but very quickly becomes focused primarily upon its own survival. As such, it is open to undesirable influence from both outside and inside the community. The committee of experts also presents a problem of vested interest. One would not, for example, wish to have policies on public health and welfare made solely by specialist groups of doctors and pharmaceutical executives, even though both have undoubted expertise in these areas, because both groups also have an asymmetrical relationship to the issues of health and community wellbeing. Pharmaceutical companies make much more money from the ailments of the wealthy than they do from the prevention of illness among the disadvantaged. Doctors may well consider high profile, high-earning, cutting-edge procedures preferable to working with chronic illness among the poorest in society, but that is not necessarily what is best for the community as a whole.

A system by which individuals put themselves forward for election, to be decided by a general public vote, sounds highly democratic. Indeed, this is the basic process of most western democracies – that elected representatives make decisions on our behalf and, we hope, in our collective interests. As modernising societies have moved towards greater democracy, they have certainly seen the mechanism by which political elites are selected open out to an ever-widening segment of the population. They have not, however, seen much by way of a corresponding

widening of the elite groups themselves. This is an argument made by John Burnheim in his book *Is Democracy Possible?* (Burnheim 2006).

Demarchy

Burnheim puts forward an alternative to representational democracy, which he calls 'demarchy'. He argues that all forms of democracy have a tendency, as Aristotle warned, to be prey to the rhetoric of orators and fall under the control of elites. He shares with Christopher Hayes a view that such elites inevitably become oligarchs; in Burnheim's view, tyrannical ones. "The bigger and more passive the audience," he writes, "the more that is likely to happen" (Burnheim 2006, 2).

Demarchy describes a system whereby different areas of decision-making are handled by different committees, each with a clear and limited area of responsibility. While decision-making groups communicate to enable the integration of their decisions into the larger social fabric, they are not centralised as they are in a representational democracy. In Burnheim's view, "it is much less risky to hand over control of public goods to a variety of very limited agencies than to one omniscient agency. The risk of irresponsible action is dispersed" (Burnheim 2006, 11).

The individuals who sit on those committees are drawn from a pool of citizens who have a material interest in the issues to be decided. That is, they are not people for whom the issues under discussion have no relevance to their lives, but neither are they limited to an elite or specialist group. In terms of the arts, this would mean a committee comprising not only artists and art experts, but also amateurs, pro-ams and members of the audience. Candidates do not stand for election, but are selected for duty by sortition, weighted to reflect the statistical demographic the community that will be affected by their decisions: they are chosen by lot. While that is an unfamiliar process in relation to civil decision-making, it is one which, as a society, we rely upon in a court of law, where guilt or innocence is decided by a jury of citizens picked at random from the electoral register. Demarchy shares with the jury system the mode of selection, while

limiting the pool from which selection is made to those with a material interest in the outcome of those deliberations.

Burnheim emphasises a functional approach to decision-making, one based on identifying what needs to be done rather than reaching agreement on the more fundamental issue of what is true. Just as communitarians maintain that universal truths ('thin' concepts) can only arise from the correlation of many subjective perspectives ('thick' concepts), so Burnheim reasons that demarchy is a process whereby what is to be done will precede (and does not require) any agreement on deeper philosophical truths.²⁰⁹ While aspects of demarchy may seem utopian, what is proposed is not. Rather it is in line with Karl Popper's recommendation of 'piecemeal' reform, which attends to addressing things that are wrong in small reversible steps, rather than striving to reach some ideal end game. Even though the piecemeal engineer "may cherish some ideals which concern 'society as a whole' – its general welfare, perhaps – he does not believe in the method of re-designing it as a whole" (Popper 1957, 61). Similarly, Burnheim argues, demarchy does not require a socialist revolution, nor does it demand the organisational rigidity of a bureaucratic business model, but is better understood as facilitating a form of Darwinian evolution.

One way of describing what is being attempted ... is to displace the model of the factory or the tightly organised firm as the paradigm of rational social organisation in favour of the unorganised adaptive rationality of an open-ended evolutionary process. ... The fact is that we can come to envisage certain possibilities only when they emerge from a process of change that was not directed to bringing them about. (Burnheim 2006, x)

As described by Burnheim, demarchy is a pragmatic and pluralist system of deliberative democracy. While it seeks consensus, it recognises, indeed embraces,

209 Burnheim points out that "the astounding successes of modern science have likewise come about in spite of the utter inadequacy of all the philosophies that have prescribed what science should be doing" (Burnheim 2006, x).

diversity. By dividing areas for decision-making along functional lines involving different groups, it allows for a heterogeneous set of solutions rather than demanding that everything fit within an over-arching ideological framework. It is a highly flexible system that encourages experimentation and has the potential for innovative solutions.

Janet Mather undertook an analysis of six types of democratic process: voting for representatives; decision-taking via referenda; decision-taking via public debates; decisions made by random polling; demarchy as described by Burnheim; and 'disinterested' decision-making. These she scored against six beneficial democratic outcomes: constraint on the power of leaders; satisfaction of majority interests; taking into account minority rights and interests; enabling general political efficacy; enabling popular decision-taking (deciding which policies to pursue); enabling popular decision-making (setting the agenda for the development of policies). The results showed demarchy with the highest score and representational democracy, the system currently in place in most Anglophone countries, with the lowest of all. While Mather does not take this as an indication that we should simply adopt demarchy as the preferred political process – rather, she finds all six systems wanting – she does conclude that there is a need for change, if democracy really is important to us. However, she does note that one of the strengths of demarchy is its high level of transparency and accountability (Mather 1995).

While demarchy is proposed as a system that may operate across a range of scales, I think it is one that best suits decision-making on a community level. As Christian Hiebaum has pointed out, there are a number of organisations that operate at a global level in a functionally focused way, but they tend to provide frameworks within which small, more localised decisions are made, rather than as decision-making bodies in themselves (Hiebaum 2013). Michael Zürn has argued that issues relating to identity (which would certainly include questions of culture) work best when the communities under discussion are small, with the pressure to congruence becoming more problematic as the group becomes larger (Zürn and

Walter 2012). Hiebaum considers this “a fundamental tension within democracy: the tension between identity and difference”; one which he thinks renders demarchy unsuited to global decision-making (Hiebaum 2013, 95).

