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‘What are the new values that will inform arts provision in the next twenty years?’

The TMA Winter Event "Ambitions for the New Age" on 12th November, 2009 commenced with a keynote address by John Holden of DEMOS.

We are very grateful to John for allowing us to reproduce his presentation here.

Good afternoon everyone, and thanks so much for inviting me back to speak to you for a second time.

What I've been asked to talk about is this: 'What are the new values that will inform arts provision in the next twenty years?'

It's always entertaining to look into the future, but I should preface what I have to say by pointing out how often people get it spectacularly wrong. For example there was Thomas J Watson, the Chief Executive of IBM, who in 1943 reportedly said "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

And then there's Edward the Seventh, who thought that the motor car would never catch on because there weren't enough footmen who were intelligent enough to be trained as chauffeurs.

So if we're looking forward into the next twenty years, we should bear in mind that in 1989 nobody predicted the death of Diana or 9/11 or the election of Barak Obama. And now looking forwards, it's certain that there will be just as many extraordinary events in the next twenty years.

But events are not the same things as values, and when it comes to values, we can be certain that there are many of them that will endure, such as the importance we attach to love and to relationships.

Indeed when I first read this question, I thought that I could give it pretty short shrift. You will all remember that Rita, as in *Educating Rita* responded to the question "Suggest how you would resolve the staging difficulties inherent in a production of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*" with the answer: 'Do it on the Radio.'

Well, one response to asking 'What are the new values that will inform arts provision in the next twenty years?' is simply to say 'there won't be any new values.'

But a moment's thought tells you that that's not the end of the story. Because although it's obvious that at any one time we, acting as individuals, or acting collectively as communities and societies, have a complete set of theoretical

values at our disposal, it's equally apparent that some values are adopted and given life, and others are neglected and fade at different points in history.

Circumstances arise which allow certain values to flourish at particular moments. For example, however caring and generous some individual bankers may be, it is clear that over the last twenty years the values of materialism and self-interest have dominated in the financial sector. That has happened, I would suggest, partly because of the political promotion of values of individualism and market freedom in the early 1980s, partly because of a set of decisions about how society should be organised that flowed from that ideology, and partly because new technology developed a set of calculating and communication tools that enabled a handful of people and institutions to concentrate large amounts of money in very few hands.

To put it another way, there is a direct link between Margaret Thatcher telling Womans' Own that 'there is no such thing as society'; between that and the huge increase in individual home-ownership in the 1980s; between that and the proliferation of TV programmes on how to get on the property ladder in the 1990s; and between that and the creation of a dysfunctional market in discounted mortgage futures in the 2000s.

In retrospect it all hangs together very clearly. And for our purposes today, I think there are three big lessons to be learnt from that example. The first is that values really matter. They form a bedrock on which norms of behaviour, policies and practices are built. The second is that the widespread realisation of values, or the way that values play out in society, is affected by a whole host of factors, only some of which are reasonably predictable. And the third is that, because of that unpredictability, values have unintended consequences. I am sure that when the think tank the Institute for Economic Affairs started promoting the free market and the dream of a property owning democracy in the 1950s, they did not have the collapse of the banking system as their ultimate end-game.

But what, I hear you thinking, has all this got to do with the arts?

Well, what I am trying to do here is set a framework so that we can think about how values will affect the arts over the next twenty years, but not just values on their own: we need to look at values in the context of social and technological changes. So my model looks like this:

On the left hand side you have a list (and this is not a complete list) of the *sources* of values, such as religion, politics, tradition, education, cultures and sub-cultures. Since at least the beginning of the twentieth century we have lived in a society with increasingly heterogeneous values. Traditional societies and religious systems have values that are held universally by the group, indeed that often define membership of the group, and that change, if at all, at a glacial pace. But Modern societies have individuals and groups within them who have differing values, sometimes diametrically opposed. Our own society is characterised by the value that we attach to pluralism and

relativism. Indeed, I imagine that pluralism and relativism are two very important values for most of us in this room. And as I will explain later, I think the arts over the next twenty years will be affected by sets of values that might at first seem contradictory.

In the middle of the picture, these heterogeneous values are distilled into the mainstream values that are dominant in society. Some of those values last a very long time – like the value accorded to friendship; but others can change quite quickly – look at how the value of loyalty to an employer has crumbled in the last fifty years.

