

these core areas may have no intention of corresponding with a mass market but their creative outputs feed into the wider cultural industry sector of film, video, print and advertising. In this way we can associate artistic activity with innovation, research and risk – all of which are important activities in a knowledge economy. It follows, therefore, that just as the state may choose to invest in scientific or technological research at an academic level, it may also be of benefit to invest in pure artistic experimentation; in the knowledge that the core areas of creativity feed into the surrounding cultural and creative sectors.

Academia has long upheld the need for peer review as a means of assessing excellence, value and innovation. It has also been a useful way of weeding out the derivative and mimetic. Culture and creativity are of course essentially mimetic, generating ideas and responses to previous expressions and forms. ‘Evaluation’, along with ‘inclusion’, has entered into the tired lexicon of instrumental jargon, too often utilised as a means of reporting back that a given quota of things occurred. Appropriate peer review offers a more open, yet intensive assessment of aims, objectives and outcomes. This might comprise artists, arts administrators, technologists and other forms of specialist; dependent on what is being appraised.

I conclude this article by offering some thoughts on cultural and creative development. According to Nicholas Bourriard ‘Art is a state of encounter’¹⁰ and we can argue that this is available to everyone. As an encounter it may be unfamiliar, beyond our current experience and capable of expanding our understanding. It may also alienate - our choice being to enquire further or disregard what lies in front of us. In order to develop our understanding of aesthetics we need tools to advance our individual criticality and this in itself is an ongoing process, aided by education. Bourriard asserts that artistic practice is no longer confined to simple objects such as paintings in galleries; now more likely to embrace the ‘whole scene’ or space (and so dematerialising the gallery). This liberation of artistic form from the reification of the gallery space, propels artistic practice out into the world producing a wider set of transactions. The artistic work commissioned as a part of a regeneration programme is an opportunity to develop an encounter, not limited to a street bollard or bauble. This encounter can offer both the artist and the community the opportunity to expand their understanding of the ‘whole scene’ and is a two way process. When it stops being an encounter, and becomes an imposition of the state or other agency, then it becomes meaningless and unhelpful.

Cultural regeneration is not limited to the construction of landmark buildings, it is an ongoing process involving people, interactions and places. Architectural practice applied to regeneration is an integration of these three things. Moreover, consultation at a community level is not a perfunctory part of an architectural design team’s job sheet, it is a major factor in forming the end result.

In Britain the creation of new cultural infrastructure has been largely successful, particularly in re-profiling city centres and bringing in tourist investment but often at the cost of ignoring or containing peripheral communities. However the installation of a landmark cultural building or artwork does not of itself bring about wider community development or cultural cohesion. These require specific strategies and responses to particular locations. Furthermore the multiple interactions between the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, the Arts Councils, the regional development agencies and local government often create a lethal mix of conflicting objectives or at worst inertia. Added to this is the increasing relationship between creativity and technology, requiring changes in approach and perception in terms of innovation. Less government focussed on regional policy and globalised concerns, can place more resources directly in the hands of those that understand how to innovate and regenerate. Finally a system of peer review would serve to assess impact and potential; based on real world experiences and empirical knowledge of art form areas and creative risk.

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2 Blunkett, David (2002), Speech to the Performance and Innovation Unit Seminar on Social Capital. 12th March 2002.

3 Bourdieu, Pierre (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge: Polity Press [English translation]

4 Kester, Grant (1995) *Aesthetic evangelists: conversion and empowerment in contemporary community art*, published in Afterimage Magazine

5 Kwon, Miwon (2004) *One Place After Another*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press

6 Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor (1976) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York: Continuum [English translation]

7 Higgs, Peter; Cunningham, Stuart and Bakhshi, Hasan (2008) *Beyond the creative industries: Mapping the creative economy in the United Kingdom*, NESTA. http://www.nesta.org.uk/beyond-the-creative-industries-making-policy-for-the-creative-economy-policy-briefing/ last accessed: 15 August 2008

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9 KEA – European Affairs, (2006) *The Economy of Culture in Europe, KEA European Affairs*. http://www.keanet.eu/ last accessed: 15 August 2008

10 Bourriard, Nicolas (2002) *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon: Les presses de reel [English Translation]



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ARTICLE

At Risk

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There is strong evidence to suggest that culture and creativity are important components in regenerating urban areas. British cities such as London, Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester, Bristol, Birmingham and Liverpool have all experimented with large-scale capital projects and cultural zones or ‘quarters’. Looking beyond purely capital investments in landmark buildings, a number of questions arise regarding the wider implementation of culture as a social, economic and educationally motivated tool:
i)Are culturally motivated regenerative packages solely focused on increasing tourism and what are the economic effects for local communities when cultural investment is attempted?
ii)What impact have cultural regenerative projects had on social deprivation and does the central, urban location of these new structures benefit those in peripheral and neglected communities?
iii)What role do artists play as agents of this renewed investment and how do regenerative criteria affect the creative outcome?