That said, in my view, demarchy offers an approach which could well suit the needs of the community at a local level; I say this recognising the increasing multicultural richness of many contemporary communities. This is significant because I believe that a strong culture grows up from the local to larger conceptions of national and regional, just as, within communitarianism, ‘thin’ concepts arise from the correlation of ‘thick’ ones. Communitarianism as a philosophy and demarchy as a deliberative mechanism become less compatible on a large scale because the one builds on matters of identity, which will tend to diverge as the population under consideration widens, while the other requires congruence in order that a functional solution might be achieved. As the scale of the community increases, so it becomes harder to find a functional solution. However, this is not to say that scale of *geography* is necessarily the delimiting factor. A community can be constituted in many ways: geographically, certainly, but also by shared interest, opinion, practice, taste and so on. This has become especially evident with the rise of the internet, whereby dispersed individuals with shared interests are now able to assemble virtually to define and advance their collective agendas.

While demarchy is not utopian, it does assume that people will, on the whole, behave well. In part this is to be effected, as is the case for a courtroom jury, by establishing appropriate procedures and inducements to undertake the work with due diligence and care, and by ensuring that the decision-making process is public and transparent. But, essentially, Burnheim assumes “that most people, if they are faced with limited concrete questions about matters that affect them directly, are capable of gaining enough understanding of the issues to make sensible choices about them” (Burnheim 2006, 11). That might seem like a big assumption, but, as Burnheim points out, this is perhaps more reasonable than supposing, as we do with the procedures of representational democracy, that most of the population is able to make sound judgments on the relative merits of

competing political elites informed by the necessary grasp of all the main policy issues that will face a prospective government.

There are other reasons why we might expect such a system to work, despite – or perhaps even because of – the differences between people. James Walker considers that Burnheim’s demarchy builds on the pragmatism of John Dewey (Dewey 1916, 1927) and later Walker and Evers (Walker and Evers 1984) in emphasising “the importance of locating perceptions of problems *shared* between people of different social positions and sectional interests” (Walker 1987, 57, emphasis in original). This echoes my own interest in exploring the things we share as a starting point for deliberation and in the potential of art as an evolved behaviour to facilitate shared attention. As I emphasised in Chapter 6, such shared attention does not assume shared meaning; indeed meaning will be understood differently by different individuals and groups because each brings to the collective experience their specific memories and established patterns of thinking. Nonetheless, the reward mechanisms that have evolved in the brain do encourage collective attention, if the right circumstances are in place; and, as Brian Boyd, Kathryn Coe, Ellen Dissanayake and others have emphasised, the arts have a particular propensity for creating just such circumstances.

This sense of things shared while differently understood, helps to avoid any privileged relationship to meaning by a dominant elite and ensure that such deliberations integrate a healthy range of views. Those different perspectives, which reflect the richness of the community, will bring a useful breadth to the discussion. Meanwhile, the functionality emphasised by Burnheim will help individuals, whose perspectives arise from different experiences and beliefs, work together in seeking solutions, rather than requiring them first to agree on any more fundamental questions of truth on which such a solution might be said to rest. This, in turn, offers two important benefits. First, there is an in-built potential for radical new ideas, since a diversity of perspectives are in play without the constraint of any artificially applied collective ideology: the solutions sought are functional, not doctrinaire. Second, it provides a considerable degree of flexibility: decisions may be

changed later (if and when improved solutions are identified) or reversed (where they prove to be faulty in practice) without such changes creating an ideological crisis.²¹⁰

Demarchy is not an untried theory, it is being actively employed in pilot projects across a range of levels of government. In Australia, the New Democracy Foundation seeks to build support for Burnheim's ideas and to trial them in real-life situations. Its focus is research and testing models of deliberative democracy in the field. In 2009, the foundation, working with the Australian National University, Curtin University and University of Sydney, supported by an Australian Research Council grant, staged an Australian Citizens' Parliament. The event took place in Canberra and deliberated upon the issue of how the Australian political system might be strengthened to better serve the population (Australian Citizens' Parliament 2013). The foundation has organised a number of projects including citizen involvement in the long-term financial planning for City of Melbourne and renewal of capital assets for Marrickville Council, New South Wales. It has also run citizens' juries enquiring into ways to ensure a safe yet vibrant nightlife in Adelaide and Sydney.

The theory and procedure of citizens' juries was developed independently in the United States and Germany in the 1970s, spreading to the United Kingdom in the 1990s. Such juries have recently been used as a means by which small-scale producers can become involved in the governance and implementation of agricultural research in Bangladesh, Bolivia, India, Iran, Mali, Nepal, Peru and Sri Lanka (Excluded Voices 2012). More broadly, the issues are promoted by the US-based Deliberative Democracy Consortium in Washington DC, with scholarly research published in the *Journal of Public Deliberation*. There is, therefore, a substantial framework within which post-doctoral research might be undertaken

210 Here, one might refer back to the issues discussed in Chapter 5 regarding the need for openness of discourse and resistance to groupthink (see page 250 et seq).

to explore in depth the application of demarchic and community–deliberative approaches to arts policy development and decision-making.

My interest in this thesis is in how arts policy might be shaped to better serve the many through direct, meaningful and unrestricted cultural engagement. In so doing, I have highlighted the importance of active participation and understanding the things we share as human beings, while fully acknowledging the diverse contexts and experiences that make us all different. These ideas are pertinent both to understanding how artworks might operate in society and how public policy relating to the arts might be formulated and implemented. The two processes are closely related and this goes a long way to explain why active engagement in the cultural life of the community can have a direct and beneficial effect on the way that community might address wider social and wellbeing issues. Powerfully, such a model does more than simply call for our shared attention; it brings into play our most powerfully human faculty: imagination.

Imagine

In 1968, George Land began a longitudinal study into divergent thinking among a cohort of sixteen hundred primary-school children enrolled in the US Head Start program.²¹¹ The research protocol involved a battery of eight tests that had originally been developed for use by NASA to help select innovative scientists and engineers. The tests were repeated twice more with the same cohort of children at five year intervals and compared with results from testing two hundred thousand adults over the age of twenty-five. The results were remarkable. At the age of three to five years, 98 per cent of the cohort scored in the “genius”

211 The Head Start Program is run by the United States Department of Health and Human Services to provide early childhood education support to low-income families. It also provides health and nutritional advice. Established in 1965, the program was expanded in 1981 and further revised in 2007. In that period over twenty-two million children have participated, though the overall success of the program is still debated (Currie and Thomas 1995).

category. Five years later, only 32 per cent scored at that level and, by the time the subjects were in their early to mid-teens, the proportion had dropped further to just 10 per cent. By comparison, of the adults tested, only two per cent achieved the “genius” score (Land and Jarman 1992a).