On the right hand side of the diagram are the factors, again an incomplete list, of things that enable or disable values to be realised. That list includes legislation, technology, communications, financial resources, and many other things.

There is a constant interaction between the range of possible values and the factors that distil those available options into the fluctuating set of mainstream values.

In fact, I would argue that the arts are themselves one very important factor that can enable or disable the adoption and expression of values. In other words, I think we have to see art both as a value-driven, and as a value-forming activity. Which means that the question we started with – what new values will inform the arts? – has to be understood to operate with its corollary – what art will inform the new values?

Of course, it has always been the job of the arts to confirm, to challenge, to uphold, to undermine, to question, and to reflect the values that are found in society. That is a cliché.

What is perhaps more interesting is the way in which some of the values of arts practice are being challenged not just by shifts in wider social values that we are about to explore, but by the way that social and technological changes are allowing those values to gain purchase. Together, the values and the context set an agenda for arts provision in the future.

So let me enumerate some of the values that are gaining importance and that are most relevant to the arts.

The first is the value placed on creative expression, not just by artists but people much more widely across society.

There is a great deal of evidence that people want more creative control in their own lives. One example of the increased value placed on creative expression is the statistic I have heard that more than half of Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 have uploaded content onto Youtube.

Another example I can give you is to look at the commercial world, where we are gradually moving from a totally producer-controlled world, to one where activity is driven by the desire of consumers to have a hand in creating the products that they want to use.

If you look at the car manufacturing industry we have moved from this: a Model T Ford where the producer made it in one colour, at a fixed price, on a take-it-or-leave it basis, to the new FIAT 500, where the customer can choose between half a million different styling options, so that they might never see another car exactly like theirs on the road.

The Harvard Business School academics Shoshana Zuboff and Jim Maxmin argue that we are witnessing a revolution in the relationship between producers and consumers. They say that instead of being passive buyers, we are now 'individuals (who) seek true voice, direct participation, unmediated influence and identity-based community because (we) are comfortable using (our) own experience as the basis for making judgments'. And if we are comfortable with our own judgements, that makes us less willing to accept the judgement and suspicious of the expertise of others, whether they be doctors, politicians, scientists or artists.

We can see the desire for individual control over our lives operating right across the commercial sphere, and in public services as well, we are seeing more and more examples of people wanting to determine their own individual outcomes, whether that's in terms of where they go to University, or the service they get from the NHS.

People want their lives arranged to suit them, so that they have what they want, in the form they want, when they want. And they also want to do these things at a moment's notice, which brings an important element of casualness into life, with social arrangements made at the last minute, and subject to change. All of that of course is the complete antithesis of building-based performances where the content, price, timing and location are determined exclusively by the producer or provider.

Another value allied to that of creative expression is the value attached to stimulus. Novelty, the new, and the spectacular seem to be increasingly valued and sought after.

But the three values I have just mentioned: creative expression; individual autonomy and a desire for stimulus and novelty are not the whole story.

Paradoxically, there is another set of values that coexists with them, and push in the opposite direction. These are values that, while always present to some degree, come to the fore in hard economic times.

These values are, first a desire for comfort and stability. Yu In-chon the South Korean Minister of Culture put it like this in a speech in February this year when he said that "There may seem to be no relation between culture and the economic crisis, but the fundamental way to cope with it comes from culture because it heals people's painful hearts. During these economically difficult times, our lives would be much harsher without culture and art"

And of course he has a point. It's a well-known fact that in the Great Depression of the 1930s Hollywood thrived by healing painful hearts with a regular diet of dreams and escapism. When the last Bond film was released I was very puzzled by its title, *Quantum of Solace* but now I can see its prescient significance. As Steve Weiner, the boss of the cinema chain Cineworld said at the time "It's ideal for forgetting about falling share prices and other real-life gloom. Cinema visits rise in economic downturns." Hence *Mamma Mia*, which of course started off as a stage musical, being the highest-grossing film of all time in the UK.

The second value coming to the fore in the recession is that of solidarity. In hard times we tend to stick together, to affirm our sense of community. The political rhetoric is 'we're all in this together' – in spite of the fact that of course we are not all equally affected. Alongside solidarity there is a desire for rootedness. When we feel adrift and tossed about on wild economic seas we look for anchors, and tend to be culturally conservative and backward looking.