Irrefutably large-scale cultural institutions such as Tate Modern have had a strong economic impact, as well as drawing in large numbers of tourists. London’s status as a global cultural capital has been readily enhanced by new investment, but the impact of culture on other cities seems more difficult to quantify or qualify. The development of cultural facilities in places such as West Bromwich, Cardiff and Liverpool raises further questions. Charge £7 to gain entry to a cultural facility in one of Britain’s most deprived communities - as the newly opened *The pUBLIC* does in West Brom - and you are in real trouble. According to the West Brom Blogger - on attending the opening of the new facility: “more people seemed interested in the cheap market stalls and the pub opposite than this black and pink art gallery. That’s probably got something to do with the fact that ‘*The pUBLIC*’ is less popular in West Brom than a Wolves supporter.”¹

Entry at Tate Modern has always been free, except for blockbuster shows weighted according to middle-class art going price points. A local authority cut and paste ‘regen’ strategy based on a landmark building alone is not enough. In deprived areas like West Brom and Liverpool there is an all important ‘buy in’ necessary from the local community in order to gain momentum and support for new ideas. Without this even relatively mundane cultural packages are left wide open to comparative analysis with other local infrastructure, such as hospitals. Furthermore, it can (and has) been argued that many of the new structures tilt towards the success of Bilbao, where profile raising and inter-city competitiveness become the priority, as opposed to social impact.

In 2002 David Blunkett, the then UK Home Secretary, set out his understanding of the importance of social capital in a speech to the Performance and Innovation Unit. He said:
“Too many post war regeneration schemes excluded communities and disrupted rather than supported local societies. Initiatives such as Development Corporations focused too much on building physical infrastructure, and failed to make long term improvements because they ignored the community.”²

In *Language and Symbolic Power* Pierre Bourdieu goes further:
“The more people are dispossessed, especially culturally, the more constrained and inclined they are to rely on delegates in order to acquire a political voice. In fact, isolated, silent, voiceless individuals, without either the capacity or power of making themselves heard and understood, are faced with the alternative of keeping quiet or of being spoken for by someone else.”³

Blunkett’s words still ring true today. The Blairite ‘Third Way’ applied to culture in Britain recognised



the economic importance of the cultural industries alongside the potential of creativity to crack social problems and help those in disenfranchised communities gain a voice. Concurrently, state investment in artists and institutions became directly linked to social outcomes and the ability of those receiving awards to provide accountable evidence of success (or indeed failure) based on such bywords as ‘inclusion’ and ‘audience’. Prior to New Labour’s cultural instrumentalism, creative ‘output’ in the UK had wavered between high-visibility (and evidenced) to ‘off the radar’ (and unaccountable).

This reappointment of cultural investment towards social engagement, whilst emphasising the importance of partnership and personal empowerment, failed however to devise a suitably complex understanding of how creativity can on one hand provide opportunity to those in deprived areas and on the other hand build analytical skills and trust between communities and artists. Furthermore, many of the cultural institutions responding to the challenges of widening cultural participation lacked professionals able to develop trust-based longer-term relationships with communities, along with the longer-term funds to do it. This was largely due to over-focussing on projects and outcomes from an artistic perspective, when more deeply in-grained social problems were apparent. In other cases, well-meaning and ‘leftist’ individuals and organisations have targeted communities ‘at risk’ with short term objectives to commission new work with dubious levels of inclusion and artistic outcome.

Art historian and critic, Grant Kester has referred to particular socially engaged art projects as ‘aesthetic evangelism’. For Kester there is no doubt that community-based public art projects have some direct benefit for the participants - in many cases defined as ‘young people at risk’ - but he takes issue with the lack of criticality and surface layers of representation that are inferred in press releases and public relations campaigns alongside this work once they have been ‘delivered’. By implication, these marketing and reporting materials are often selectively written to serve the aims of the commissioning institution and the artist, as opposed to those ‘at risk’. What is not apparent in most cases is any longer term evaluation of the impact of this cultural empowerment among selected groups, although this could easily be done. One example might be longer term evaluation and case studies of those involved in this kind of project work.