So, what is divergent thinking? What does this tell us about the way children change as they get older and why this might occur?

Divergent thinking is the ability to conceive of many possible solutions to a given problem. It is a fluid, non-linear and wide-ranging form of ideation that is a necessary, though not sufficient, component of creativity. It may be considered as a complement to convergent thinking, which is systematic and linear, following logically defined steps in order to reach a definite conclusion. The imaginative processes of divergent thinking are important in ensuring that the widest range of possibilities is considered, while convergent thinking may subsequently be required to shape the initial ideas into a workable solution. Divergent thinking is unconstrained and associated with increased fluency in problem solving. In contrast, convergent thinking tends to lead to optimisation, which focuses on getting the best results from existing ideas (Vosburg 1998). Convergent thinking alone can lead to stagnation and the maintenance of the status quo. While it seeks precision, it tends to reinforce existing ways of thinking and inhibit new ones. It is closely associated with the kind of ‘scientific’ bureaucracy that demands the measurable as evidence of competence. John Kenneth Galbraith wrote eloquently of the dangers of conventional wisdom and the demand for hard and fast metrics in his critique of the affluent society. He is speaking here of the resistance of economists to changing their ideas, but his words ring true for a much wider application:

The precise, to be sure, is usually the old and familiar. Because it is old and familiar, it has been defined and measured. Thus does insistence on precision become another of the tautological devices by which the conventional wisdom protects itself. Nor should one doubt its power. (Galbraith 1958, 254)

So, why do children tend to lose the ability of divergent thinking? There are several answers, all of which are likely to play a role. The first is that the infant brain is highly plastic. As described in Chapter 7, the developmental retardation known as neoteny extends the period of neural plasticity in young children allowing the ‘wiring’ of the brain to continue long after birth. It is a process that accounts for the considerable difference in cognitive ability between chimpanzees and human beings, despite the two species having very similar DNA, because chimpanzees do not have the same continuing brain development after birth. For many years it was believed that neuroplasticity was a characteristic of the young during a critical period of cognitive development and structuring of the brain. However, recent research suggests that the brain retains a degree of plasticity into adulthood though the area of plasticity shifts from the grey cells to the white cells (Yotsumoto et al. 2014). Another view is that our educational system does much to shut down diverse thinking in favour of learning the accepted way of doing things.

In July 1991, John Taylor Gatto – a public school teacher of twenty-six years who had been named New York City Teacher of the Year for the previous three years – resigned, very publicly, with a letter in the *Wall Street Journal*. He believed the standard curriculum that he was required to teach actually damaged children, making them dependent, deferential and disinterested (Gatto 1991). He subsequently wrote a book dissecting the ‘hidden curriculum’ at the heart of the state education system in the United States.²¹² Among the problems endemic in the system were the emotional and intellectual dependency they instilled in children, the cultivation of indifference, and the undermining of self-esteem by tethering it to hierarchical judgment (Gatto 2002). In such an environment it is

212 The term ‘hidden curriculum’ describes those things learned without them being openly intended. They are side effects where norms and values are inculcated in students unintentionally or without due consideration. These are often negative qualities and can include reinforcing social inequalities, undermining a child’s self-confidence and enthusiasm to learn in order to render them more compliant, and to suppressing creativity in favour of learning standard ways of thinking.

inevitable that the 'unruly' nature of divergent thinking would be suppressed, along with the enthusiasm for new ideas that drives it.

Land and Jarman also emphasise the importance of the joyful and enthusiastic engagement of young children in harnessing their imagination. Like Gatto, they identify the growing constraint on imagination in the way children are taught to accept the opinions and evaluations of others and to mistrust their own (Land and Jarman 1992a). Indeed, positive mood seems to have an important effect on imagination, leading to improved ability to integrate a variety of unusual information (Murray et al. 1990). Klaus Fiedler described a 'loosening' effect on cognition associated with positive mood and a corresponding 'tightening' with negative mood (Fiedler 1988). Building on this research, Suzanne Vosburg undertook a study which concluded that positive mood has a significant beneficial effect on ideation fluency and problem solving abilities (Vosburg 1998).

New ideas are important if we are to adapt to the accelerating changes in our social, technological and, increasingly, our natural environment. Nor is it the case that such ideas come only with high IQ and specialist expertise. Research undertaken at Oklahoma University found that the imaginative skill of "divergent thinking has a substantially stronger direct effect on idea generation than [either] intelligence or expertise" (Vincent, Decker, and Mumford 2002, 175).

The arts and education maven, Ken Robinson, has made a strong case for a radical reinvention of our educational system. Given we live in a time of rapid and unpredictable change, he argues that we need to educate children to be creative and adaptive, to try new ideas and take chances. But our schools are still stuck in the industrial-age thinking of their first formulation. In the nineteenth century, employers required workers who could follow instructions, now we need workers who can find new ways of doing things. Children are born with a natural aptitude for creativity, which formal education systematically removes from them. At school, "we don't grow into creativity, we grow out of it. Or rather, we get educated out of it" (Robinson 2006).

We are born with a propensity for creativity and so we are born with a propensity for the arts – all of us. The various arts have their own syntax and formulations, some of which are intuitive and others have to be learned. But that is just the means by which creative expression is made and received, not the underlying faculty by which it comes into being. Robinson advances three principles under which human life flourishes: that we are diverse; that we are curious; and that we are inherently creative (Robinson 2013). We have, as part of our inheritance, the imagination to adapt, but, Robinson argues, as does Gatto, our educational system fails us by suppressing these innate skills. It instils in the young individual a fear of making mistakes that represses open divergent thinking. It replaces curiosity with compliance. It imposes narrow forms of standardised testing and ranking which promote a singular interpretation of intelligence that, in turn, establish rigid notions of class that privilege a minority. It marginalises those whose aptitudes are, as Howard Gardner describes them, any of half a dozen or so other types not captured by an IQ test: spatial, musical, kinaesthetic, social, introspective, naturalistic and existential (see also page 256) (Gardner 2003). These need not simply be latent propensities. Philip Ball is of the view that “most children acquire some grasp of musical grammar by the age of around six or seven without any specialised tuition” (Ball 2010, 372).

Human beings have considerable potential – much more than most are permitted to realise – but this potential is not realised in a mechanical way that can be plotted in advance. This is why Robinson argues we need to take a very different approach to education.