The third value we tend to adopt in a recession is frugality, partly because there is less money about, and partly because when some people have less, it's distasteful, at the very least, for those that have more to flaunt it. Frugality has an added benefit of supporting another contemporary value: concern for the environment.

And the final recessionary value is, I suggest, anger, if that can be called a value. Anger is certainly of value to society, and we have a great deal to be angry about – from MP's expenses to bank bonuses and way beyond. We should expect the theatre to be exploring the causes of our current moral and financial crisis and trying to find some answers. And that is exactly what is happening – in Enron, in Jerusalem, and in The Power of Yes.

So here we have two sets of values at work that exist together and can be viewed as either paradoxical or complementary. We have:

Individuality	and	Solidarity
Distinctiveness	and	Community
Creativity	and	Rootedness
Novelty	and	Familiarity
Stimulus of the new	and	Comfort of the old.
Large-scale spectacle	and	Small-scale intimacy
Provocation and challenge	and	Maintenance of the status quo

The new reality demands a different way of looking at what culture means, and hence new ways of looking at the value of the arts and culture. It demands a shift in the political response to culture, and it requires changes in the way that cultural funders and cultural organizations go about their business. It presents a new set of opportunities and a new set of challenges for everyone involved.

Let me try to explain how I see this new reality.

I think that now, for practical purposes, there are three, deeply interrelated, spheres of culture: publicly funded culture, commercial culture and home-made culture. They are not separate or oppositional, they are completely intertwined, but they are different from each other in important ways.

In publicly funded culture, culture is not defined through theory but by practice: what gets funded becomes culture. This pragmatic approach has allowed an expansion of what culture in this sense means, so that it can now include things like circus, puppetry and street art as well as opera and ballet. Who makes these decisions about what to fund, and hence to define this type of culture, is therefore a matter of considerable public interest. For example, official responses to the cultural production of different community, social, ethnic and faith groups carries deep significance in terms of validating, accepting, and valuing different minority cultures within the definition of what government sees as culture. Presumably, the values that are applied to decisions about what to fund are founded in artistic excellence and the pursuit of the public good – but they are values that have in the past been poorly articulated and difficult to describe.

Commercial culture is equally pragmatically defined: if someone thinks there is a chance that a song or a show will sell, it gets produced; but the consumer is the ultimate arbiter of commercial culture. Success or failure is market driven, but access to the market — the elusive ‘big bucks record deal’ of Bruce Springsteen’s *Rosalita*, the stage debut, or the first novel — is controlled by a commercial mandarin class just as powerful as the bureaucrats of publicly funded culture. In commercial culture, the underlying values are not as clear as might be supposed. Parts of the sector are dominated by values of personal self-enrichment, but others are concerned with producing good work. For example 90 per cent of film makers in the North east, people who want their work to sell, nevertheless say they are not primarily motivated by money. Their number one motivation is the satisfaction of producing creative work.

The crucial point though, is that in publicly funded culture and in commercial culture – the only two routes to getting work to an audience until very recently - there are gatekeepers who define the meaning of culture through their decisions.

But recently there has been a crucial development in the third type of culture: home-made culture.

Home-made culture extends from the historic objects and activities of folk art, through to the post-modern punk garage band and the YouTube upload. Here, the definition of what counts as culture is much broader; it is defined by an informal self-selecting peer group, and the barriers to entry are much lower. Knitting a sweater, inventing a new recipe, or writing a song and posting it on MySpace often require a great deal of skill, but they can be done without the interference of a gatekeeper — the decision about the quality of what is produced lies in the hands not of council officers or record company A&R departments, but instead is decided by all of those people who directly see, hear or taste the finished article.

Unlike publicly funded and commercial culture, home-made culture is intermediary-free.

The internet is credited with driving the mass creativity that is found in home made culture, but in reality it is only one of the factors that explains it. Cheap musical instruments, the availability of digital camcorders instead of expensive film, new public investment in galleries and theatres, the education system — all these things have played a part. But the important thing is not that technology has made the production of art cheaper and easier and enabled so-called amateurs to achieve professional standards. No, the really revolutionary things about the technology are that it has allowed people to collaborate in a way that they never could before, and it has allowed them to communicate directly with each other.

