

CREATE-ABILITY:

THE CHANGING MEANING
OF ART AND ARTISTRY

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City Bridge Trust



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Introduction: The sky of our attention

I was involved with the Akram Khan Dance Company for many years. At one point they were working on a new dance show for the company called *bahok* (meaning carrier) which went on to become an enormous global success. While the company was developing the material in workshops I asked Akram what the show was about – an innocent if naive question. He replied that it was set in the departure hall of a station or airport and the dancers were all gathered around a destination board, constantly flicking and rotating different times and destinations. This sounded banal and unpromising to me. I waited with some apprehension to see the show that would emerge. When the show finally came together it was indeed in exactly the setting Akram had described, but of course that was not what it was about. The real subject of the new piece was that our contemporary mobile international lives (and Akram certainly lives a mobile and international life) had reached such a fever pitch that the idea of home, though still emotionally powerful, had become decoupled from place and space and had become a concept that lived mostly in our heads. In that sense home was a hope, not a fact. These profound thoughts seemed indisputable in the beautiful, dynamic original work on stage. For myself, I cannot imagine thinking those thoughts in an airport departure lounge and then making them into a beautiful, original dance performance for a whole company. I don't have the faintest idea how one might go about such a thing. That's why I am not an artist and Akram is.

In any situation artists can be moved to create. The artist David Hockney points to what for him is the primordial urge to paint, an urge that draws deep on humanity's history:

"It's all part of the urge toward figuration. You look out at this world and you're called to make gestures in response. And that's a primordial calling: goes all the way back to the cave painters. May even have preceded language. People are always asking me about my ancestors, and I say. Well there must have been a cave painter back there somewhere. Him scratching away on his cave wall, me dragging my thumb over this iPhone's screen. All part of the same passion."¹

¹ 'David Hockney's iPhone Passion', Lawrence Weschler, New York Review of Books, *The Best Technology Writing 2010*, Yale University Press, 2010,

The art critic Herbert Read (and renowned anarchist) calls this the 'will to form'.

*"No one will deny the profound inter-relation of artist and community. The artist depends on the community - takes his tone, his tempo, his intensity from the society of which he is a member. But the individual character of the artist's work depends on more than these: it depends on a will-to-form which is a force within the artist's personality."*²

Of course, true and great artists are different to other people in the way that Hockney and Read describe, but everyone has an instinct for the arts, drawing on longer-standing universal instincts which seek out myth and religion. Everyone, however poor or excluded, whatever the difficulties of their day-to-day existence, even if they are only struggling and subsisting, is 'moved by a desire to understand the world around them, its nature and society'³. That gives them the capacity for 'disinterested thinking', or story-telling, music making, drama or dance. We are no less impelled to make modern myths than at any time in human history. The roots of the arts in myths are inseparably intertwined with the experience of living; of being human. We make them about such modern obsessions as science and progress too.

This instinct is an all too evident blessing in childhood. No sensible parent nowadays would venture from home without a story book and a colouring book and coloured pencils. Every parent knows that two simple activities have the power to distract and calm an anxious or fractious child: reading a story or drawing a picture. These are the uncomplicated, consoling and revelatory truths about art and artistic practice (drawing a picture) and artistic appreciation (telling a story). Throughout all our lives these two assurances of making and appreciating art recur in many different circumstances.

From a child's perspective acquiring literacy and the demands and possibilities of communication are a mixed blessing. As John Berger noted in the opening sentence of his classic *Ways of Seeing*,

*"Seeing came before words. The child recognises before it can speak."*⁴

² *The Meaning of Art*, Herbert Read, Faber and Faber, 1931

³ *Myth and Meaning*, Claude Levi Strauss, Schocken, 1979

⁴ *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger, Penguin, 1972

The power to join in and influence others may be gained by writing and reading, but the possibilities of unfettered imagination are contained and curtailed at the same time. Growing up only accelerates this depressing descent into rationality. Adults forget not only what they once saw and sensed, but forget also forget the feeling of having seen it and sensed it at all; such are the sad but sanitising limitations of memory. In the name of self-protection ugliness and pain are forgotten, but memories of joy and beauty disappear in the same way. Adult life is lived mostly through the conscious mind in the visible world – these are unwanted but seemingly necessary restrictions. This is how the advantages and disadvantages of reading look through the eyes of a five-year old, Robert in Edward St Aubyn’s novel *Mother’s Milk*.

“In a way things were more perfect when you couldn’t describe anything....Once you looked into language, all you could do was shuffle the greasy pack of a few thousand words that millions of people had used before....But before the thoughts got mixed up with words, it wasn’t as if the dazzle of the word hadn’t been exploding in the sky of his attention.”⁵

Perhaps one of the continuing purposes of art is attempting to recover that dazzled and exploding imagination.

This paper is about the many ways in which these two ideas of making and appreciating art have woven their way through to contemporary society and the forms they take within it. I am not concerned here with the special skills, insights and privileges of the artists who have received official or public recognition.

The first section of the paper counsels against thinking of current ways of making and experiencing art as permanent. They may feel classic and forbidding at a particular moment but that may be little more than snobbery intended to evoke feelings of inferiority among the less well-educated or less well off. In this sense of constant re-framing and re-forming the arts are in perpetual motion. The manner and matter of how they are seen in future is bound to be different to the present because the present is so different to the past.

The second section argues that appreciation of art offers great pleasure and wisdom, though appreciation in itself is unlikely to be transformative, especially for the excluded or the worst off. This section also deals with the way in which arts education has become tainted by snobbery and elitism, as well as the difficulties of combining arts education with the obligations of contemporary education to prepare pupils for a fractured and fragmented labour market. The third section of the paper notes

⁵ *Mother’s Milk*, Edward St. Aubyn, Picador, 2006

how the making of art has been incorporated into the industrial processes of the market. Production mediated by 'good taste' (which is nevertheless often arbitrary, ephemeral and mutable) has come to be called 'the creative industries', part of 'the knowledge economy.' This transformation has brought economic benefit but has arguably degraded and limited the creative process itself as well as creating a hyper-reality over which, as I will discuss, widespread and then permanent dissatisfaction soon comes to prevail. The fourth section draws out my thoughts and reflections on a range of arts visited and observed for this report, many of them funded by the City Bridge Trust.

Sections five and six are about how access to the making of art has been widened to draw in almost everyone including the left out and the left behind to considerable therapeutic and other benefit. The reservation of the arts for the knowing and the wealthy has been bust open and not a moment too soon. Despite elitism and the lowering effects of industrial production processes for market value, participation in the making of art has become once more, as it was in ancient times, an almost universal practice adapted for and enabled through technology in contemporary ways of life. Section seven is about the specific benefits of the arts, for everyone and particularly for vulnerable people.

The last section of the paper advances a new idea: 'create-ability'. I argue that seeing and understanding objects that communicate love, truth or beauty is not as good as making them. The emphasis in education on the contradictory priorities of appreciating 'the finer things in life' and learning the generally mundane skills required to get a job are in the end less important than the possibility everyone could be endowed with the pleasures, benefits and abilities of making things.

The subjects are discussed thematically as well as with reference to specific arts projects. I have also tried to point to important trends, such as the growth of participation, the increased significance of technology and the widespread 'commodification' of artistic activity and output. These trends are not linear. Society does not progress in one simple direction and the arts certainly do not proceed in a straight line; on the contrary, things move in all directions, often paradoxical, sometimes contradictory, though no doubt subject to some subterranean, indiscernible complex patterns. I have therefore highlighted currents as well as counter-currents. I have sought to look for the 'invariant elements among superficial differences.'⁶ The differences in this case being the range of types, settings and approaches of artistic activity encountered in writing this paper, but to be encountered all the time, everywhere.

⁶ Levi Strauss, op cit

1. Art in Perpetual Motion: From the lordly to the intimate

Writing and reading books has changed little for hundreds of years even though the means by which books are produced and reproduced has been radically simplified and made more efficient and cost effective in numerous mostly technological ways. However the experience of reading a book, having hardly changed, is perhaps unique in its immutability among the art forms.

Often built in the classical style to convey familiarity and permanence museums and art galleries are meant to feel like institutions which have been present for centuries, but compared to the entire history of painting showing paintings in purpose-built galleries is relatively recent. Many of the paintings and sculptures millions of people have come to know and love by visiting art galleries were originally intended for churches and private houses. Religious paintings were an aid to priests in fulfilling their duties to instruct the faithful. The proportions and perspectives; the humanity and aestheticism that characterize Renaissance painting in contemporary thought were part of the artist's *method*, but in the main their *purpose* was religious.

In most other cultures too, most of the beautiful objects now on display in museums were created for the purpose of ritual, even sacrifice or to be buried with the dead. Beauty in the eye of the beholder was, if anything, secondary, perhaps even irrelevant. Aesthetic appreciation by the irreligious was not at all the intention of the commissioner or the artist, but intention and effect need not be closely connected. William Hazlitt wrote,

“A life spent among pictures, in the study and love of art, is a happy noiseless dream.”

It may be a ‘happy, noiseless dream’ to Hazlitt and to many contemporary viewers. But those who commissioned and created the artworks in question certainly did not have ‘noiseless dreams’ in mind. Their intention in religious and aristocratic painting was to make a good deal of wakeful noise, some of it far from happy. Outside of churches and religious art aristocratic portraits without religious meaning were displayed in grand private houses for the greater glory of wealthy individuals, families and their ancestors; or to revel in military success, or strengthen the attachment of ordinary citizens to their aristocratic superiors and royal rulers; or to remind descendants of the forbidding, formidable strengths of their forebears.

Artists also, like their work, have not always been seen as they are now. The lonely artist quarrying ideas from the darker recesses of their tortured but original minds has always been far from the truth and something of a romantic fantasy. Instead of searching in solitude for intense, solitary ideas and inspiration, painters' studios can be more like factories than solo creative effort. In the past subjects were taken by instruction or payment. Subjects were saints and heroes but their models were peasants and prostitutes. Assistants helped them to produce and reproduce as many paintings as they could in the shortest time. Artists' lives were often rambunctious and certainly irreligious. Out of these many mundane things they created what we now see as sublime art, touching the heights of the human calling, admitting the viewer to the mysteries of truth, love and beauty. This is Hazlitt's 'noiseless dream', metaphorical gold made from crushed stones and the blood of insects.

Significantly, the means of reproduction of these works has changed too, more or less re-defining the meaning of the phrase a 'work of art'. Although it was always possible, with time, expense and manual effort to copy images, photography made it possible for anyone to create or copy images quickly with relatively little effort. The unique work was not unique any more. We have come a long way from the artist's months of painstaking work in the studio before anyone sees the result.

Film too changed the dynamics. They made photographs move and took theatre away from the contrivances of the stage and into real life *mise en scenes*. Digital photography has taken a further drastic step in re-defining the work of art. Not only can it be quickly and easily copied, it can also be instantaneously transmitted. And in recent times another huge technological step has been taken: art is created on the phone. David Hockney, a longstanding technophile among artists, now makes 'paintings' on his iPhone. He uses his phone to paint the light of the dawn from the bedroom of his window in North Yorkshire, something he says is hard to achieve with traditional painting.

*"After all, what clearer, more luminous light are we ever afforded? Especially here [in Yorkshire] where the light comes rising over the sea, just the opposite of my old California haunts. But in the old days, one never could, because, of course, ordinarily it would be too dark to see the paints; or else, if you turned on a light so as to be able to see them, you'd lose the subtly gathering tones of the coming sun. But with an iPhone, I don't even have to get out of bed, I just reach for the device, turn it on, start mixing and matching the colours, laying in the evolving scene."*⁷

⁷ Quoted in Weschler, op cit

Nature, as in Hockney's case, has much pre-occupied artists, its representation and relevance. One looks at Gainsborough's paintings not just for the mostly aristocratic subjects, but for the landscape beyond. The nature there represented has to some extent been 'rescued from time and anxiety'⁸ and thereby turned into culture. The contemporary artist Richard Long, using walking as his artistic material and text as his way of representing nature, has taken this process to a wonderful essence.