We have to go from what is essentially an industrial model of education, a manufacturing model, which is based on linearity and conformity and batching people. We have to move to a model that is based more on principles of agriculture. We have to recognise that human flourishing is not a mechanical process; it’s an organic process. And you cannot predict the outcome of human development. All you can do, like a farmer, is create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish. (Robinson 2010)

As discussed in Chapter 4 (see page 173 et seq), Paulo Freire emphasised that such flourishing requires experts to work *with* children to help each child discover their own creativity – their own answers – and not simply treat them like empty cognitive vessels into which the expert ‘deposits’ information. It is a dynamic process that demands active participation. “Knowledge,” Freire writes, “emerges through ... the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful enquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other” (Freire 1970, 53).

On 2 September 1990, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) came into force. It is currently ratified by every member of the United Nations except Somalia, South Sudan and the United States. The convention sets out the rights of the child, including their cultural rights. It seeks to protect children from negative cultural influences, but it goes much further in that it places value on the subjective experiences of children as distinct and independent of adults (Greene and Hogan 2005; Johanson 2010). As Katya Johanson notes, a number of the UNCRC articles “rest on the belief that children have a participatory and creative role to play in culture” (Johanson 2010, 390).

In Nordic countries, especially in Denmark, Finland and Norway, national cultural policies make specific provisions for the culture of children. The concept first appeared in Denmark in the 1960s and a decade later in Finland and Norway. In Denmark, the Do It Yourself program moved away from a focus on simply introducing children to passive appreciation of professional adult art, to understanding children as active participants in the cultural life of the community (Johanson 2010). The focus was on “opening up a broader dialogue between children and adults” (Buchhave and Wanting 1993, 22). Try It Yourself was a similar program run in Norway in the 1990s (Kjørholt 2002; Johanson 2010). In all three countries, there has been an emphasis on relocating the site of children’s cultural and expressive activities away from adult institutions of art to everyday places, including schools and kindergartens. This general emphasis on active cultural participation by children and respect for the autonomy of their cultural

interests and expressions remains primarily an approach of the Nordic countries.

As Katya Johanson notes:

The policy emphasis on participatory children's culture – exemplified in the notion of a 'children's own culture' worthy of policy attention – is a radical departure from the policy assumptions of other western nations. In Britain and Australia, for example, it is a dominant assumption that the role of policy is simply to introduce children to arts produced by adults, albeit tailored to children's limited attention span or vocabulary. (Johanson 2010, 399)

In seeking ways to develop public policy for the arts that actively engage the many in a meaningful and enriching way, the Nordic approach to children's culture as dynamic, owned and participatory could well stand as a useful starting point. In the view of the Danish library advisors, Bente Buchhave and Birgit Wanting, such an approach helps "work towards developing freer and stronger people, who are better equipped to decide for themselves what they want with their lives". Not only that, it may also prepare children to "be active citizens and make well-founded choices both for themselves and on behalf of others" (Buchhave and Wanting 1993, 22).

Refresh or Restart?

As Mark Ravenhill indicated in his speech quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the arts council movement is a relative newcomer; one whose fortunes have been mixed and whose functionality is questionable. It is, of course, not the only means by which either arts policy outcomes or arts public funding are delivered, but it does usefully encapsulate some of the dilemmas and challenges that face any such attempt to promote the public and personal aspects of creative culture through collective means. So, as a kind of thought experiment, I will make some tentative suggestions as to how such an intermediary body might be constituted and operate to better serve the interests of the many and promote a lively, egalitarian arts culture.

The first question is whether it is possible to modify the existing agencies or if it is better to close them down and start afresh. In England, so far, the approach has been on modifying the existing institution. In Scotland it was to close down two institutions and open one new one with a remit that embraced many of the responsibilities of the defunct agencies along with a swathe of additional ones. Neither approach has proved particularly successful to date. The English agency continues to struggle for validity; the new Scottish agency is, after a turbulent first couple of years, attempting to wipe the slate clean and start again with a new CEO. But I will leave aside these questions in favour of setting out a few pointers that arise from my research and could, in my view, improve both the focus and the functionality of any such intermediary body.

Governance

The intermediary body should be independent. Ideally, it should draw on strategies such as Burnheim's demarchy to ensure not only that it is truly arm's length from government, but also free from excessive influence of either the market or any narrowly defined artworld elite. Arm's length describes a relationship between two or more parties where neither controls the other. Membership of decision-making committees should reflect a balance between artists, art-workers, critics and the official artworld, on the one hand, and representatives of the amateur and pro-am communities and the wider public of art audiences, on the other. The process of balancing should also respect and reflect the demographic complexion of the communities served by such committees, with membership decided by lot and a regular, but staggered, turnover of committee members. Such an intermediary body should have a level of independence, but this should be tempered by transparency of operation, with the process of decision-making, and not simply the outcome, being open to public scrutiny. While this may raise issues of commercial confidence as individual artists and organisations apply for funding, if all applicants are in the same situation, the benefit of such commercial intelligence would remain symmetrical and may even help organisations in monitoring their own performance.

Beyond this, the agency structure should be the minimum required to fulfil its basic function of advocating the arts and organising committees to determine the allocation of funds. It should not itself undertake research, but it should aggregate and make freely available a wide range of research from diverse sources. Ideally, the agency should be modest, effective and relatively powerless, though structurally it should be strong enough to be able to resist unwelcome or unfair influence.

Values

Historically, the arts council movement has held to values of both access and excellence which have, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, led to tensions that have been difficult to resolve. To these two, a third value – innovation – has come to be a prominent feature of arts council aims and objectives. I do not think these values are wrong, but I do think they need to be clearly defined. If this is done appropriately, these values might be found much less mutually conflictive. So, rather than dismiss these values, I would propose that they be elucidated with especial focus on how such values impact upon the engagement and enjoyment of the arts by the wider public.

However, it is important to understand first the ways in which these terms can become excuses for a lack of cultural democracy, if only so that we can avoid those pitfalls. The demand for ‘excellence’, for example, often becomes an argument in defence of narrowness, a focus on rarity and elitism, especially given the current lack of an agreed artistic canon. ‘Innovation’ can too easily become the pursuit of novelty for its own sake, an excuse for obscurantism and the argument that the unintelligible is simply ahead of its time. What is the use of innovation unless it provides people with an improved way of doing things; helps them meet changing needs and finds ‘better ways’? ‘Access’ can lead to the presumption that a small group have the ownership of art and access to ‘their art’ is granted under sufferance; audiences have to be ‘re-educated’ to understand art in the terms of the elite if they are to be permitted access to it, rather than have the validity of their own opinion respected.