So instead of the arts and culture simply being provided by a set of professionalised 'producers' to a group of relatively passive consumers the game has changed.

Now, individuals can take on positions as producers and consumers, authors and readers, performers and audiences across all three spheres of culture. Each of us is able to move through different roles with increasing fluidity, creating and updating our identities as we go. Artists travel freely between the funded, commercial and home-made sectors: for instance publicly funded orchestras make commercial recordings that get sold in record shops and exchanged on file-sharing websites; street fashion inspires commercial fashion; and in the opposite direction an indie band that starts on Myspace may get a record deal on another continent, and then play at a publicly funded music venue.

The rapid and enormous expansion of the internet as a space for cultural communication and as an enabler of mass creativity has changed the possibilities for all three spheres of culture and all forms of cultural expression

within them, because it presents, across the board, a wealth of new opportunities (such as new audiences; new art forms; new distribution channels) but also a set of questions (what to do about intellectual property; investment in technology; and censorship for example). One big question it sets for arts funders is where to intervene to best effect, because it's no longer obvious that they should confine themselves to their traditional role. Another is whether, in a world of mass creativity we should get rid of the word 'provision', which you will recall is in the title of this speech. Maybe we should be dropping the idea that the arts and culture are provided by one lot of us to another, and shift our perception to seeing the arts and culture as things that are developed together. Many of these questions that we face are, of course, value-laden.

Now, does this shift in our model of culture matter? Well, I think the answer to that is yes. Under the old model the arts could be dismissed as elitist and marginal; the commercial arts were mere entertainment; and the home – made was amateur. But put all three together and you have what Jordi Marti, the head of culture in Barcelona, calls 'the second ecosystem of humankind'.

The implications of that are profound. For one thing, the move from a high culture/low culture model to a more integrated model has changed the debate about quality, from being one where the arts are naturally superior to popular culture, to one where quality is debated in niches, wherever it is found – is that a good TV programme? was that a fine performance of *Otello*? how do these jazz players rate? And so on. Not just that, but with the rejection of the role of the expert that I talked about earlier, the whole question of who determines what quality means is up for grabs.

But more important than the quality debate, this new threefold cultural model shifts the arts and culture from being a 'nice-to-have' leisure pursuit, looked after by the smallest department in central government, and the most obscure office in a local authority, into something that affects the whole of life. Because now we are what we read, watch, listen to, create and perform.

Could it be, then, that in the next twenty years and beyond, creative expression – as an individual pursuit, as a collaborative venture in groups and communities, and as an act of appreciation of the creativity of others in the present and the past – what if all these things become a major driving force in how society organises itself; what if the arts become the means through which society shapes the aims that it pursues?

You may think that sounds hopelessly optimistic or unrealistic, but just think about how seemingly peripheral matters can shift to being very important indeed in the way that society operates. Take transport for example, where in the not too distant past it was unusual to venture twenty miles beyond your home, and it was virtually unheard of to travel abroad. Now, all our lives are deeply influenced by transport – even if we don't travel ourselves as

individuals – because economic and social life has re-organised around the possibility, the actuality and the *assumption* of transport.

What happens if the arts take on a much greater significance because people are valuing them much more than they do at present? That will happen, if at all, through a shift in values accompanied by changes in organisation and in technology that allow those values to be expressed.

All of that is happening. If you add together the individual value of the arts - our desire for self - fulfilment through creative expression, and our need to form our identities through cultural production and consumption – add to that the value of collaboration in the production and enjoyment of culture that helps us to socialise, and add to that the exploration of values through the arts, and I think you have a strong case for seeing the arts as potentially much more central to society than they are at the moment.

These value shifts are being helped along by technological developments. Making some types of art to high technical standards is easier than it was. Collaboration is easier; communication is very much easier, and possible in ways that were even very recently unimagined.

If you read about what's predicted to happen next in the development of the internet you will find that over the next ten years there will most likely be staggering progress in the back-end, technical organisation of the web that will make it far more intelligent and even faster, followed by a decade of increased user-friendliness.

So we have in front of us the possibility of mass creativity transforming society, and the arts being a central concern in most people's lives.

But the question is - will arts institutions act to help or hinder that revolution?