A technology that assists an artist of Hockney's distinction in 'subtly gathering tones of the coming sun' (in itself, a very lovely description) must be something special. His enthusiasm for the phone's utility and benefit extends beyond its creative or aesthetic capacity to its immediacy and the ease of unmediated dissemination to friends, not to hard-headed dealers, galleries or customers.

*"It's always there in the pocket, there's no thrashing about, scrambling for the right colour. One can set to work immediately, there's this wonderful impromptu quality, this freshness to the activity; and when it's over, best of all, there's no mess to clean up. You just turn off the machine. Or even better, you hit Send and your little cohort of friends around the world gets to experience a similar immediacy. There's something, finally, very intimate about the whole process."*⁹

The technological techniques of reproduction by film and photograph have gone beyond their utilitarian purposes and become means of original creation in themselves, available at low cost almost universally, even now available on mobile telephones. This is a recurring, reflexive event that has looped reproduction back to production. Photographs are no longer simply copies of artificial studio set-ups. Film is now much more than moving theatre. Everyone can be a photographer or a film maker now. But photographers can also be artists. Photographs and films can be works of art in themselves. And photographers and film makers rank among the first flight of the finest artists. The photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson is a twentieth century master to be compared with Matisse or Picasso. Similarly Orson Welles stands alongside the greats of twentieth century American theatre, Arthur Miller or Eugene O'Neill.

⁸ *The System of Objects*, Jean Baudrillard, Verso, 1996

⁹ quoted in Weschler, op cit

Intimacy in the public appreciation of art as suggested by Hockney about his iPhone 'paintings' is a recent thought. Galleries are not intended to be intimate. On the contrary, they are 'the pseudo-aristocratic conception of how art works should be displayed and the artworks themselves were 'lordly, luxury items'.¹⁰ Contemporary art in its conceptual manifestation has launched a startling challenge to traditional forms of showing art. Instead of being a painting or a sculpture, as well as containing a possibly shocking idea which needs decoding, 'contemporary art resembles a period of time that has to be experienced, or the opening of a dialogue that never ends'¹¹. Damian Hirst arranging his own auction of his art (often about death) and attracting gravity-defying prices for it in the middle of the worst financial crisis in history was a staggering work of conceptual art in itself. Like technology, though perhaps less successfully, contemporary art has sought to challenge the boundaries of time and space in which the art object is too easily imprisoned. Every generation wants to conquer and abolish time and space. The chosen delusion of our times is the computer and the internet. Previous generations thought cars, telephones and aeroplanes would transcend physical and so mental limitations. They were wrong and we will be too.

Theatres in the past were noisy, chaotic places, far from the hushed, darkened reverence now expected from audiences watching plays. Actors were (as they still often are) workaday journeymen, rarely highly paid, famous celebrities. Plays were often written and adapted by several people, some of them anonymous. Actors freely altered texts when delivering them. Sometimes the names of authors were not even known and certainly not revered. Texts were far from inviolate. They were adapted in the dissemination and repeating, changing all the time, sometimes to the extent that they became the absolute opposite of the original narrative's purpose. Such is the history of the making and re-making of mythology, to which the creation of material works of art is a successor. Novels too create contemporary mythologies, notably for example the novels of Philip Roth with their classical tragic themes placed in contemporary urban, often working class settings.

¹⁰ *Relational Aesthetics*, Nicholas Bourriaud, 1998

¹¹ Bourriaud, op cit

The combined possibilities of exploring and encountering the surprising, spontaneous and urgent alongside the restrained, disciplined and punctilious is one of the joys of music; the ending of Mahler's fourth symphony would be a case in point. Theodor Adorno said,

"Music represents at once the immediate manifestation of the impulse and the locus of its taming."¹²

The critic Walter Pater, who became the high priest of the aesthetic movement in the late 19th century and whose thinking gave rise to the idea of 'art for art's sake' said,

"All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."

When it comes to the technologies of reproduction and their impact music has in some ways followed a similar trajectory to painting and photography. Concerts now find their moment in purpose-built halls with acoustics sensitive enough to hear a pin drop. But much of the music performed in these antiseptic vaults were intended for playing in churches or, in the case of chamber music, in private salons for invited guests. As with photography and film, technology has made possible the reproduction of the concert hall experience in the slipshod and easily distracting comforts of one's own home. As with Hockney's iPhone digital technologies have created music-making possibilities as well the potential to reproduce and listen to music easily.

Music is different to painting and photography in an important way. In choirs and orchestras music can be the result of group creativity. The pleasures and benefits of making music together are added to by the recognition and excitement of live performance, particularly the shared pleasures of performance in groups. Artistic creation by groups for groups, though far from new, profoundly responds to one of the most striking aspects of contemporary society: the way urban life, even if only encountered during the working day, has forced us into living in continuous proximity with one another, not just with those whom we choose for intimacy or have known for a long time, generations even¹³. Proximity to strangers is an irreversible dimension of modern city living which inculcates the contradictory urges to get involved as well as to get away – an aspect of our modern dissatisfaction. We want to get away and be alone when we must be involved and together and, inevitably, vice versa. These instincts are mirrored in our appreciations of the arts. We might long for a quiet afternoon alone with a book of poetry but want also to join in with others in book clubs and choirs; at performances and festivals.

¹² *The Culture Industry*, Theodor Adorno, Routledge, 1991

¹³ See *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs, Pelican 1972

Taken all together this long history of fractured changes in how art is made and appreciated combined with the rapid ascent of cheap, accessible technology to the point of universal availability has resulted in creativity becoming ubiquitous, present everywhere, in individuals and groups, and alive in everyone. In the mainstream of society almost everyone is now engaged in a form of creation, manufacture and sharing of artistic works in a kind of pan-creativity. This is a million miles from the romantic notion of the 'pure' artist. Of course, this idea of the artists as a class apart, a modern day priestly caste with the gifts of vision and insight denied to ordinary mortals, is not something which preceded these universalizing shifts. On the contrary as Walter Benjamin first pointed out, this idea arose in response to universalising creativity. Reifying the artist was in response to the secular world's dismissal of the need for lords of insight and expression.

"With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, namely photography...art felt a crisis approaching that after a further century became unmistakable, it reacted with the theory of 'l'art pour art' [art for art's sake] which constitutes a theology of art. From it there proceeded, in the further course of events, almost a negative theology in the form of the idea of a 'pure' art that rejected not only any kind of social function but also any prompting by an actual subject."¹⁴

The phrase 'art for art's sake' rarely occurs in contemporary discourse, having become associated with the allegedly reactionary aesthetic movement. But it has its contemporary analogue. This is contained in vague phrases, often heard in pretentious artistic circles, like 'I am passionate about the arts' or 'I love the work' and 'we must put the artist at the centre'. Why not put the engineer or the neurologist at the centre? Why do we need a centre? The centre of what? It is possible to be a great supporter of the arts, including the need for public and charitable financial support (as I am), without being blind to the banality of these bromides, not at all improved by frequent repetition. They are concealments for the special pleading of vested interests. The case for the arts demands and deserves greater rigour.

¹⁴ *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin, 1936

2. The possibilities and limitations of appreciation

Those for whom the appreciation of art in any art form is a tremendous pleasure and satisfaction are simply baffled by others' lack of interest and understanding. They note with enthusiasm the many beneficial effects in their own lives of appreciating the arts. There are the aesthetic pleasures of colour and form in painting; the narrative satisfactions of character and story in literature; the intellectual stimulations of insight and understanding; the speculation about the artist's beliefs or intentions. The understanding gained is likely to stretch beyond these derived from the work itself into the deeper waters of a meditation on self: the opportunity to reflect on your lived experience, relating and comparing it to the experience portrayed in or suggested by the art. But over and above all that perhaps the greatest power of art is on the emotions, the capacity of a facial expression in a painting or a few bars of music to overwhelm one's feelings, bringing on tears of joy, loss, regret or a profound sense of tragedy. A scene, an image, a line of poetry may linger in the mind for days, weeks or months, sometimes taking up lifelong occupation in the psyche. Long after the encounter or the feeling, having seen what we have seen or felt what we have felt, we are left with the thought that the experience has permanently changed us and we must from now on endeavour to become in some imagined, unrealised way different. Rainer Maria Rilke's poem *Archaic Torso of Apollo* is a wonderful description of that impact. Someone looking at an 'archaic torso of Apollo' feels as if the ancient stone, because of its beauty and brilliance is speaking silently but directly to them. The statue,

"from all the borders of itself, burst like a star: for here there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life."

These immensely powerful reactions may arise because something in our own past is re-awakened, memories or nostalgia. Or contrary-wise they may speak to something that has never happened, something fervently wished or hoped for, or something frightening, even terrifying. Perhaps powerful responses to art, although feeling unique and personal, go instead to some common experience, some shared sense of loss or joy – a feeling that seems to bring us simultaneously closer to a better understanding of our own history while also aligning it with other people's experiences. The reassuring, enlivening possibility that we are not alone summons some universal resonances. Joy and sorrow; memory and hope for the future, loss and fear are after all, universal experiences. We all want to feel spontaneous carefree excitement turn to joy, to cope with pain or grief in a dignified way, above all we all want to love and be loved. No one is immune to the thought that such hopes require all the help we can get, for which art is at hand. The art critic, Roger Fry, a member of the Bloomsbury Group and largely responsible for bringing modern painting to British audiences, wrote:

"In art there is, I think, an affective quality which...seems to derive an emotional energy from the very conditions of our existence by its revelation of an emotional significance in time and

space. Or it may be that art really calls up, as it were, the residual traces left on the spirit by the different emotions in life, without, however, recalling the actual experiences, so that we get an echo of the emotion without the limitation and particular direction which it had in experience.”¹⁵

These emotions are powerful and true and available to all, indeed inevitable in all. Despite the universal quality of these possibilities and experiences, there is nevertheless a critique to be made of the pure juxtaposition of the aesthetic and emotional. The critique is that the juxtaposition is too readily tainted in the interpretation and re-interpretation, tainted by history, by snobbery and above all by class. This leads to elitism and mystification, denying both those who mystify and are mystified the possibility of the more authentic and so more valuable experience.

Large, abstract concepts are called in aid to which the arts grant access: ‘beauty, truth, genius, civilisation, form, status, taste’¹⁶. No one would now argue that only a few people are capable of such finer feelings, while the rest are a lower species without the necessary intellectual and emotional attributes, practically monkeys in fact. It is now said - and it is true - that these responses and emotions can be experienced by everyone. But the idea that these responses are universal sometimes exists alongside the contradictory suggestion that a mind trained by a more learned and refined sensibility is needed to educate and bring out these finer feelings in the uneducated masses which would never otherwise surface through a thick crust of ignorance overlaid and overpowered by rubbish popular culture. Sensitivity to the arts is not, it is argued from this negative perspective, an instinct, but a response borne of education. Since education until the twentieth century depended on wealth (and gender), the knowledge required for appreciation of the arts depended on wealth. Even in an era of universal education some residue of that snobbery remains. No one would argue that women are not able to appreciate the arts, but many might still say that without education, reactions in ignorance of history and tradition are at best incomplete; at worst philistine. Appreciation does not just depend on education; time, and therefore leisure and wealth, are also required – and that also implies privilege and wealth. Another aspect of class superiority which infused artistic appreciation was an unconcern for the condition of the people who manufactured the works. In pursuit of the aesthetic alone, the social impact and consequences of the image, its meaning or purpose is ignored and potentially lost.