So, to help define these concepts in ways that open the arts out to the wider public rather than drawing them closer to the elite, I propose that these three terms be defined by association with the following related qualities, which help us to consider the arts in a wider frame:

Excellence	Innovation	Access
usefulness	contingence	ownership
meaning	flexibility	involvement
experience	aptness	participation

Thus, the *excellence* of an artwork should relate to the way it is experienced by an individual viewer or listener. Does it engage the individual in ways that stimulate the formulation of meaning; meaning that the individual finds useful. Here, by useful I do not mean (necessarily) instrumental use – does it help them achieve some other goal – but does it find a place within their emotional and cognitive understanding of the world. Much more could be done to establish in some detail and with a degree of sophistication, how audiences respond to artworks both individually and as groups. As the authors of a report into the critical issues facing the arts in California noted, “the first step toward developing a coherent cultural policy is to determine what the public values about the arts and culture sufficiently to warrant public appropriation, and through what mechanisms those public goods are best provided” (James Irvine Foundation and AEA Consulting 2006, 12). While there is a degree of market research, this tends to be seen as a way to determine which strategies employed by arts presenters are likely to meet with greatest success; they do not ask the more fundamental question of whether any of those strategies have real relevance and, if not, what might be undertaken in their stead. Meanwhile, arts councils tend to ask large, imprecise questions about the public valuation of the arts *in general* (which, *in general*, remains high) rather than for the specific arts those councils choose to fund (which, in terms of actual attendances, remains a low proportion of the

population as a whole – see page 166 et seq and page 201 et seq). For the most part, they do not seek to know more about the place of the arts in people’s lives. In John Carey’s view, “the artworld has paid almost no attention to how active appreciation in art alters people” (Carey 2005, 158). He goes on to write:

“Another thing we should do, I would suggest, is to switch the aim of research in the arts to finding out not what critics think about this or that artwork – which is necessarily only of limited and personal interest – but how art has affected and changed other people’s lives ... The history of audiences and readerships is largely a blank.” (Carey 2005, 167)

Carey was writing in 2005. Since then, the burgeoning of social media has opened up a vast new page on which the history of audiences and readerships might begin to be written.²¹³ It will undoubtedly be an opinionated, fragmentary and diverse story it tells. The question of how much useful information can be gleaned – especially if one is not simply to cherry-pick the bits that suit one ideological purpose or another – will be how such mechanisms might be harnessed to generate useful data and how, in turn, that data might be employed to make things better. Social media are not the only source of popular opinion, of course, and the more engaged our communities become, the more we look outside of the usual authorised opinion for new ideas.

It is also the case that, in the last few years, there have been some initial public deliberative processes aimed at finding out more broadly what audiences value rather than simply which items on the established ‘menu’ they might prefer.

In terms of *access*, as I have argued throughout, we must think of the arts as a process of participation and not simply consumption. This is not a zero-sum

213 In truth, the relationship between the trope of a page of history and the nature of social media is perhaps best conceived of as a palimpsest, repeatedly scraped clean as new ideas overlay and replace old. As such, social media may better be described as a kind of multivocal oral history or conversation. In this case, some ideas are consolidated and passed on as memes, while others mutate as the conversation develops an idea or peter out as those involved lose interest in a given thread.

game in which the participation of the many somehow dilutes the arts spreading resources ever more thinly. The greater the public's involvement in the arts, the greater will be the sense of personal ownership of them, and so personal support for them. If the arts struggle to secure sufficient public funding to thrive it is because politicians can see no great public interest in them. If there was a widespread, passionate and vocal support for the arts, the arts would become an electoral issue on which governments might stand or fall. If we think that that is a foolish notion – that the arts will never be the 'proper' subject of political discourse in the way health or education or defence might be – then we condemn our culture to be a mere appendage to life rather than at the heart of its flourishing.

Finally, *innovation* has to be more than simple novelty, even if such novelty proves monetisable. We live in times of rapid change and considerable risk: from shifts in climate to rifts in society; between rich and poor; between ideologies in a globalised communications network. Of course, science, technology and economics all have valuable parts to play in finding new ways to live more lightly on the earth and in greater harmony with each other. But our problems are, for the most part, human-made. They were not done to us, but by us. Our cultures are ways of understanding ourselves and others; of sharing attention as the first step in a conversation about difference; of being an active participant in the making of meaning and not simply a consumer of other people's ideas; of experiencing empathy even when comprehension seems impossible. It is easier to ignore, dismiss or even hate those with whom we have no connection. It is easier to abrogate responsibility for things that appear to be distant from us. But our imagination is an instrument of adaptation; of thinking beyond the here and now to questions of 'what if?' and 'how can?' We have flourished as a species because of it. Now is not the time to cede the human faculty of practical imagination to narrow professional interests, however talented. Rather we should work *with* the talented, because it is in active participation that meaning is most cogently created. To repeat, once more, the Chinese proverb:

Tell me and I will forget;
Show me and I may remember;
But *involve* me and I will understand.

Focusing, as Burnheim recommends, on finding functional solutions rather than fundamental truths and, in doing so, using our collective creativity empowered by our rich diversity of experience, it may prove possible to imagine new futures that are both fairer and more sustainable. That would be an innovation worth investing in.

Scope

The scope of the current arts council remit is, in many cases, skewed. John Maynard Keynes' personal enthusiasm for the performing arts led him to pull them in under the aegis of the fledgling council where once they had supported themselves in the commercial marketplace. He recognised, quite rightly, that they were becoming increasingly unsustainable in a purely commercial field and that they were an important means by which the performative areas of the cultural patrimony could be kept alive. These are expensive operations (accounting for a major share of the arts council budget), which regularly require financial bailouts that syphon money away from other areas in order to sustain that which cannot be allowed to fail. These major performing arts organisations should be removed from the arts council purview and brought directly under the responsibility of government. They are sustained for broadly political reasons – not the politics of party, but of a public interest that overextends the remit of a funder such as an arts council. They are large and few, so the balance of merit and cost is one that can reasonably be debated at government level (national or regional–state–provincial, depending on the nature of the company). In this way, the major performing arts would occupy a similar position to art museums, which, because

their reliance on public subsidy predates the beginning of the arts council movement, have always stood outside of its frame of reference.²¹⁴

More recently, the somewhat ill-conceived but popular concept of the creative industries has seen a miscellany of practices cluster around, and ultimately marginalise, the arts. The creative industries are not bound by any clear ethos, shared mode or circumstance. They are simply a bundle of industries that focus on innovation and make money. They are like cuckoos that have ensconced themselves in the cultural nest, enjoying its benefits while pushing the resident arts to the margins and, in some cases, evicting them altogether.²¹⁵ These practices are suited to consideration as industries and are best treated as such within government. Where they can be applied within the practice of art (for example the use of computer graphics to expressive ends), they might reasonably be included within the frame of reference of an arts council or similar intermediary agency, but this would be because they fulfil the criteria of art and not because they fall under the larger, somewhat meaningless rubric of creative industries.