Fundamentally, engagement in a short term arts or media project can act as an inspiration or shift of self-esteem to those involved, but the question remains as to how much this can turn around existing lifestyles rooted in low educational attainment, criminality and other long term poverty issues. In Britain the middle class continues to expand, while a disaffected ‘work-less’ class remains without many forms of capital other than that derived from the black market or dwindling benefits system.

Concisely, Kester summarises:
“I believe that the artist who chooses to navigate through the highly contested and complex symbolic fields that surround ‘dangerous populations’ such as the homeless, the incarcerated, and the urban poor, will need to prepare themselves with something more than good intentions and ‘intuitive wisdom’.”⁴

Art Historian, Miwon Kwon builds on Kester’s summary and extends it to highlight the problematic notion of assimilation that dominates existing models of ‘quality assessment’ of the arts in community-based contexts, when she writes:
“The prior goal of integration and harmony in terms of unified urban design is reorganised around the performative capacity of the artist to become one with the community. And this ‘becoming one’, no matter how temporary, is presumed to be a prerequisite for an



artist to be able to speak with, for and as a legitimate representative or member of the community. Simultaneously, the characteristics of this ‘unity’ function as criteria for judging the artistic authenticity and ethical fitness of the art work.”⁵

So the danger lies in adopting representation of the community and the concomitant symbolic power that critics such as Kester rightly raise. In such cases the individual artist or arts institution has no legitimate right to represent or act as a delegate for that community, perhaps with the exception of a longer-term reciprocal involvement with the ‘target’ community.

In 1944 Adorno and Horkheimer framed the term ‘culture industry’⁶ to describe the expanding effect of new technologies and media distribution. In essence they coined the term pejoratively to describe a system based on standardisation and mass production. The Hollywood movie industry models of production and distribution at this point had already evolved to the same level as the automotive industry’s. Additionally, they asserted that mass media production and distribution had led to passive consumption, largely driven by corporatist agendas. Added to this ‘higher’ art forms, such as classical music or painting, had become marginal or misunderstood because they had become relatively too difficult.

Think tank Britain has plenty to say about culture and the creative industries. Opinion ranges from the forensic issue of capturing creativity in Higgs, Cunningham and Bakhshi’s report for NESTA⁷ - “Defining what does count as ‘creative’ however is a challenging task” - to the evidently lumpen and oafish output of Leunig and Swaffield’s report for Policy Exchange⁸ where we find: “... however much the urban intelligentsia may wish it otherwise, high art is a minority pursuit even among the affluent. It should be equally acceptable to spend money on other activities that will attract them – such as golf.”

Although it is attractive to view some cultural forms, such as film, as populist and others, such as classical music, as marginal or elitist, what is evidently the case is a problem of definition. This is exacerbated when we consider the relative merits and demerits of investing public money in various artistic practices and how we evaluate the end results. *KEA - European Affairs*, a Brussels based research consultancy business, has provided a simple delineation of the cultural and creative sector in its study ‘The Economy of Culture’⁹. KEA define the visual arts, performing arts and heritage as core arts fields. They are non-industrial in quality. Film, video, television, radio, computer games, music and print are defined as the cultural industries and are essentially industrial and aimed at mass consumption. Design, architecture and advertising are deemed to lie in the domain of the creative industries, where these activities may not necessarily be industrial in terms of output. KEA further asserts the growing intersecia between the cultural and creative industries, and a set of ‘Related Industries’ that manufacture products associated with the above, such as MP3 players and computers.

KEA’s schematic of the cultural and creative industries is inevitably problematic, as it is based on a split between mass-market and minority-interest methods of cultural production and distribution. (The Internet now facilitates a form of cottage industry where practitioners in the core arts fields associated with the visual and performing arts may reach mass audiences.) However, KEA’s model is useful in appraising the economics of cultural production. So, accepting KEA’s notion of core arts areas such as the visual and performing arts, we can infer that they are not necessarily concerned with mass production and consumption and that their role is in the production of ideas, critique of the human condition and reflection on difficult issues. Practitioners involved in the pursuit of