“The actual power of aesthetic image-consciousness with respect to the reception of works of art has always been highly questionable. It was bound up with education privilege and conditions of

¹⁵ *The Artist and Psychoanalysis*, Roger Fry, Hogarth Press, 1924

¹⁶ Berger, op cit

*leisure and in its pure form belonged more to the philosophical concept of art than it did to the social fate of works of art and the social conditions of their production.*¹⁷

All that said, education may better inculcate the better appreciation of truth, love or beauty to make the authentic experience more clearly focused, more vivid, more real. As well as avoiding elitist mystification, education must also increasingly perform the more mundane task of preparing young people for an unforgiving labour market. As Adorno put it, 'all mass culture is fundamentally adaptation.'¹⁸ He was not alone in thing that reproduction and communications of works of art was likely to lead to what we now call 'dumbing down', in the name of greater egalitarianism. And the attempts to make culture more 'accessible' have less than pure motives. They are less about spiritual improvement and more about docile workers.

*"Not enough that faded aristocratic values are fed to the fraternal millions; they are simultaneously translated into egalitarian terms and the jargon of unlimited communication. Spiritual nobility of soul and the sense of fraternity have melted together into slogans for the workforce."*¹⁹

The demands of authenticity are bound to be different to the requirements of inclusion – the former seeks to give greater space for the individual and the unique, the personal and the unrepeatable. Inclusion on the other hand emphasises shared experience and group thinking, working together, standardisation and repetition in the name of efficiency.

*"Officially [bourgeois] education is oriented towards the realm of the ideal, towards 'alles ist Schone and Gute' (all is beautiful and good), it encourages admiration for the heroic individual and glorifies the value of candour, selfishness and generosity. And yet from our earliest youth all of this is only admitted on the condition that it is not after all taken seriously. With every gesture the pupil is given to understand that what is most important is understanding the demands of 'real life' and fitting oneself properly for the competitive realm."*²⁰

¹⁷ Adorno, op cit

¹⁸ Adorno, op cit

¹⁹ Adorno, op cit

²⁰ Adorno, op cit

Although there has been a tendency to universalizing the making of art, the appreciation of classic art objects regrettably is still an all too rarefied business. The problems and contradictions of understanding the difficult in pursuit of the authentic are increased by the possibility that in the explanation, the shift from the tacit to the explicit, something is lost. This is what Richard Sennett summed up as “a movement from hands-on knowledge to the dominant authority of explicit knowledge.” And if the idea is not just to simplify for one person, but for everybody then something big may be lost in the simplification. The lowest common denominator is soon reached even if pursued in the name of egalitarianism. It is not just that simplification may lead to banality. As people are swamped by the artifices and artefacts of the ‘mass media’ and as these gain currency across all the social classes more traditional forms of popular culture are occluded to the verge of extinction, like folk music or country dancing²¹.

In truth, regardless how well-educated the viewer, the contemporary experience is bound to be different from the original artistic intention. Our times are different: more secular, individualistic, mechanized and urban. However transfixing the beauty of Renaissance paintings, the contemporary viewer who does not believe that the beautiful young woman with the ecstatic expression is a virgin to whom an angel has announced that she will give birth to the son of god is having a different experience to the one the artist intended. She is not just a sublimely beautiful young woman in an iridescent blue cloak cast in perfect perspective against a Tuscan landscape. However transporting the contemporary listener finds Bach’s St John Passion, if they do not believe that the tremendous, mournful drama of the music is to convey the significance of the death of that same son of God and its symbolic re-enactment in the mass, it simply cannot be the same experience as it is for a believer. Aesthetic, human or philosophical responses are bound to be short of the limits the artist was aiming for. An ancient bronze head from Benin may look stately and elegant, but it was certainly not made to be exhibited in a museum. No one knows for certain why it was made. We cannot fully know what our contemporary sensitivities are missing and we cannot miss what we have never known.

²¹ See *Uses of Literacy*, Richard Hoggart, 1957

Simply using education to improve access to the extant benefits of art as currently presented to those too ill-educated to have discovered these treasures and pleasures themselves or to have had them bestowed as a birthright of class and breeding might be worthwhile but will hardly be enough if the contemporary representations to which people are being introduced are shortly to be anachronisms, many quickly forgotten. Since the way that art is created, and the relationship between artists, art and their audiences has changed in radical and revolutionary ways over time, these methods and relationships can only be expected to change again in future. The one certain thing is the way that art is created and experienced in the future will not be the same as now. So the emerging trends in the arts are as interesting and important as the current methods and approaches.

3. Art for the market: The triumph of the inessential

The means of technological reproduction being so readily to hand and the recognition that creativity is not reserved for the chosen few has long led to the creation of artistic products for sale and distribution. Long ago the financial transaction stretched beyond paying the artist to make the work towards the on-sale of artistic product as well as the sale and on-sale of reproductions of it.

Reasonably faithful reproductions of Michelangelo's David sold to millions of tourists cheap and in all sizes has turned a masterpiece of sublime beauty into a global icon that has almost become kitsch.

From the consumer's point of view 'needing' to acquire an object has gone far beyond the use to which it might be put. Any individual object can attract various kinds of value. These have multiplied in contemporary culture, way beyond simple, practical usefulness, or even just looking nice. As for the object, it might be valued for its financial value or for its exchange value. But an object can also acquire symbolic value: the watch that I received as a gift for my first communion is a symbol in my mind of a sacramental moment in my young life many decades ago. And the symbolic object is also a sign within a system of signs.²² In my case, the make of the watch was Ingersoll. Nowadays the present of a Swatch is something vastly different to being given a Rolex. If the Rolex is a cheap fake bought in a Bangkok street market, however, that would mean something entirely different again. These various types of value are not aligned with one another. They do not march in step. Appreciation in one domain of value does not mean appreciation in all domains. The expensive might also be vulgar; something simple and inexpensive, even if it was found and free, can be minimally elegant. Similarly something desirable to the many may – partly as a result – seem undesirable to the refined or select few. These binaries and switchbacks have created the marketing industries. Marketing has 'awakened desire' by creating the feeling in us all that desire is in fact need. The creative industries also flow out of these processes of switchback value creation.

²² Baudrillard, op cit

The digital space and the knowledge economy (in which information and its interpretation is bought and sold; no objects are involved at all) mean that symbols and signs can be created, communicated and exchanged without going to the trouble of making an object. The object may only exist in virtual, on-line space or it may be just an idea, a concept. Its creative aspect is a process rather than an object, as in design or architecture. Even within the ordinary bureaucratic workplace, where in the past accurate unquestioning repetition were the principle virtues of efficient production office workers are now encouraged to innovate and be creative; they are even sent on training courses on how to do it. The creation of creativity has become a creative industry in itself. We have entered what Baudrillard described as 'hyper-reality'. Nothing is only what it seems, intended to be more but quickly turning out to be less, and then awakening desire for something else; something new. As consumers we are doomed to feel both over-fed and hungry at the same time.

Creativity is itself up for sale, re-labelled as innovation. So a computer engineering company like Apple comes to be known as a creator of beautiful objects and an innovator, not simply as talented group of engineers, without whom none of the rest of it – creativity and innovation – would ever materialise.

“The characteristic of the industrial object which distinguishes it from the craft object is that in the former the inessential is no longer left to the whims of individual and manufacture, but instead picked up and systematized by the production process, which today defines its aims by reference to what is inessential (and by reference to the universal combinatorial systems of fashion).”²³

Fashion means that signs and symbols are ever-changing. What is thought beautiful changes not just with the seasons, but all the time creating a constant struggle to keep pace and an endless desire for consuming more. Fashion has spread way beyond its traditional domain in women's clothes into furniture, gardens and now even into food. This process of monetizing creativity, like it or not, has put the consumer in the driving seat and downgraded the artist. Walter Benjamin noted back in the 1930s that artists respond to threats by embracing them, though with misgivings. Artists have fought back in the currency of their defeat. They have turned themselves into 'brands' extending their work far beyond the realm of art and its reproduction into the creation of objects designed not as art but for sale.

Since the 1980s in the UK, following rapid de-industrialisation, these processes along with their close cousin, technological innovation has transformed the British economy. Facilitated by the globalization of investment capital, trade and supply chains have created numerous opportunities and destroyed

²³ Baudrillard, op cit

many others, transforming the world of work and revolutionizing what the word work means. Work used to have two simple and distinct definitions. The first kind of work, such as being a coal miner, working in a steel mill or being an agricultural labourer, was physically arduous, boring, repetitive, unsociable, done in uncongenial physical conditions, thought to be unskilled and poorly paid. The second kind of work, the work done by managers and professionals, involved a good deal of socializing at the company's expense, was intellectually stimulating and varied, physically undemanding, high status and well paid. The fact that manual workers had a great deal more social solidarity than their 'white collar' counterparts is hardly surprising given the unpleasantness of their lives. It was a limited consolation but now that social solidarity at work, like most manual labour, has gone forever. Knowledge and creativity are the only currencies in which the British economy can realistically deal.

In that context, the word work has taken on other meanings. At the end of a particularly exposing and harrowing session psychotherapists tell their participants that they have done 'good work'. The hard labour is emotional, not physical; the emotional exploration of oneself. And artists too now produce 'work'. Curators go to 'look at work'; they no longer just go to exhibitions. The created object is no longer a fetish. The more all-encompassing term 'work' can take in things which are not objects, which, as I have noted, may scarcely exist at all.

The intention in separating the creative process from the art object is to put creativity at the service of constructing a product that has value in the market. This has consequences not just for the artist but also for the way the work is perceived and responded to. The appreciator has become a consumer and consumers have choices. The creative act is then the choice of the artistic product not just the inspiration and making of the object. The consumer is validating their own knowing good taste, as well as, perhaps more than, the creativity of the artist. Whether one likes it or not, as a result the consumer is empowered, the artist devalued. Buying a ticket for a concert by a famous composer, conductor and orchestra 'creates the appearance of immediacy at the same time as the absence of relation to the object'.²⁴ In other words consuming the artistic product creates an illusion of good taste and social status, rather than inspiration and enjoyment *per se*. 'Every object has two functions – to be put to use and to be possessed.'²⁵ Buying the ticket may be more important than the appreciation of the music.

²⁴ Adorno, op cit

²⁵ Baudrillard, op cit

4. What we saw and experienced in arts projects and activities

I have argued that the making and representation of art is constantly in flux, even if it looks fixed. So far, I have also made two binary and somewhat paradoxical arguments. First, the joys of art are universally accessible, but education can also help – and hinder – in its appreciation. Second, while there may be much money to be made and many jobs available in the creative industries, working in the creative industries is not the same as making an artistic object. Art has the capacity to encompass the entire range of human emotions and experiences; the creative industries do not. In this section of the paper I want to test these arguments against some real projects and artistic activities. The main arguments in this paper are about firstly, the emotional benefits of appreciating the arts and secondly, the importance of making things. On those two important counts these projects generally passed with flying colours.

We reviewed a database of several hundred arts organization that Lemos&Crane has compiled over many years through awards and websites. These ranged from arts projects promoting literacy, activities taking place in prisons, in community centres, in theatres and art galleries, projects which focused on particular client groups. The database included projects doing creative writing, music making, choirs, visual arts, drama workshops, theatre skills, playwriting, and digital arts. A sample is given in the appendix. We also specifically considered arts projects which had been funded by City Bridge Trust.

Out of that long list, we selected a range of arts projects to visit, many though not all of which were supported financially by the City Bridge Trust. We observed and participated in some of their activities *in situ*. We watched and discussed their work, in a range of settings, including a care home for older people, arts centres, a women's prison, a young offenders' institution, secondary schools, a training centre, Sadlers Wells Theatre in Islington and the Albany in Deptford.

The activities we encountered, like the settings in which they took place, were also tremendously varied: drama workshops in a secondary school, a women's prison and a young offenders' institution; a reminiscence session in a care home for older people, a super hero club night for young adults with learning disabilities at the Albany; script writing and film making workshops for people over 60 and those who had experienced mental health problems, a theatre design class for women who had been involved in the criminal justice system, music workshops, drawing and art classes and exhibitions.

Similarly, if not more diverse was the range of people we encountered as participants: people with mental health problems, both those living in the community and inpatients, older people in care homes, people over 60, young people, young adults with learning disabilities, offenders, including people serving life sentences for murder, people from many different racial and ethnic backgrounds, men and women. The diversity of the participants in every sense was one of the most striking features of the projects we visited, particularly when all the projects were considered. They really were reaching a wonderful range of people.