Design is another area that needs more careful delineation. There is a strong argument that design may well be the most lasting legacy of the creative practices of the present day. Certainly it has a powerful and extensive role within the modern world. But design is a very wide church. One could quite reasonably argue that everything which is not a product of nature is a work of design. Thus, all things *made* can be included in the collective term. At the other end of the scale, design can be seen as a focus on the haut couture and the luxury commodity. Here, any line between, say, a diamond encrusted iPhone and

214 In Scotland, the major performing arts are no longer the responsibly of an intermediary body, but funded directly by the national government. Meanwhile, museums have come under a new body that effectively centralises museum funding, though this is distinct and separate from the primary small-to-medium arts funder, Creative Scotland.

215 A number of universities have developed creative industries departments, which, as they evolved, abandoned the fine arts to focus on those practises that generate greatest profit.

Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God* seems to dissolve.²¹⁶ Then again, what of the traditional crafts? Is a Mexican sugar skull made by a local crafts person for the Day of the Dead a work of design, of craft, a commercial commodity, an expression of a tradition or a work of art? Perhaps it is many or all of these things. One way of looking at this question is to break down the process of categorising into stages. These stages should focus on functional questions rather than upon trying to decide any more fundamental ontological truths. Is the work primarily undertaken for, and potentially supported by, the market (be it the oligopsonistic market of luxury contemporary art, the town-square bazaar or some other existing mechanism)? I say 'potentially supported' because, of course, all markets are competitive. That said, I do not think that public funding should simply pay for things that are intended for the market, but which the market does not find attractive. This is different from saying that some things stand outside of the market and should be supported. John Kenneth Galbraith described this succinctly in his contrasting of "private opulence and public squalor": the more successful the market, the greater the need for public expenditure to enable those things that are necessary for the healthy life of the community, but unsustainable in a free market for goods and services (Galbraith 1958, 191).

The question of scope is best considered in functional terms delineated in the context of the current situation and not by trying to establish hard and fast definitions. This will always be a challenge since the possibility of free money is a constant spur to the imagination of the grant applicant. However, an open, transparent process of deliberation should, over a number of iterations, help to clarify processes in a way that in-camera decision-making only goes to make more mysterious.

216 In 2014, the New York based company, Falcon, offered a rose-gold iPhone 6, embellished with a large pink diamond, for \$48.5 million USD. Cheaper versions were also on offer with a blue diamond version available for \$32.5 million USD and an orange diamond version for \$42.5 million USD (Kooser 2014). Prices have since risen (see www.falconluxury.com). Meanwhile, the alleged sale price for Damien Hirst's *For the Love of God* was £50 million GBP (Byrne 2007).

Funding

In my experience, funding functions best when it is available from a number of sources. This is not just the obvious matter of such diversity leading to increased cumulative resources, but that there are a greater variety of philosophical perspectives in play. While Fotofeis received the majority of its core running costs from a single source – the Scottish Arts Council – it was able to apply to a range of funders for its many projects, depending on the nature of any given initiative. It was this that allowed Fotofeis to be so wide-ranging in its program; it was not tied to any one funder's interests.²¹⁷ An arts council will, of course, be one of a number of arts funders that also includes state or provincial governments, local authorities, private trusts and philanthropists and commercial sponsors. Nonetheless, an arts council should take a diverse approach to both what is funded and who is funded. Broadly, I would suggest that funding should be allocated to flow in at least three main streams: direct to artists (musicians, actors, visual artists and so on), to presenters (theatres, studios, galleries and so on) and to community producers. This last group, formed along the lines proposed by Burnheim, would represent community interests and act as an interface between professionals and pro-ams/amateurs in the development of partnerships in the production and presentation of work. Thus, the means by which an art activity may be presented could involve at least three basic interest groups, which might work together, thus spreading the cost across three budgets, or in pairs or singly. This budget would then subsidise that aspect of the production that could not be covered by earned income. The parties may choose to stand as guarantors against loss (an approach favoured by Keynes for the subsidy of performing arts). If an artist was highly motivated to present their work they might raise the money themselves and rent the facilities for its presentation. A theatre may choose to

217 The portfolio of more than fifty funders for Fotofeis included: local district councils, regional councils, local and regional enterprise agencies, local and district arts partnerships, Scottish and UK arts agencies, European development initiatives, and overseas government and cultural agencies, along with a variety of philanthropic trusts and commercial sponsors.

wholly subsidise the presentation of a touring production or may work with the local community producers to co-present or co-produce, and so on. A local community might partner a musical ensemble to present work in a municipal hall even though the management of the local concert venue was not interested. The flowing of funding to a number of groups allows for a wider range of options and for more active involvement of the community–professional partnerships. These, in turn, not only create a greater sense of ownership, but build greater knowledge of the nature of the arts and what goes into their presentation.

In putting forward these ideas for ways in which an intermediary body might develop I am not suggesting a cut-and-dried solution, but simply seeking to open out ways of thinking about some of the challenging questions that such a re-imagining entails. As I have made clear in this thesis, the best answers will not come from an individual, but from communities working together involving people with different, even conflicting, ideas deliberating in pursuit of functional solutions to contingent problems. The above ideas are simply indicative of some of the things that might be debated and some of the areas in which further research could usefully be undertaken.



Beyond the nature and function of any intermediary body, I would also suggest a review of the way in which the not-for-profit sector is constituted. Not so much its physical nature, although I think this would tend to evolve in the context of the ideas I am setting forth, but in terms of how it conceives the relationship between artist, audience and institution.