Let me paint a picture of what many (but by no means all) theatres, music venues and galleries are like and contrast that with the description I have given of the way society is changing. You may think I'm being unfair, because some of the things I'm about to mention seem to be so essential to the way that arts organisations operate that they cannot be changed without destroying their integrity, but *let* me be unfair for a minute:

The Below Average Theatre then, is one where:

A product is offered in which I have no say. It's put on at a time and in a place of someone else's choosing. If I don't like what's on, the theatre's website won't show me the options of what else is available that evening in a different venue in the same town. A lot of the time the building is shut, when it could be being used for all sorts of things, and from the outside that seems wasteful. When I go it's usually half empty which doesn't make me feel like I've made a great decision in buying a ticket. But whenever the theatre is full,

the critic in the local paper says that because the play is popular it must be dumbed-down. A lot of stuff on the stage doesn't seem to connect with what my life is like, and I've seen all the Willy Russell's and Ayckbourn's that I want to see.

Now of course it doesn't have to be like that, and in many places it isn't like that; but it's up to all of us to make sure that my ghastly caricature becomes completely unrecognisable. So here are my top ten tips of what arts organisations need to do over the next twenty years:

One - more than ever before they need to understand and respect audiences and the public. Public support is crucial, whether we're talking about the box office, or in terms of political backing. So strive to know what people want, what you can give them, how you can nurture them and surprise them and put something good into their lives. Learn from them. Talk to them. If you don't value them, they will not value you.

Two, get much smarter at marketing. It still astonishes me how difficult it is to find out what's going on in the arts. I'm forever finding out about things randomly – on a poster in a library or through a mailing that I happen to open rather than throw away. Either that, or someone tells me about something that I would have liked to have gone to a week after it's closed. Surely in this age of search engines, the arts companies in any given town or region can get together to provide a live list of events and happenings that is flexible enough to be searched in many different ways? Please, just do it.

Three, create as many opportunities as possible for free events or experiences. Use livestreaming to enlarge your audiences. This lowers the risk for people, brings them in, and gives you an opportunity to expand your community.

Four, collaborate to get into mainstream broadcast media much more. Mainstream media have significant problems of their own, and one of their responses has been to cut arts programming. We can't let that happen, because most people have contact with the arts through those channels. So we've got to continue to come up with innovative ways of getting the arts on TV.

Five: use networks. Use your audiences to tell their friends about you; and help them to bring along a parent or a child. Build communities of interest and support. Use the internet, word of mouth, the physical spaces that you control; use other friendly organizations and get out into the streets to create and grow those networks. The more allies you have, the stronger you will be. But remember that when people join networks they invest time and energy, and so they need to be rewarded.

Six, do all this, and more, with less money. Figuring out how to do more with less is a good discipline in easy times – in hard times it becomes essential to

survival. When politicians demand efficiency increases don't just groan, think about the dozens of ways in which they can be achieved – whether that's by sharing back-office functions, dematerializing tickets or whatever. And work buildings harder. They are expensive, and anyone who runs a building knows that inflation is running at five per cent, not zero. They consume a lot of resources, so they must be made environmentally efficient and used to their maximum capacity.

Seven: make friends with geeks, and read about the way that media, communications, creative opportunities will change. Also make friends with the under-twenties, and other early-adopters of technology.

Eight: Experiment. Theatre will become heterogeneous. There will be the reinvention of the private patronage theatre, but instead of the patron being Charles the Second it could be Karl Lagerfeld or David Beckham, There will be community supported theatres, like community supported farms. There will be flash-mob theatre and participatory theatre. There will be a lot more theatre taking place outside theatres.

Nine: Read moral philosophers. In twenty years' time playwrights will still be exploring issues of love, political intrigue and existential angst just as they always have. The trick is to connect these classic themes with contemporary circumstances to make them fresh and relevant today.

And Ten: stop worrying. Look forward not back.

Here's one reason to stop worrying. This is a timeline produced by an American sociologist a few years ago showing when various things are expected to become extinct. He's been fairly accurate about village shops, and retirement. I hope he's wrong about public libraries and lunch. But you will at least be relieved to see that the demise of theatres doesn't feature; so in twenty years' time theatre should still be going strong, even if it's happening in different ways, and with a very different relationship between the theatre and its audience – a word that may itself have disappeared in twenty years' time.

Thank you