As well as the differences, when the projects were considered in comparison, some underlying similarities became evident. The first striking positive quality was that all the projects used highly structured, focused, clearly defined methods. Notable by its absence was time-wasting, drifting, lassitude and pointless activity. This may not sound like much, but these are often negative features of all too many community and youth centres and activities. Allied to the clear, structures and methods, was the fact that the facilitators, trainers, group leaders, theatre directors and so on were all skilled professionals, highly motivated and committed. These are again not qualities encountered everywhere.

An all too common feature of many worthy projects and activities is a distinct reluctance to participate on the part of the intended beneficiaries. Well-intentioned projects often struggle to motivate and engage people into the activities. There are often few incentives; stigma may be attached to participating and the activities themselves may be not very interesting and too much like hard work. In prisons or other institutional settings it is relatively easy to oblige people to participate since they have few other choices and are to some extent susceptible to moral pressure, particularly if, for example, they know that compliance and participation may quite legitimately assist in the granting of a parole application. In order to be trusted a prisoner has to demonstrate the seriousness of their commitment to change. In community settings however, people may simply not be interested or motivated and cannot easily be cajoled or persuaded. By contrast, in the projects we visited, there was no evidence of shortage either of demand or enthusiasm. Many of the activities, groups and projects were fully subscribed, even with a waiting list, such as the Company of Elders. Others, like Heart 'n' Soul's club night at the Albany in south London, attracted more than 300 people. Some came considerable distances from many different parts of the country and, in many cases, required special transport to make the journey.

Demand for these activities and attendance at them is not necessarily the same as enthusiasm or impact. But we encountered many examples of enormously animated discussions, for example, about the Synergy theatre production of 'Random' by Debbie Tucker Green, a play about someone being killed by stabbing and the traumatic emotions brought on in the family; themes which resonated with the experiences of the women in the room, some of whom disclosed that they had been convicted of murders themselves. Discussions often took a very personal and disclosing turn, becoming intimate and emotional. A powerful space for personal reflection had evidently been created along with the possibility of new insight leading to a change in attitude and behaviour in the future.

Age Exchange

Age Exchange has earned a local, regional, national and international reputation for developing creative opportunities for older people who in turn help younger people to understand their past and interpret the world around them. Age Exchange has translated and interpreted the experiences and memories of thousands of older people into touring productions, schools work, training projects, arts programmes and cultural events. They are the leaders in reminiscence work. Reminiscence workshops gather invaluable materials which are then used in a range of contemporary settings. The workshops take place in the community as well as in residential care homes and hospitals. As well as the benefits to the participants themselves, which are well-established in research, work in care homes also contributes to making professional care of older people more personal and less depressing. Loneliness, helplessness and boredom are the triangle of curses that afflict too many older people living in care homes and reminiscence work of the sort undertaken by Age Exchange is a welcome corrective.

We attended a workshop in a residential care home. Some of the residents present were living with dementia, the group for whom reminiscence work is most effective. A range of evocative materials was used including songs, pictures, cookery books, advertisements, kitchen utensils, a bar of carbolic soap and a tea cosy. The discussions and activities engendered undoubtedly authentic responses from residents, like, *"On Friday's Mum didn't cook but brought in fish and chips."* Another resident noted, *"My dad was a miserable bugger."*

Most of the discussion focused on childhood rather than memories from adult life. The facilitators were very skilled and enthusiastic, showing a touching and admirable kindness, respectfulness and gentleness; perhaps the most important thing in the circumstances.

Clean Break

Clean Break is a theatre, education and new writing company which works through theatre for personal and political change, working with women whose lives have been affected by the criminal justice system. Established in 1979 by two female prisoners, Clean Break Theatre is recognised nationally as a leading arts education and training provider for female prisoners, ex-prisoners and ex-offenders. Their ethos is engaging in theatre creates new opportunities for women in these situations and with these histories, developing personal, social, artistic and professional skills. Clean Break's principal activities include a nationally accredited education and training programme in theatre and the performing arts; an annual touring production within theatres and prisons; and training and education using theatre for prisoners, offenders and other professionals working within the criminal justice system.

We attended part of an excellent theatre design course for a group of about ten women who had been involved with the criminal justice system. The course was highly structured and demanding of intensive time and attention. The impressive focus was on tasks, making things and achievements. Reflection and debate were not part of the methodology. From observation and conversation it was clear that the participants got a great deal out of the course as well as the wider encounter with Clean Break and theatre. As well as skills, camaraderie and a considerable boost in their self-esteem was delivered by achievement on the course.

Many of the women told us in informal conversation that their lives, though much improved now that they were not part of the criminal justice system, were still complicated and in some ways difficult. Their confidence as well as their quality of life was greatly enhanced not just by what they were learning and the skills they were acquiring, but also from the mind-expanding, life-enhancing stimuli and pleasures of going to the theatre with friends and becoming involved in the arts more generally. For some their lives had never been easy even before regardless of their entanglement with criminal justice. Their early experiences of education had been unsatisfactory and disempowering; relationships had been disappointing and ephemeral; parenthood had proved demanding; jobs had not been easy to come by. And drugs had in some cases played too large and destructive a role in their lives. Their involvement with the arts, while not solving all those problems, was making their lives bigger, and in that way making their problems relatively smaller; a profound and unarguable benefit.

Company of Elders

Sadler's Wells provides a programme of dance and educational activities for older people. The Over 60s Club was set up in 1989 in conjunction with four day centres in Islington. Its focus is dance, with the emphasis on movement rather than ballet, plus an educational input from leading choreographers and dancers. Members are sometimes taught by visiting choreographers from the main theatre and perform with some of the dancers.

The Company of Elders is a pioneering dance company whose participants have an average age of 75 years. Half of the members are in their 80s. The company is over-subscribed and closed to new members. Most have had no formal dance training prior to joining the company and yet are able to achieve the highest standards culminating in a performance in the Sadler's Wells Theatre before an audience which has paid the full price for tickets.

We attended a performance by the Company of Elders as part of a mixed bill at the Lilian Baylis Studio Theatre. The items on the bills featured dancers of all ages from various Sadlers Wells' activities and programmes. There was no hint of populism or dumbing down in the performance. The look, feel and movement was highly contemporary; more Pina Bausch than Strictly Come Dancing. In conversation with the dancers afterwards, it was clear that they took the work extremely seriously, seeing it as artistic creation, not just a leisure pastime or a social activity. One of the dancers observed tartly that she thought much contemporary dance featuring young dancers was 'soft porn'. That rather acerbic observation speaks of a great deal of pride and commitment; seriousness of purpose and resolute creativity – all requirements to be an artist. In their maturity the company members had become artists.

Core Arts

Core Arts, established in 1992, is a unique organisation providing a range of visual art, music and multi-media opportunities for people with mental health problems living in the London Borough of Hackney and surrounding areas. The need for these services is well documented - the levels of mental ill health in deprived boroughs such as Hackney are significantly above the national average. Surveys of local in-patients in mental health wards show great interest in artistic therapies, as a means of self-expression. Each week Core Arts offer 52 workshops for painting, creative writing, music and singing. Service users are regularly involved in the planning of classes and activities. Indeed, it was users that proposed a change from open sessions to more time-tabled classes. These were seen by participants as encouraging regular attendance with a degree of structure which they sought in their lives.

We visited the Core arts centre, observing and meeting people taking part in life drawing classes, music teaching, musical jam sessions, art classes and IT skills sessions. Musicians worked together and had good technical equipment for recording and producing CDs. The art sessions were for hospital in patients with mental health problems. The atmosphere was calm, focused and productive, perhaps unlike other times in the participants' lives. The artists in the life drawing classes seemed pretty accomplished to our untrained eyes. An exhibition of the work of Rudolph Lindo, a Core arts member, was also on display.

As with Clean Break the focus was on the task and the output. These were not therapeutic sessions *per se*. In the sessions we encountered the emphasis was on making art, not reflecting on or debating personal experiences. There was a prevailing ethos of de-stigmatising the experiences of members, likewise shared with Clean Break. Labelling and stereotyping were actively avoided and the focus was on the people and the art, not the problems and the past. And the manner of focus combined calm with spontaneity. If only life was like that all the time.

Harrow Community Choir

The Harrow Community Choir provides musical creativity in a friendly, safe environment where mental health service users, their families and carers can sing, enhance their musical and creative abilities, build self-confidence, socialise and becoming confident about performing in public regularly. Among the choir's objectives are team working, while retaining individuality; reducing the stigma of mental illness labels; peer support on a practical level; and integration into the wider community. Members' abilities range from those who have been singing for 30 years or more to those who have never sung but always wanted to. The age of the group is from 20 to 70s. One of the co-directors is a former mental health service user and the other is a current service user.

Rehearsals are weekly including provision of outside professional tuition. Members are encouraged to suggest their favourite music for the choir to sing, getting people to take a solo spot within the songs and gently exploring their own musical creativity in a supportive and safe atmosphere. Since its inauguration in October 2009, the choir has made several public performances, mainly at events within the mental health community.

A natural development of working together and socialising has been to encourage groups of members to support each other with practical issues, everything from giving members lifts to resolving housing problems. There is a strong belief in what can be achieved with social support in the community, for which there is plenty of evidence in the research literature. Some members, who have returned to hospital, still attend choir rehearsals and events even though they are inpatients. Here are some comments from members.

"And for me personally you've managed to achieve something bordering on unique: you've got me committed (almost!) to a weekly activity that I've both enjoyed and maintained for 10 months with very few missed rehearsals or events!"

"The feeling of togetherness and the sound of the choir was uplifting."

"You feel part of something and it gives me the opportunity to meet people and go out in the evening."

We attended an evening session. By 7.30 pm all the seats in the hired room at the Centre were taken. About 30 people attended a mixture of both mental health service users and their carers. Several we spoke to were founder members and affirmed the confidence they gained both from the activity of singing and doing so as part of group of people, who they felt affirmed by and who were mutually supportive outside the evening's activities.

The purpose of our visit was more participatory than observational. To understand how the group 'ticked' and the power of singing together, it had been stressed we too would have to sing! "We love breaking down barriers" as Harrow Community Choir co-director David Phelops had put it.

Our overwhelming impressions were first, the very high levels of engagement by the choir and the audience throughout the evening. Sometimes this seemed even transformational, as someone who had struggled to speak found a strong, clear singing voice. Secondly, the experience of singing together – 'talented' and 'untalented', service users and carers – created a warm and empathetic atmosphere of non-judgmental solidarity. The songs were carefully chosen to emphasise positive feelings, inclusiveness and a sense of a supportive community. The voice exercises meant even those who experienced difficulty in articulation could contribute as much as anyone else. The benefits of finding a voice are of obvious literal and metaphorical value; as are the gains of recognitions from the wider world. All that applies to everyone, but it applies with special force to those who have suffered the exclusions consequent on problems with the mental health.

Heart 'n' Soul

Heart 'n' Soul is a leading organisation in the disability arts movement. It is based in the Albany, a community arts centre in Deptford, home to a number of significant disability arts organisations. Heart 'n' Soul provides opportunities for adults with learning disabilities to create musical and theatrical productions which then tour and are also performed at open events in mainstream club culture.

We attended a club night for 300 young people with learning disabilities and their families and carers at the Albany in Deptford. This was a splendid occasion. The theme for the evening was superheroes and costumes for dressing up were available, as was photographic equipment to record the memorable experience of becoming Spider Man or Super Man for the evening. On the main stage the Fish Police were playing, a band that had been formed by people who had attended Heart 'n' Soul activities, some of whom though not all had learning disabilities. One was deaf and one, by way of contrast, played bass with Grace Jones. This was interspersed with DJ and VJ sessions, as well as an open mike session. In the rooms around the centre there was a tranquil 'midnight garden' for relaxing and calming down, a games room full of computer games an art zone, a 'unique boutique' and a parents' and carers' room. There was also, of course, the café and the bar.