The Library and the Laboratory

While the museum grew out of the treasure house and the cabinet of curiosities, the contemporary art gallery (the non-collection-based *kunsthalle*) developed from the studio vernissage and the salon. Here the emphasis was on the new and the fashionable. The audience was a coterie: friends and clients of the artist or

acolytes of the salon's patron. In the twentieth century these ideas of the 'new' and the 'recently made' evolved. Increasingly, private galleries became about the market place. However, following the Second World War when "the white heat of technology" (Wilson 1963) and the supply-driven economy created a new urgency around the notion of innovation, the public contemporary art gallery became associated with the laboratory: a place to experiment and find new cultural meaning and fresh marketable artefacts.

The library grew out of collections of writings that centralised knowledge. The medieval library was an arcane space, arranged as a dual hierarchy with spiritual texts on one side and secular on the other. To access knowledge one had first to learn the hierarchy. With the exponential increase in the production and dispersion of books and pamphlets following the invention of the printing press, libraries became more commonplace and, at a slower pace, more democratic. The rise of public education that accompanied nineteenth-century industrialisation saw the public library become an integral part of civic life and a tool of social reform. Self-improvement was the order of the day and with it the rise of the autodidact. Today, libraries are hubs of the community. The reading and borrowing of books is but one aspect of their work; they operate as learning and leisure environments, meeting places for diverse sectors of the community and a source of all manner of information. Libraries are owned and understood by public and politicians alike.

While libraries rely upon the work of writers, authors are not their focus; readers are. Indeed the modern library encourages not simply passive consumption of books, but direct engagement in learning, personal growth and active participation. At best, they are places of emancipation and individual enlightenment. In contrast, many contemporary art galleries – certainly those in the laboratory model – focus primarily upon the creativity of the artist and view the wider public as passive consumers to be 'educated' to their way of thinking or ignored for their perceived inability to grasp the significance of the new.

Libraries are not galleries (or concert halls or theatres) and I am not suggesting that one can simply apply, wholesale, the modes of one to another. However, my research has led me to conclude that there is much that may be learned from the library movement, which might usefully inform not-for-profit art institutions in terms of engaging the public in the delivery of a public good.



In this thesis I have explored both the long evolution of the arts as behaviour and the much shorter development of public policy and government funding for the arts in Anglophone countries over the past two centuries. In doing so, I have sought to demonstrate the resources we share as a species and the ways in which art and the public interconnected prior to the establishment of the arts council movement, during the eight decades of its existence and in the context of the rapidly changing technological and social landscapes of the twenty-first century.

I have pointed to a number of qualities that I believe represent the virtues of art and mark a productive way forward. These qualities include the importance of shared collective attention, generating diverse individual interpretation and the exploration of those ideas through modes of conversation. I have also proposed that the adaptive signification pertaining to sexual selection and group selection in the evolution of human beings has bequeathed us two associated value systems for art: one with an emphasis on individuality, spectacle and ‘uselessness’ the other on mutuality, intensity and empathy. These, I have suggested, may be understood as the poles of a scale along which various modes of art are distributed. To this I have proposed a further type of human evolution – open selection – with a focus on trial and error.

Above all, I have urged that we consider the active participation of the many in the creation and presentation of the arts, rather than the segregation of a small number of active producers from a much larger passive audience. My conclusion is that this will not only enrich the lives of many more people, but it will elevate the way the arts are valued by the community as a whole. Widespread

enthusiasm for the arts would inevitably lend them greater political weight, leading to a stronger emphasis by government on ensuring that the arts prosper. This need not simply be in terms of increased funding, but by shaping the socio-economic environment to better facilitate and encourage such collective engagement within and among communities.

What I have demonstrated is that there are practical ways in which public policy for the arts can be developed to actively engage the many, and not just the few, in cognitively and affectively meaningful ways. There are precedents for how this might be achieved and there are opportunities in the rapid flux of social and technological change that could be harnessed. Beyond this, there are deep-rooted aspects of human nature that tend to encourage just such engagement. In establishing the things that are or could be, I am seeking to clear away some of the perceived barriers to progress that declare a thing impossible because it is not in our nature or has never before been achieved. Such barriers include: the belief that it is impossible to maintain quality while facilitating wide participation; the view that aesthetic response is the product of a refined sensibility denied to the mass; the failure to recognise the potential wisdom of crowds; the uncritical acceptance of cultural values; and the certainty that professionals know better than amateurs.²¹⁸

My research into human evolution, and especially in neurophysiology and evolutionary psychology, while spanning some very new fields of science, supports the propositions I am making for the arts in relation to the wider public. There are historical precedents for the benefits and sustainability of participatory arts, both from the history of the development of the arts council movement and from a survey of the rapidly evolving digital and online fields of creative communication. There are mechanisms of deliberative democracy and distributed

218 Lord Kelvin, one of the nineteenth-century's greatest physicists, was adamant that it was impossible to create a heavier-than-air flying machine. It took two amateur bicycle mechanics, Orville and Wilbur Wright, to prove him wrong.

culture already functioning in the world that offer a workable foundation on which to build.

If, as Mark Ravenhill suggests, the subsidised and public arts need a Plan B, then a new alliance between professional, pro-am, amateur and community along the lines explored in this thesis would, I conclude, be a fruitful place to start.

EPILOGUE

Reflection and Action

When I began this thesis in 2006, it may have seemed like something of a fool's errand. In the intervening nine years, much has happened to demonstrate the usefulness of the undertaking and the relevance of the ideas it raises.

The impetus for this research developed slowly over four decades working in the applied and fine arts. By the beginning of the new century, a set of challenging notions was beginning to come together in my mind. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say: in my imagination. I wrote about some of these concepts in 2003 in an essay entitled 'Art without the Artist', itself based on a lecture I had been commissioned to give at the Centre for Contemporary Photography in Melbourne (Foster 2003). This essay and subsequent lectures helped me begin to shape my ideas and conclude that there were changes afoot that would be interesting to explore in the broader context of my ongoing concern with empowering audience engagement.

The research described in this thesis is essentially a mapping process that seeks to review and correlate a wide range of ways of thinking about the arts in the present-day, while drawing on both recent history and the very much long arc of evolutionary time. In the intervening years, as new literature in these areas was being published in increasing quantity, my task was one of both sifting, connecting and synthesising on one hand and simply running to keep up on the other. This was especially true in the field of sociobiology and the study of wellbeing. Thus, as my research has progressed, my own ideas have developed not simply through personal study, but in light of the outpouring of new data, analysis and opinion becoming available. This has made for a highly dynamic progression of ideas.

Aside from this general flow of new ideas and evolving theories, there were three specific events which had a significant impact on my thinking. The first was the global financial crisis of 2008 and its continuing aftermath. It was an event with far-reaching effects. While Australia managed to avoid the worst of the fallout, the impact in Europe and North America was considerable. Surprisingly, given that the crisis arose from the excesses of deregulated financial markets espoused by neoliberalism, after only a moment of hesitation, the neoliberal Right began to supersede the softer neoliberalism of the New Left. While the initial fire-fighting saw a raft of Keynesian stimulus packages, it was not long before the harsher regime of austerity was brought into play and, with it, the ethics of individual resilience rather than collective welfare. In the arts, this saw a shift away from New Labour's dual focus on the creative industries and instrumentalism to a singular focus upon monetisation. While we have witnessed an astonishing escalation in the upper reaches of the contemporary art market in terms of both the quantity of works sold and the prices achieved, the market has also provoked a growing chorus of despair that art is becoming hollowed out to a very shiny, but increasingly vacuous, shell. Beyond the question of economic sustainability lies the larger and even more troubling question of social stability in a world in which the gulf between rich and poor becomes ever wider and the impending threat of climate change ever more real. Such far-reaching and all-

embracing issues bring a sharp urgency when considering the role of the arts in society. What can the arts help us to understand about how we live together, how we imagine a shared future and how we might create solutions to problems that, in one way or another, will come to affect us all?

The second big change to take place over the period of this research has been the rapid and expansive growth of social media and related online applications such as crowdfunding, digital journalism and peer-to-peer file sharing. When I began my research, Facebook and Flickr were barely two years old, YouTube and Vimeo barely one, while Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Google+, Kickstarter and Pozible did not yet exist. We are also getting our news and opinion online from a more diverse range of sources. A tipping point came in 2008 when, in the United States, more Americans reported getting their news online than from newspapers (Economist 2009). This has opened the field to a much wider range of ideas and attitudes through national and international news feeds, through specialist news and opinion blogs and in articles reposted in social networks.

The third change was personal. After twenty years heading national organisations, I returned to working independently in order both to pursue the ideas arising in this thesis and to take up opportunities to work more extensively overseas. This brought about an unexpected shift in the focus of my research, though in retrospect it seems almost inevitable. As CEO, one has a responsibility to the organisation for which one is the temporary custodian. One must adopt the corporate values and priorities, and promote these vigorously. The role tends to take over the individual. When I finally returned to freelance work, I realised that I had so absorbed this way of prioritising the organisation that it had become central to my way of conceiving of the wider frame of the arts and, more specifically, this research. Consequently, I had assumed that one important outcome from this research would point to new ways in which a cultural institution might operate in society. While I was thinking of art institutions more

generally, I had also imagined that the Australian Centre for Photography (ACP) might become a model or prototype for such a conceptual shift.

A year or so after I left ACP, however, I had begun to shake off the sense of corporate responsibility and, with it, my central focus on the institution. Of course, I continued to draw on the many things I had learned at ACP and Fotofeis, and before that as a freelance curator working for galleries and museums. However, I now considered the things so learned from a much wider perspective. In doing so, I find my analysis of those earlier experiences reoriented, coming to point in another direction. This has led me to consider the underlying centrality of the community – rather than the institution – as the fundamental forum for culture and the diverse, interconnecting forms that communities can take. While my interest had always been in how one might facilitate the ‘conversation’ between artist and audience, and stimulate the active participation of individuals in a fuller sense of their own culture, I had conceived this as occurring through the institutions of the gallery, workshop or festival. Now I see the community as central and its institutions as only one of a range of ways in which a society engages art in the synthesis of culture, and individuals discover and express their own creativity.

Spanning almost a decade this research has helped me to consolidate much that I have learned while working in the arts, leading me to new discoveries. As a result, I have enriched my understanding and found ways to give it clearer structure. As a map, this research has not simply shown where I have been, it has pointed the way forward.



The nature of doctoral research dictates that it is the work of an individual because it is, on one level at least, a test of that individual. The nature of the research by which we seek better ways to understand, to enable and to sustain ourselves as a community is more often the work of many minds. These minds

may be working in collaboration or in contest: fitting together insights and expertise like a jigsaw or testing conjectures and conclusions competitively.

In this thesis, I have mapped out something of the journey of discovery, made possible by the considerable resources afforded a doctoral researcher. The journey began with a set of professional experiences and personal intuitions and a powerful desire to make sense of them: to set them into a larger frame of reference. In doing so, I sought ways in which those personal insights might inform larger questions about the role of art in society and, in particular, the role of government policy in the lives of the people. I have explored a range of paradigms – ways of envisioning the world, each with its own construct, emphasis and language. I am not an expert in any of these fields. I am a generalist (a Nexialist in von Vogt's term). The benefit of generalism is, I believe, in helping to highlight connections *between* ways of thinking and, thus, open up multi-dimensional perspectives on the challenges we face.

And we do face challenges.

The next step is to find ways to encourage this conversation between paradigms. My approach is to establish a research network through which ideas can be shared and built upon. In this way concepts and strategies can be tested, shaped and evolved in an ongoing exchange of information and analysis with an emphasis on the identification of practical outcomes. The network is conceived as an open structure, linking a series of research nodes (individuals and groups working in specific fields, or fellow generalists). Being open, I would like this conversation and its findings to be available to anyone who wishes to be involved and for the use of anyone who wants to take the materials and develop them in and for their own context.

The mechanisms of the network itself should be 'lite' and seek, as far as possible, to operate without the need for significant financial support. Rather, it will focus on building its social and cultural capital. It will use the inexpensive tools available through the internet and related digital technologies to connect the conversation and make its ongoing findings known. It will operate within the

'hacker ethic' and participants would effectively be involved as pro-ams. By this I mean that, while they may be salaried experts in their particular field, participation in the network will be in the public interest and unpaid. This is likely to limit the number of those wishing to be involved, but it will have some potential benefits. It will help to maintain a degree of freedom for the conversation since the network will not be beholden to a funder – public or private. It will also ensure that those who become involved do so from a genuine interest in the field and in the idea that culture can be a living force within the community, aside from its ability to be monetised.

Work on establishing this network began some years ago, in parallel with my research. It builds on relationships established, over many years, while undertaking professional projects in various parts of the world. I am establishing a group of advisors with whom to collaborate in planning the next steps. Importantly, these advisors will not all hail from within the cultural sector, nor will they all work in academic institutions. The focus of the network and its mode of operation will be one and the same: a conversive community.

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