The atmosphere was exceptionally convivial with much dancing by (not so old) parents as well as young people. Many of those attending were obviously friends, pleased to see one another again in lively conversation. As is to be expected at a club night, romance (or at least a few kisses) blossomed among some young people. Although, a very different kind of project to Clean Break or Core Arts, we also got the impression that Heart 'n' Soul sought not to dwell too much on problems, preferring instead to think about possibilities. The fact that the evening was specifically for young people with learning disabilities meant that the participants could rest assured of being free from prejudice, stigma or hostility (which has finally been recognized as a widespread problem) and could be unconcerned about seemingly conspicuously different and therefore shy or anxious. The experience was lively, positive and life-enhancing. The benefits of fun are not to be under-estimated.

Spare Tyre

Spare Tyre is a long-established and innovative theatre company which works with marginalised groups in the community. It provides people with the opportunity to express themselves through creating and performing theatre on subjects important to them. Spare Tyre began life more than 30 years ago as a radical women's theatre project, but has since broadened its remit significantly, seeking to address disadvantage in many areas.

Hotpots are an ensemble of artists over 60. Hot Pots are 'role models speaking to their own community and challenging social prejudice'. Hot Pots are uniquely placed to articulate and celebrate the voice of older people. They devise and perform their own shows, often based on personal experience. Hot Pots also tour to audiences in community and arts venues.

"They are committed to having their voices heard – enlightening audiences about the potential of older people. "

The ethos of the Hot Pots group is very specific. They interrogate their own experience, turn it into theatre or film and perform with a clear goal of challenging prejudices about older people like them. They were, as it were, using theatre and film to campaign through speaking out in an authentic and different voice to prevailing negative stereotypes. Their artistic practice was a study in assertiveness. The benefits are felt in the gaining of pride in being yourself, being different.

During our encounters they were being trained by a freelance actor/director in scriptwriting, film and appear in a short film. Some of them had already produced ideas and half-written scripts and they made a good deal of progress in working together to develop a story board, validating the individual achievement of the person whose original idea they were working on, but working together to realise it creatively.

From our participation and conversation, the group clearly had a strong, bonded collective identity as a group of artists, as well as people who wanted to challenge negative received wisdom about older people. As individuals, they seem to have embraced the identity of an artist for themselves. So, while they may set as their mission the influencing of other people's perceptions of them, the primary and immediate impact was on their impressions of themselves.

Synergy Theatre Project

Synergy Theatre Project was established in 2000 specialising in working with prisoners, offenders and ex-offenders through drama to enable better rehabilitation and to enhance their skills. Its work also aims to raise debate and discussion about imprisonment and its consequences in the wider public arena. Synergy has a strong programme of supporting prisoners to write, produce and perform their own work. One of the important strands of Synergy's work in recent years is to harness the experiences and "life-skills" of the offenders and ex-offenders to use drama work with young people – especially those deemed at risk of offending – to challenge their preconceptions and attitudes. Synergy has developed strong links (and received funding) from local police forces and crime reduction agencies and has garnered much praise for this work, including their work in schools.

We visited a women's prison and two schools where Synergy were working, all as part of the same project. The project was built around a play called 'Random' by Debbie Tucker Green about the reactions of family members to a stabbing and killing. It is an emotionally powerful and poetic one woman play which was performed in the prison. The school children went to see the play at a theatre. After seeing the play all three groups discussed the play, as well as participating in drama workshops about how they might go about putting on a play like this themselves.

As far as the women in prison were concerned, some of whom had lived through similar experiences to those depicted in the play, the emotional effect was powerful and cathartic. In the discussion there was considerable disclosure of personal experiences and emotions, all skilfully and empathetically handled by the facilitators. Empathy was the main theme of the debate. For people who have committed a violent crime, understanding and empathizing with the experience of the victim and their family is a critical dimension in coming to terms with the crime committed, moving on from it and not re-offending in a similar way. Someone who simply cannot see the world through the eyes of the people on whom their behaviour impacts is ill-equipped to manage their own behaviour and relationships in the future in a way that reduces the likelihood of them doing something similar again. This was a rather different ethos to that encountered in the more task and accomplishment-based projects we had visited, such as Clean Break. In this case, there was a specific emphasis on reflecting on personal experience and drawing lessons from the artistic encounter which might help in understanding and making sense of those personal experiences with a view to future emotional benefit.

With regard to the workshops in schools, less emphasis was obviously placed on inculcating victim empathy. In both schools teachers had included young people as participants in the workshops who were at risk of exclusion or had been in some kind of trouble, though they were not singled out or identified. The emphasis in the workshop was therefore more on understanding the feelings and experiences of the family in the hope that greater insight about this would have a preventative and deterrent impact. The atmosphere in the drama workshops was busy and creative, rather than reflective or disclosing. The young people were left to deduce the important messages relevant to them. The emphasis, unlike in the prison, was rather more on the creative process of making a play than on a therapeutic emotional encounter.

Ten Ten Theatre

Ten Ten Theatre is a national award-winning theatre-in-education charity borne of a Roman Catholic ethos working throughout England, Scotland and Wales. The company is developing a play about knife crime. The process of development involves running workshops in seven young offender institutions (YOIs) where different scenes are practiced directly and new scenes improvised. The company visits each YOI for one week, with morning and afternoon workshop sessions held on each day. On the final day there is a performance of the play where family members of the young offenders are invited. Having visited each of the seven YOIs and involved the young offenders themselves to such an extent in contributing to the content and language of the script, the ultimate aim is to have a highly-refined and polished play that can be shown at a major theatre. The play will also then be toured round each of the participating YOIs.

The workshop sessions are delivered by an experienced professional director and four young actors. Ten Ten Theatre's Artistic Director is also present. There are 420 inmates at Aylesbury Young Offenders' Institution. Forty young people applied to join the theatre group – an impressive 10 per cent response. Only 13 people in the end took part as others were ruled out because of bad behaviour. We attended the afternoon session of the second day at Aylesbury YOI.

This project is a triumph of the 'show, don't tell' principle. The project's aims were achieved by getting the participants to do things that illustrated indirectly the subject or objective, not just talking about them. For example, getting into the character of someone trying to persuade someone to do something – and to do so convincingly "like it was on EastEnders" - gave people the space and distance needed to think about, to mimic, and therefore to better understand the emotions, motivations and techniques involved; likewise, taking on the role of someone being pressured, and having to act out the emotions of fear, intimidation, etc and summoning up the bravery needed to say 'no'. This was 'role play' in the literal dramatic sense also seen metaphorically as it is in training scenarios for professional development. Or getting people to think about their future and then to sing it / perform within a rhythm and within a group dynamic created freedom, momentum and spontaneity – removing the embarrassment from what could otherwise be a miserable and cringe worthy task.

One of the most telling insights came from the director when we, as observers, suggested that participants had no problem with voice projection – given their noisy entrance and general ebullience. “Yes” he replied, “but the problem is diction.” He went on to say,

“Consonants are consciousness and vowels are emotion. We’re trying to give these young people some diction for their lives in general - there’s no shortage of emotion, or talent.”

There are evident differences in ethos, approach and values between these projects. For some the emphasis is on skills and task, without reference to experience or reflection. For others, emphasis is placed on reflection and the gaining of insight from a better understanding of your past experiences in order to seek to influence your future. And in others, there was an emphasis on personal experience as a seam of creative material to be drawn on to make an assertive creative and artistic impact.

All had in common collaboratively working together and building relationships towards a shared group identity. They also all emphasised learning and understanding creative processes, making artistic products and gaining recognition not just through involvement, but also through performance which brings acknowledgement from a wider audience and the larger community. In order to make the art, the facilitators and participants all knew that some educational input was needed on the better understanding of what art is and what it can do as an essential pre-requisite to the making of the art itself. Understanding what art can do and learning how to do it brings the possibility of becoming an artist yourself. And once you have the confidence and skills artists are no longer just distant people to be admired, but something you have become and continue to grow into. A fundamental transition has taken place in how you see yourself; in your identity. You have, as it were, gone backstage to be the maker of your life, not just a wary, watchful and occasionally amused member of the audience of life’s drama.

5 Widening the Circle: Universal participation

Participation in the arts is growing – our society is moving away from the idea that artists with unique gifts make art while the rest of us look on in awe and admiration. That idea is at the heart of the projects we visited. As well as the kinds of activities already described, book clubs, creative writing courses, book festivals, music festivals and choirs are all rapidly expanding to involve millions of people in the making and appreciation of art who would not describe themselves as artists but wish to be seen as more than audiences.

These participatory and inclusive trends extend far beyond the educated mainstream. Artistic creation has given voice to the marginalized and thereby brought them right into the hallowed halls of the cultural establishment. This has been assisted by the forces of fashion and commercialization already described. These latter forces, looking always for something new and preferably shocking have found the shock of the new among people who transgress and are marginalized. But more significant than these market forces has been the factors that created the discrimination of the range of different voices in the first place. In part these were responses to the contradiction that acceptance required conformity, but if you were different, conformity did not bring acceptance. On the contrary, however determined you were to blend in, the reaction was too often to draw attention to ineradicable differences as a precursor to stigma and rejection. If you were different, it seemed, there was no alternative in anger or sorrow but to place difference at the centre; to take difference from being marginal to being meaning.

The placing of difference at the centre unleashed powerful, transformational social and political forces in the 1960s and 1970s. These do not concern me here, except to note how creative difference became – re-shaping shared notions of identity, removing the fixed certainties of inescapable, inherited identities.²⁶ This has happened partly in the name of meritocracy: no talent even among the different and formerly ignored should any more be left on the sidelines. Some have mixed feelings about this, not just for reactionary reasons. Stifling conformity in a top down society is not appealing, but predictability and shared group sentiments brings much wished for feelings of security.

Of course, the making of art in politics is not confined to the angry, lost or suffering. Politics in art is not only a response to one's personal experience of stigma or discrimination. Artists are continually called to respond to the politics of their time in their own voices. The painter Joan Miro was born in Barcelona in 1893 and lived until 1983, experiencing all the main events of Spain's turbulent twentieth century, the Spanish Civil War, the rise of fascism, dictatorship and, finally democracy and

²⁶ *What is this 'black' in black popular culture*, Stuart Hall, included in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 1996

a constitutional monarchy. Towards the end of his life in 1979 he spoke modestly but distinctly of the social and political responsibility of the artist, stressing the importance of the distinctiveness of the artistic voice.

“I understand that an artist is someone who in the midst of others’ silence, uses his own voice to say something and who makes sure that what he says is not useless, but something that is useful to mankind.”²⁷

Even more fundamentally, the making of a work of art may be conceived as a political act in itself, as W.H. Auden noted.

“The mere making of a work of art is itself a political act.”²⁸

Because it is a warning and a reminder to:

“the Management that the managed are people with faces, not anonymous numbers.”

This process of gaining an expressive voice has extended beyond the obvious differences of colour and race. Women certainly no longer think their role is to admire the pictures that men paint of women.²⁹ As already noted, disability arts has become an assertive force, drawing attention not only to the shortcomings of society’s rejections and exclusions and the depredations imposed on disabled people, but also to the anger felt about that. Anger can be a creative energy; submission on the other hand drains the creative flow. But the purpose of black or disabled artists is not to draw attention to race or disability, nor even to add a weight to the balance in favour of tolerance. In common with any other artist their purpose is to raise a unique expressive voice across the range of human emotions and experiences and beyond. But, even for the angry and the assertive, sadness, loss, abandonment, suffering, exclusion are also at the heart of the human experience. These darker shadows draw deep on the well on human happiness which if not replenished may run dry. Such are the experiences of being in prison, a care home, homeless or in some other way vulnerable. And the arts have a special and unflinching place for the worst off.

²⁷ Quoted in Tate Catalogue, 2010

²⁸ *The Dyer’s Hand*, W.H. Auden, Faber, 1962

²⁹ Berger, op cit

6. A Special Place for the Worst Off

The practice of the arts has been shown to be beneficial in virtually all excluded, marginalised or stigmatized groups. Art, music and drama therapy have a long history in a variety of settings, including in relation to mental health and older people. The emphasis is on imparting the competence and confidence for artistic practice from the origination of ideas, through all the processes of creativity, reflection, ideas and inspiration to reflect insight. Many benefits are said to flow from all these activities – benefits that can be gained by anyone, even if not in one of these excluded groups, but benefits which have a special value to the excluded or the vulnerable, as summarized in the table below.

Specific needs	Client Group	Potential benefits of arts therapy/arts initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affective disorders • Psychotic disorders • Forensic mental illness 	Clients with Mental health problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symptomatic relief (negative symptoms in schizophrenia) • Raised self-esteem • Bonding social capital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical symptoms • Anxiety • Depression 	Palliative Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression • Better coping skills • Bonding social capital • Independence to pursue own interests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social isolation • Loneliness • Neurodegenerative disease • Cognitive decline 	Older people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonding social capital • Raised self-esteem • Promotion of mental capital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental illness • Poverty • Substance use • Poor social support 	Homeless people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised self-esteem • Bonding social capital • Adherence to other health and housing services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental illness • Substance use • Aggression 	Prisoners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised self esteem • Reduced symptoms of depression • Reduced aggression • Better relations with prison staff

From a strong tradition in China, Japan and East Asia creative and art therapy began to infiltrate western practice, particularly in mental health, in the early 20th century. Once psychotherapy began to be taken seriously creative collaboration with artists became more common in pursuing therapeutic goals from the 1940s onwards. That developed into professional, evidence-based approaches to arts therapies. Since the 1960s artistic practice has gone beyond therapeutic boundaries into the wider realm of ‘community arts’ in schools, hospitals, prisons and supported housing and social housing estates.

Several schools of thought surrounding arts therapy exist, each with different psychological and philosophical underpinnings. Some adopt a Freudian view of arts therapy, suggesting that artistic expression, much like a dream, forms a portal into the unconscious³⁰. Other schools are grounded in Jungian theory and suggest that creative arts interact with our *archetypes* – innate psychological tendencies which shape subsequent behaviour³¹. Winnicott’s notion of art as a *transitional object* also forms part of the psychoanalytical basis of arts therapy. In this conception, a piece of art becomes an object allowing the transition from concrete to abstract representations of the external world.³²

Creative arts media are particularly useful as non-verbal communication that facilitates self-expression in participants. This is particularly salient for participants who for one reason or another face impairments in vocalising their thoughts and feelings. A related rationale of arts therapy is that of *affective processing* – the notion that, through creating art, a client is able to make sense of and manage their emotions³³. Art allows us to rationalise our lives so far and understand how we have come to our present situation. The term *autobiographical competence* has been coined to convey this aim of arts therapy.³⁴

The finished piece of artwork allows insight into the artist’s ‘psychic content’³⁵. Some suggest that more can be inferred from the creative process of making art, rather than the finished article per se. Somebody’s inner thoughts and emotions may be more clearly and openly revealed in analysing how someone paints, performs music or drama³⁶.

³⁰ ‘Art therapy for schizophrenia or schizophrenia-like illnesses’, R. Ruddy and D. Milnes, *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2005

³¹ ‘A narrative view of art therapy and art making by women with breast cancer’, K. Collie et al, *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2006

³² ‘Psychoanalysis, art and interpretation, C.L. Ardila *Annuary of Clinical and Health Psychology*, 2006

³³ ‘Art psychotherapy: the wood in between the worlds, M. Learmoth and K. Huckvale, *New Therapist*, 2008

³⁴ *John Bowlby and Attachment Theory*, J. Holmes, Routledge, 1993

³⁵ ‘The treatment of aggression using arts therapies in forensic psychiatry: results of a qualitative inquiry, H. Smeijsters and G. Cleven, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 2006

³⁶ Smeijsters, Cleven, 2006, op cit

Over and above the artistic activity itself group activities are opportunities for social interaction and forming new relationships and friendships. This can be described as *bonding social capital* – forming relationships among your peer group or those who have had similar experiences and backgrounds to you³⁷ Doing new things, whether artistic or not, engenders a sense of purpose in life³⁸. The creation of artwork also imbues a sense of achievement and self-esteem; qualities frequently lacking in vulnerable people.

Art therapy

Art therapy refers to the use of painting, drawing and other visual media to achieve healing within the context of a tripartite relationship between the client, the therapist and the artwork³⁹. The formation of this relationship happens in five stages⁴⁰:

- *Identification*: the unconscious process of being absorbed with creating a piece of art while the therapist observes as a witness.
- *Familiarisation*: the client becomes a conscious spectator of their artwork
- *Acknowledgement*: the client develops and vocalises attitudes to their artwork with input from the therapist
- *Assimilation*: the client re-examines the piece of art with new understandings following interaction with the therapist.
- *Disposal*: attaching significance to the artwork by exhibiting, destroying or leaving it with the therapist.

³⁷ *Bowling Alone*, R.D. Putnam, Simon & Schuster, 2000

³⁸ “‘I don’t think they knew we could do these sorts of things’”: social representations of community arts by older people’, M. Murray and A. Crummett, *Journal of Health Psychology*, 2010

³⁹ ‘What is art therapy?’, British Association of Art Therapists, www.baat.org, 2010

⁴⁰ Learmoth, Huckvale, 2008, op cit

Music therapy

Music therapy endeavours to use systematic musical experiences to help participants develop relationships and address issues they may find difficult to do by using words alone⁴¹. Music therapy comes in different approaches and styles. The *active* approach entails the production of music such as free improvisation or recitals. Conversely, *passive* or *receptive* music therapy involves listening to music, such as that from a recording or played by the therapist. Most music therapy adopts a combination of both approaches⁴². Therapists may also vary the *level of structuring* in music therapy to focus on either deep or superficial aspects of music. In a similar vein, therapy sessions may place emphasis particularly on the music or, alternatively, on the client's issues and needs that are highlighted by the music.

Drama therapy

Drama therapy has its provenance in 'remedial drama' activities that emerged in the 1940's and 1950'. Drama therapy can serve as a 'container' for the disordered and chaotic thoughts of participants that may pose problems in traditional psychotherapy⁴³. Another psychological mechanism employed by drama therapy is that of *aesthetic distancing*⁴⁴. This alludes to the relative ease of expressing sensitive or embarrassing thoughts and desires (e.g. fantasies of harming someone) in the safety of the pretend world.

Drama therapy sessions are very varied. Simple sessions may use a *creative-expressive mode*. The emphasis is on improvisation and free creativity without interpretation of subsequent performance⁴⁵. More complex therapy involves analysis of the person's own characteristics and how these may be portrayed in drama. Popular myths and tales from the folklore of world cultures are also utilised to mirror the lives of participants, helping maintain feelings of normality⁴⁶.

⁴¹'Music therapy for schizophrenia or schizophrenia-like illnesses', C. Gold et al, *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2005

⁴² Gold et al 2005

⁴³'Drama therapy for schizophrenia or schizophrenia-like illnesses', R.A. Ruddy and K. Dent-Brown, *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2007

⁴⁴ Jones 1993, op cit

⁴⁵ Ruddy, Dent-Brown 2008, op cit

⁴⁶'Phantasy therapy in psychiatry: rediscovering reality in phantasy', G.B. Schmid et al, *Forschende Komplementarmedizin Und Klassische Naturheilkunde*, 2002

Dance movement therapy

Dance movement therapy involves using body movements and improvised dance to enact one's thoughts and feelings. It is particularly useful in participants who find verbal expression difficult or otherwise daunting. In addition to psychological benefits such as improved perceptions of one's own body, Dance Movement Therapy also aims to engender physical outcomes such as improved coordination. In this vein, it is also used in patients recovering from brain injury and in those with other neurological impairments⁴⁷.

This section of the paper has reflected on the known evidence of therapeutic benefit from artistic processes and activities. I want to set this alongside the more general trends drawn out in the earlier parts of paper about technological reach, economic imperatives for creativity, universal participation and the drawing into the arts of the worst off. Put together, the general trends and benefits with the specific value to the excluded makes a compelling case for artistic practice in the rapidly developing need for innovation in inclusion.

⁴⁷ 'Dance movement therapy improves emotional responses and modulates neurophormones in adolescents with mild depression', Y. Jeong et al, *International Journal of Neuroscience*, 2004

7. What is achieved by art?

In the early parts of this paper I acknowledged the power and importance of the arts, while posing some questions about the way in which art is practiced and represented. In the latter parts of the paper I sought to draw attention by way of example to the approaches and benefits arts projects and activities can bring. I have also drawn attention to the widening of those involved in the arts and, in particular, the welcome drawing in of the excluded and vulnerable. I am positing art and artistic practice as a universal good. In order to develop the argument, I must be more precise about the benefits that derive from arts activity. Set out below are the key benefits of the arts, at least to my mind.

Meaning, magic and mystery

I have already noted the emotional reactions that art can summon up, the insight and identification with the artist and the reflection into the receivers' own current condition. One aspect of that, according to Picasso, is 'controlling terrors and desires', to which we are all susceptible and with which we all need help.

*"[Painting] could have a 'magical' role of capturing and controlling terrors and desires, pinning them down with colour and form. "The day I understood that," Picasso said later, "I had found my path."*⁴⁸

I have also discussed the iconography of the objects and the way in which objects have become de-objectified in 'hyper-reality'. Nevertheless, art objects in themselves and the representation of objects in art can be imbued by a special power by an artist. This is Claude Levi-Strauss discovering his reaction to Picasso's paintings. In his own mind he has gone from the object, even banal objects, to a more threatening social reality – and the agent of that journey is art and the artist.

*"Even prosaic objects – bottles, glasses and pipes – were somehow edgy and full of suspense, 'immersed in the still, apprehensive atmosphere that precedes accidents, riots and disasters."*⁴⁹

This way of understanding objects in art as something else, something more than they seem and investing them with powerful resonances creates the possibility of a revealed meaning in art, which may even seem magical. The historian Keith Thomas noted that as long as so many things remain inexplicable, people will always believe in magic. Since some things will always remain inexplicable and incomprehensible, the idea of magic remains and finds one of its homes in art. The belief that everything can ever be explained is itself a kind of magical delusion.

⁴⁸ Claude Levi-Strauss: *The Poet in the Laboratory*, Patrick Wilcken, Bloomsbury, 2010

⁴⁹ Levi Strauss, op cit

Mindfulness and self-esteem: a state of wonder and admiration

A number of the projects we visited noted the important ability of artistic activity to raise self-esteem. This is linked to artistic practice. Drawing on the Buddhist idea of mindfulness, the suggestion is that focused concentration on artistic striving, because it requires meditative patience and searching reflection, brings with it a calmer and perhaps more spiritual state of mind. In the world of Zen some kinds of artistic practice might bring us closer to the abstraction of the sound of one hand clapping. Here is the critic Herbert Read talking about the calming effects of art.

“The real function of art is to express feeling and transmit understanding...We come to the work of art charged with emotional complexes; we find in the genuine work of art not an excitement of these emotions, but peace, repose, equanimity....It is true that the work of art arouses in us certain physical reactions: we are conscious of rhythm, harmony, unity and these physical properties work upon our nerves. But they do not agitate them so much as soothe them....it is an emotion totally different in kind from the emotion experienced and expressed by the artist in the act of creating the work of art. It is better described as a state of wonder or admiration, or more coldly but more exactly as a state of recognition.”⁵⁰

It is not just a more quietist mode that art might bring about. Calm may also reside in a greater coherence or unity of thought. The world can never fall into rational analysis but we can in different way seek the details of your thought into some less chaotic, arbitrary shape – and that brings an undoubted uplift of mindfulness. As the great 20th century British abstract sculptor, Barbara Hepworth, noted:

“Working realistically replenishes one’s love for life, humanity and the earth. Working abstractly seems to release one’s personality and sharpen the perceptions, so that in the observation of life it is the wholeness or inner intention which moves one so profoundly; the components fall into place, the detail is significant of unity.”⁵¹

⁵⁰ Read, op cit,

⁵¹ Read, op cit,

De-stigmatising

Many of the organizations we visited saw challenging discrimination and stigmatization of their client groups as an important aspect of their purpose. For example, Clean Break made no mention of the participants' offending history and the subject was almost taboo. Prison staff at HMP Send made no mention of the participants' offence. The subject was almost taboo as far as professionals were concerned, certainly reticent. In many cases the approaches the staff took were – rightly – no different to the approach that they would have taken to any other group who were not labelled as having a mental health problem, an offending history or a learning difficulty. However, as far as offenders were concerned, there was a great deal of self-disclosure – far beyond casual conversation. As a matter of ethos, change, recovery and avoiding future reoffending requires 'ownership' and victim empathy. So participants have learnt from probation officers and social workers to prioritize the need for disclosure.

The nature of the projects and who participated in them was to some extent problem-focused. The projects were *for* people with learning disabilities or mental health problems. They were not for everyone. Nor was there any suggestion that the purpose of these projects was to include specific groups like people with mental health problems in creative collaboration with the more general mainstream of people with no history of mental health problems. Why, for example, do young people with learning disabilities need a club night that is different to every other young people?

The argument for separation cannot be that members of these groups could not handle mainstream spaces. That would indeed be stigmatizing and discriminatory in itself. The case must be either that they would not find those places and spaces welcoming and therefore they wouldn't attend. They would be excluded *de facto* from mainstream spaces without any alternatives. Seeking to include different people may in reality simply mean that people have fewer acceptable choices. The other argument for arts projects working with specific group is that the creative process is itself an inquiry into the condition of being different; how that feels, how other people react and so on. That is reflected for example in the practice of Synergy.

One of the purposes and benefits of de-stigmatisation is to combat the feelings of internalized inferiority; the belief that you are worth less and deserve less because of a group identity you either have or have been given, but did not choose. One way of achieving those benefits is by ignoring the disability or stigma. In other words, because other people put too much emphasis on a particular characteristic and use it to label and stereotype people, the way to combat that stigma is by not giving the characteristic which is perceived as a shortcoming any credence at all; disadvantages, so this argument goes, are socially constructed out of natural differences.; disadvantage and exclusion are neither necessary nor inherent. If people are treated equally, the theory goes, they will feel more equal and if they feel more equal, they will feel more included. The unspoken assumption may be that their behaviour will conform more to the norm, and they will display less of those transgressive qualities making them less likely to be stigmatized and discriminated against. A virtuous circle has been entered, rather than the alternative vicious circle of being treated unfairly and therefore feeling inferior; staying away from the mainstream brings about your permanent depression, depressive behaviour and exclusion. The benefits are perceived to derive from letting go and moving on from the negative experiences, thereby changing not just behaviour but identity and sense of self.

There is also a contrary ethos, which is also practiced in the arts project: which is to acknowledge, explore and 'work on' the aspects of the person's own behaviour, history or condition which led to their stigmatization. W.H. Auden thought that the hero of modern poetry is:

"the man or woman in any walk of life who...manages to acquire and preserve a face of his own...to have a face one must not only enjoy and suffer but also desires to preserve the memory of even the most humiliating and unpleasant experiences of the past."⁵²

The exploration is of motive, consequence, impact on self and others and, if accepted, the need to find ways of not repeating the same behaviour again. The idea is that, as it were, re-visiting the scene of the crime mentally and emotionally, reflecting on what has happened and talking to sympathetic, non-judgmental professionals, will result in insight into both the pebble that diverted the direction of the stream in the wrong direction and, furthermore, the way in which the stream can now be diverted to its truer, better, more socially acceptable course. This view is particularly applied in relation to offenders, where the intention is to avoid repeating patterns of offending behaviour and the belief is that the better understanding of those events and patterns will help in their future avoidance, to the benefit of the offender themselves not to mention the significant benefits to the rest of society.

⁵² Auden, op cit

Community

The gaining of community by participating with others in shared creative activity is an often commented on aspect of group artistic activities. All artists, though they may be reluctant to admit it, are troubled by whether their work will have any value after their death. However much one's work is fated and celebrated, history shows that art given great contemporary recognition often turns out to have little lasting value and, in a way worse still, art which does have true lasting value is all too easily forgotten. The poetry of John Keats, now one of the most popular English poets, attained little or no recognition until long after the end of his short life. In order to overcome this anxiety about making temporal ephemera Herbert Read argues that art, with its religious origins in Western culture, must inevitably speak to some notion of contemporary community, a shared sense of values. Without that, supposed art will in fact turn out to be narcissistic ephemera.

“Can the artist, on the basis of his own sensibility, and without the aid of mass emotional and traditional ideals – can such an artist ‘good, great and joyous, beautiful and free’ create works of art which will hold their own with the greatest creations of religious art... The answer to the question whether great art can exist independently of religion will therefore depend on our scale of values. The court of judgment is sooner or later the community. It would seem, therefore, that the artist, to achieve greatness, must in some way appeal to a community-feeling. Hitherto the highest form of community feeling has been religious; it is for those who deny the necessary connection between religion and art to discover some equivalent form of community feeling which will, in the long run, ensure an historic continuity for the art that is not religious.”⁵³

A shared sense of belonging

Artistic practice can be a solitary, expressive activity, bringing together personal insight and reflection, objective qualities like shapes or geometry, or more subjective tastes like colour or texture. But there is a special pleasure and satisfaction in collective artistic activity. The book club for example is the opportunity to supplement the individual, private pleasures of reading with the possibilities of discussion, bringing other perspectives and interpretations of the author's intentions or achievements. And there is the added pleasurable possibility of being with people with shared interests, perspectives and empathy; a new possibility of friendship. Joining a choir adds the benefit of performing and the recognition that comes from it. Above all there is the sense of shared creation which making music together brings, what Claude Levi Strauss called the ‘feeling of simultaneity.’⁵⁴

⁵³ Read, op cit

⁵⁴ Levi-Strauss, op cit

8. Craft and Create-ability

Art involves making things and part of the benefit of the art is not to the audience that sees or appreciates the work. The benefit is gained by the maker in the making itself. Of course the benefits of making things are not only derived and enjoyed by artists. Bricklayers, cooks, gardeners, knitters and needlewomen also know the pleasures and satisfactions of making things. Nor are any of these activities, not traditionally artistic, without commitment to and achievement of aesthetic appeal and use value. Here is possibly England's greatest gardener, Gertrude Jekyll, on the significance of the *activity* of gardening, rather than the glory of the garden once made. Note once more the association of creativity and spirituality.

“A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all, it teaches entire trust. ‘Paul planteth and Apollo watereth, but God giveth the increase’. The good gardener knows with absolute certainty that if he does his part, if he gives the labour, the love and every aid that his knowledge of his craft, experience of the conditions of his place, and exercise of his personal wit can work together to suggest, that so surely as he does this diligently and faithfully, so surely will God give the increase.”⁵⁵

Gardening and the many other activities of ordinary people, often done in private for solitary pleasure or only for discussion with the like-minded few, are all acts of creativity. They are, as it were, all crafts and, unlike the technological methods of reproduction discussed earlier in this paper, they involve creating something specific, even unique. This uniqueness is an expression not only about the object created, but symbolic of the individuality of the person who made it. Neither the object nor the person is susceptible to mechanical reproduction.

“Against the rigorous perfection of the machine, the craftsman became an emblem of human individuality, this emblem composed concretely by the positive value placed on variations, flaws and irregularities in handwork.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *The Beauties of a Cottage Garden*, Gertrude Jekyll, Penguin, 2009

⁵⁶ *The Craftsman*, Richard Sennett, Allen Lane, 2008

That is the magic of making. And it is accessible to almost everyone. Richard Sennett has risen movingly of not being able to become the professional musician he hoped to be, but that has not dimmed his sense that the individual creative instinct is very widespread and more or less equally shared, and quite similar, at least in its processes, for most people.

“The innate abilities on which craftsmanship is based are not exceptional; they are shared in common by the large majority of human beings and in roughly equal measure. Three basic abilities are the foundation of craftsmanship. These are the ability to localize, to question and to open up. The first involves making a matter concrete, the second reflecting on its qualities, the third expanding its sense...To deploy these capabilities the brain needs to process in parallel visual, aural, tactile and language-symbol information.”⁵⁷

The connecting of thought and action is the way that problems are identified and then solved, this requires skill and that skill is derived from doing it. The skills are to specify, localize, contain. The second stage in making things is reflecting, understanding, evaluating options and making choices, which contain harmony and the possibility of communication. Skill is gained from knowledge, insight, practice and confidence. Practice needs to be a habit, repetitive action becomes a rhythm, as well as adding to the rhythm of the day; the rhythm of someone’s life; a counterweight to chaos, boredom, idleness, isolation, frustration and lack of purpose so characteristic of the lives of many vulnerable people – but by no means them alone.

“Every good craftsman conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking; this dialogue evolves into sustaining habits, and these habits establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding. The relation between hand and head appears in domains seemingly as different as bricklaying, cooking, designing a playground, or playing the cello – but all these practices can misfire or fail to ripen. There is nothing inevitable about becoming skilled, just as there is nothing mindlessly mechanical about technique itself.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Sennett, op cit

⁵⁸ Sennett, op cit

The argument that I want to propound is that, whatever the many benefits of arts appreciation, the economic benefits of creativity, the value of participating and inclusion; over and above all those undoubted benefits of the arts that we should without doubt applaud, there is the urge to make things. This is partly intellectual and partly emotional, because we are drawing on 'witness, memory, nostalgia or escapism.'⁵⁹ Making things also represents the harmonious joining of intellectual and manual activity. The creation of harmonious habits, of a calm mindfulness and of a strong individual identity, however traduced by others, as well as the appeal of the created object - these are the artistic instincts. They are present, I believe, in us all, all too readily driven out by modern life's not rich enough tapestry.

That is not to say we could all make a work of art to rival the greatest. The greatest works of art are the work of genius and the rest of us, of course, must be humble in the face of that. Virtuoso art will always have its special and elevated place, though it should not be set apart from anyone. The artistic genius should and will always get noticed, but not everyone can be or wants to be a genius – nor should the presence of that small, rare band of geniuses so infrequently encountered put everybody else off. In the absence of genius, the benefits of reflection, creation, sharing and appreciation remain. Talent is not equally distributed, but because some have lots does not mean that others have none or that the limited is negligible. We all have create-ability and that is, in the end, the case for the arts.

⁵⁹ Baudrillard, op cit

Appendix: A selection of participatory arts projects featured on Lemos&Crane websites and Awards programmes

Alzheimer's Society: Singing for the Brain

The Alzheimer's Society runs *Singing for the Brain*, a service which uses singing to bring people suffering from dementia together in a social environment. Meetings are held once a week or fortnightly. Sessions begin with breathing exercises and vocal warm-ups to ease tension, increase lung capacity and enhance blood-flow to the brain. Teaching harmonies is used as a way to help people increase concentration. Singing leaders teach songs from scratch so that everyone can take part and no-one feels left out. Songs from different eras, musical styles and traditions are incorporated. Familiar and well-known songs and melodies are vital to the success of the programme as they evoke verbal and emotional memories. Learning new songs is equally important as it helps to improve cognitive skills. Singing is also a way for people with dementia to express themselves.

Barking and Dagenham Council: Art Blanche

Art Blanche gets adults with learning disabilities to create art using recycled rubbish. The artists own the artwork created. Participants develop skills and individual abilities and increase their social networks through interaction with the voluntary sector, theatre groups and community organisations. The project also raises the visual presence of disabled people in the borough. All members of *Art Blanche* participated in a local town show themed 'Out of Africa', creating a float with rubbish, fabrics and paint. Participants feel a sense of achievement and empowerment through sharing their art with others.

Birmingham City Mission: The Workshop

The Workshop is a partnership project between the Birmingham City Mission and Trident Housing Association that trains vulnerable people in woodwork. Participants are free to work at their own pace - there are no targets, goals or time constraints. While they work with the wood, the vulnerable person is supported by a staff member who plays the part of an 'active listener'. There is no pressure to speak but instead people can, at their own pace, open up to the listeners. Sharing their burdens eases their mind and begins the road to recovery. Creating or restoring the wood pieces brings back beauty into their lives. Through the support offered the gradual healing process begins and people start to reclaim meaning and purpose.

Cambridgeshire County Council: You Are Words

You Are Words is a joint project between Cambridgeshire Libraries and poet John Killick from Dementia Positive that provides people with dementia with a creative experience both individually and socially, and that counters stigma and educates the public about dementia through public events, publications and media coverage. Working collaboratively with each person involved with the project,

John Killick writes down or records their words or discussions and shapes them into poems. They are then approved by the person and permission is given for publication; in some instances that authorisation comes from a relative. The most unbreakable rule is that John adds nothing to a person's words, he only selects from the available material. Sometimes no editing is necessary. Cambridgeshire Library staff have hosted and supported poetry readings in libraries, workshops for library and care staff across the eastern region, and the publication of a *You Are Words* calendar of art and poems.

Camden Calling

Camden Calling helps vulnerable homeless and ex-homeless people to access the arts and music scene; they are people with little self-esteem and few social connections when they join the project. Seventy-five percent of current members have a diagnosed mental health problem. Members are supported when they have bookings with other promoters because there is always a group of people to go along and support them. The aim is to improve the access that homeless and vulnerable people have to music, arts and popular culture and to create opportunities for members to develop friendships, confidence and working relationships - all transferable skills that accompany a sense of belonging. Camden Calling has produced and released a compilation album of original music by members and supported members to release original material providing members with laptop computers, mobile internet access and equipment and rehearsal space. The project has assisted members to find work experience placements, referred members to career development courses and provided members with references for employment.

Cardboard Citizens

Cardboard Citizens runs theatre workshops and plays for and by homeless people. Participants take part in workshops on acting, singing, dancing, music-making and writing. Inspired by the stories of people, an annual tour of hostels is delivered in the style of 'forum theatre'. During the play, the audience suggests actions that can change the outcome of what they are watching - sharing information instead of passively viewing. The project emphasises the need to change attitudes and perceptions of homelessness. Actors feel confident and develop their skills through the plays and workshops. The Cardboard Citizens group has been performing since 1991.

Central and Cecil: Dramatic Watercolour

The *Dramatic Watercolour* project took people from three sheltered housing schemes in Camden, north London, to the Sir John Soane's Museum. The residents visited exhibitions where they looked at Hogarth and Canaletto paintings, and then they painted their own watercolours. Efforts were made by the project's organisers to involve people who had not previously had much experience of going to galleries or painting. The project has seen the beginning of supportive friendships which have created more lively communities in the sheltered housing schemes. Friendships have been cemented in the conversations about history which naturally followed discussions about the pictures. This project was part of the Adult Learning Partnership for Camden, which aims to engage people in new learning activities and improve access to informal learning for adults.

Company Paradiso: Warning: May Contain Nuts

Warning: May Contain Nuts is a comedy show produced by mental health service users in collaboration with BBC Radio Berkshire and the charity Company Paradiso. The aims of the project are to encourage service users to tell audiences about their experiences through a variety of creative means: comedy, music, poetry and performance skills. The performers are largely users of mental health services in Berkshire and Sussex and narrate comical stories about depression, schizophrenia and psychosis. Performers, however, are not requested to display 'overt madness' in their routines. Participants have reported the immense sense of satisfaction that is generated by making others laugh. The comical stories and real-life experiences also serve to lessen stigma and show audiences that mental illness is on a continuous spectrum with normal human experiences.

Company Paradiso: New Ballads of Reading Jail

New Ballads of Reading Jail was a creative writing scheme for prisoners run by Company Paradiso during St George's Day week. The scheme involved prisoners in writing workshops to produce raps and record their experiences and communicate their emotional stories to the public. These pieces were then turned into ballads and performed by guest performers and poets including John Hegley, Tim Turnbull and the Thames Valley Male Voice Chorus. The performances were broadcast on local radio and the audience was invited to respond to the work by phone or text.

Dance United: The Academy

The Academy is a dance-based alternative education programme for young people who have been offenders or are at risk of offending. Participants are referred through various agencies. No auditions are needed for acceptance at the Academy. The students practice various dance forms including jazz, African dance, and capoeira as well as circus skills and choreography. The young people are trained in a professional programme for 12 weeks, with 25 hours of class time each week. On completion of the course dancers receive a Level 1 qualification - Certificate in Practical Performance skills accredited by Trinity College, London. The Academy works with students to create long-term plans, either in education, employment or continuing opportunities in dance.

Fine Cell Work

Fine Cell Work gives prison inmates a professional craft skill to practice in their cells from which they can earn money. They can use the money when they get out or to help their families while they're inside. The psychological benefits include self-esteem, calmness, a sense of connection to the outside, self-discipline, working as part of a team and the satisfaction of a job well done. Volunteer instructors who are all trained in needlework go into the prison to teach the inmates from scratch to do embroidery and quilting. They start with practice pieces then get paid for the second piece they do, e.g. £5 for a small piece. They then begin a learning journey where they progress through increasingly challenging levels of stitching. When they reach the highest level they begin to get commissions at a higher rate, these are specially ordered by customers and are one-offs. Sometimes they're special pieces of embroidery shown in museums or at English Heritage sites, for example 47 embroidered cushions were produced for Dover Castle.

Harrow Rethink Support Group: Harrow Community Choir

The Harrow Rethink Support Group's *Harrow Community Choir* aims to build self-confidence, challenge stigma and promote cross-cultural education through the medium of chorus. The choir provides a platform to develop musical ability and creativity in a friendly environment for mental health service users, their families and carers. The choir rehearses weekly but is open to everybody, irrespective of whether they have completed the course. No musical talent or prior experience is required and members often find that singing with other people brings out hidden talent. Singing is backed by other choir members playing clarinet, piano, guitar and trumpet.

The sense of community within the choir is particularly strong. Several new friendships have formed and there is a significant element of peer support where members help other members with practical matters such as housing issues and transport. People in the audience of the choir's productions have any negative preconceptions of mental illness challenged, which helps tackle the problem of stigma. Singing provides many intrinsic benefits such as improved self-esteem, relaxation and intellectual stimulation.

HMP/YOI Doncaster

The Arts and Media Department at HMP/YOI Doncaster runs a number of projects including: an initiative that trains prisoners in the art of filmmaking and editing; a course where prisoners write and perform plays to invited audiences (part of this initiative is that prisoners can work toward a LAMDA qualification); a scheme where prisoners help to improve the appearance of the prison by putting street art themed murals on the walls; and a reflective reading group in which prisoners are encouraged to make connections between the behaviour of the characters they are reading about and themselves.

HMP/YOI Parc: Hay in the Parc

In 2008 HMP/YOI Parc collaborated with the Hay Festival of Literature and Arts to expose prisoners to a range of literary styles and figures by hosting *Hay in the Parc*. The festival is now a regular cultural event and is an integral part of arts intervention at the prison going from strength to strength each year. As part of the event prisoners perform some of the work that they've produced and get to rub shoulders with a range of celebrity authors who have included Scott Quinnell, Jake Arnott, Jasper Fforde, Mark Johnson, Erwin James, John Sam Jones, Rachel Trezise, Levi Roots, Bobby Singh, Patrick Jones, Niall Griffiths, Terry Cooper and Lloyd Robson. A selection of prisoners' short biographies, *Inside Out*, has also been published.

Housing 21 Dementia Voice: Frames of Mind

The *Frames of Mind* project worked with four older people with dementia to make Life History video packages that express some important things about what defines their lives. The videos represent not only the past experience of these people, but how that experience shapes them and their preferences to this day. With the help of the animation company, Salmagundi, the four participants took lead roles in authoring their own videos, making use of animation, photos, narration, personal belongings and art materials. As well as being beneficial for the well-being of the person with dementia, the video is useful when the person's accommodation changes and introductions need to be made to new staff and carers.

Leeds Partnerships NHS Foundation Trust: Film to Change

Film to Change is a partnership initiative to build and improve, through film, the skills, experience and positive identity of mental health service users while at the same time tackling stigma associated with mental distress. Thirty-two service users were trained, supported and mentored to produce short films on the subject of mental distress and stigma. In addition, 20 students participated in mental health awareness training and then produced short films and posters challenging stigma experienced by young people with mental health problems. *Film to Change* participants learned new skills and developed experience of all aspects of film direction and production, as well as softer outcomes associated with participating in a group. Fans of the project include the film-maker Ken Loach.

Open Doors: Creative Drop-In

Open Doors' *Creative Drop-In* ran fashion and magic shows for sex-workers as part of its health drop-in service to help them think differently about themselves and who they can become in life. As well as supporting its clients with core practical services such as drugs counselling and legal support, the weekly drop-in sessions got the women involved in art and drama projects. In 'Entrances and Exits' the women planned, prepared, acted in and filmed a fashion show. The act of dressing up, putting on wigs, directing, and stage managing was transformational. The women forgot that they were sex workers and took on new identities. Creating a warm, welcoming environment is vital to the success of the work. The project placed a big emphasis on staff and service users sitting down and eating together. Taking photos and videos was also important to record achievements, which were shared with service users' families and friends. The women reported feelings of strength and optimism after taking part.

Sing For Your Life Ltd: Silver Song Clubs

Silver Song Clubs are sessions of singing and music-making for older people. The group meets on a regular basis and sessions are delivered by trained staff. Various venues are used for the meetings such as community centres, day care centres and hospitals. The sessions are free to attend and if possible transport to and from the venue is provided. Carers and family members are encouraged to attend and to take part. Activities include singing, playing percussion, hand chimes and chair-based exercises. Older people get to meet new people and build a community through music. Songs help to evoke memories and encourage older people to share their stories with other participants and their families. More than 1,500 older people attend a Silver Song Club each month. Sing For Your Life Limited in partnership with Making Music and The Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health designs and delivers the programme.

Sound Minds

Sound Minds runs a recording facility, art studio and a rehearsal space for people with mental health problems. Arts projects for visual artists and musicians are offered as well as courses in music technology, film-making and singing. The Count Me In booking agency gives training and advice and finds people work delivering entertainment and arts workshops in mental health circles and beyond. The service also helps create publicity materials, demo tracks and a space on the Sound Minds website for the artist. Where there is a track record of reliable performances, the agency tries to get paid bookings for the participant.

SSBA Community Trust: Poetry in Wood

SSBA Community Trust runs *Poetry in Wood*, an art and woodwork training programme for people with learning disabilities. The participants have a range of learning disabilities including autism, Asperger's and Down's syndrome. Students learn product design and development, computer art and screen printing through an OCN accredited programme. There is no set timeframe for completing the work and a personalised training package is created for the individual, enabling them to work at their own pace. Once they have learned the skills required they can start doing paid work. Completed projects include wood and mosaic signage, mobiles from recycled materials, chess and other boxes from recycled hard wood. The project creates a way for otherwise unemployed people to gain skills and take control of their lives.

Streetwise Opera

Streetwise Opera gets homeless people involved in music and the arts through workshops, performances and work placement schemes. In addition, each year, there is a full opera production. Directed by a professional artist the actors in the opera include homeless and ex-homeless people as well as professional performers. The production is of high standard and through the opera the group hopes to change the public image of homeless people. Participants feel a sense of achievement and it also gives them a chance to get back in touch with family and friends by inviting them to the performance.

For more information visit www.lemosandcrane.co.uk.