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Those that can, play. Those that don't think they can, or think they ought not to, or think they are not allowed to, don't.

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We live in a world of cultural confusion. Under considerable, and misguided, pressure to be everything to everyone (with extraordinary caveats attached for some) we are not losing but denying our individual circumstances and contexts, the elements that make our engagement with society meaningful and that inform how we understand the world. The danger is that this influence is insidiously received and is often interpreted by people as an internal restraint rather than an external constraint. As a consequence there is little potential and encouragement for the emergence of a creative person, that is someone who understands the purpose and nature of creative activity and engages in it as ethical behaviour. As a country we are the poorer for this lack of natural capacity and intelligence.

To make my case I will set out my arguments in the following order:

I believe there is a confusion about the nature and value of culture that is currently promoted in a misguided way by the British government (though I think it is probably possible to generalise this case to most “westernised” governments) in an attempt to rationalise this vital force and use it as a tool to achieve perceived social and economic benefit.

As a result creativity, here understood to be the key driver of significant cultural activity, has come to be identified as a fashionable commodity, a boom industry, in such a way that its potential as experienced in a stimulating and, sometimes revelatory way, by anyone as part of their personal development has been devalued.

In consequence those that can't have a valid creative experience that enables them to engage with and understand their culture could become disaffected and disenfranchised.

But, if we provide effective community education practice that embraces creative process and critical engagement it could be possible to reclaim the valid cultural experience of the individual in ways that will be truly useful for the well-being of our society (and the economy!).

Cultural confusion

So, I believe we live in a world of cultural confusion. This confusion is endemic in the way the government engages with the currency of culture and how it seeks to use this "nowness" with all its apparent appeal to form policies and purposes in order to influence potential and products. Perhaps the most extreme example of this was "cool Britannia" when former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, on receipt of some estimation of the value of the "music industry", decided that all unemployed and disaffected young people in the country could just become successful pop musicians and thereby dramatically increase the country's GDP and get rid of the underclass at the same time.

The term "multicultural" has become very popular in recent years as a construct to design and describe societies made up of varied groupings of people who, apparently, have their own cultures, and the sum total of these is the national multicultural. From this definition a concept has been generated that is "multiculturalism". In practice this process has been less than convincing as a mechanism for widening cultural understanding and there is also concern that it has more to do with Politics, with a capital P, than with the representation or definition of the lives, achievements and social and political, with a small p, interaction of different groups of people. Robert Hughes (1994) reflects on this concern as follows:

Unhappily, you do not have to listen very long to the arguments on the other side before sensing that, in quite a few of its proponents' minds, multiculturalism means something less than genuine curiosity about other cultural forms.

The purpose of this policy was to identify and integrate a broad, but specific, range of minority cultures into the common culture and make good citizens of them all. In the name of diversity these policies and practices seek to promote a sense of cultural homogeneity in that they do not recognise the way in which people actually value things, culture among them. They encourage a sense of valuelessness and this has an impact way beyond any particular artefact or cultural product. Knowledge and experience are also victims here. An understanding of value is a subjective and developmental process and so cannot be received in an arbitrary way; it must be lived. Once understood, whatever that means, the individual, confident in their understanding, is able to make judgements about the value of new things and new experiences.

This view is further confirmed by the current practice, arising from the perceived failure or, at least, shortcomings of multiculturalism, of abandoning the objective of a diverse common culture and encouraging distinction and separateness. An example of this is the following policy statement to be found on the Arts Council England website (www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/diversity 2007). The statement begins with a grand gesture

Race, ethnicity and faith will remain major preoccupations in this country and the arts are fundamental to such debates. The arts help us to develop a sense of our

identity and ourselves as individuals, as members of our communities and as a nation.

It is not really clear what the distinction between “our identity and ourselves as individuals ” is in this context but we move on to a qualification

The debate now also needs to encompass a richer and more broad-ranging definition of diversity. By ‘diversity’, we mean that we will respond to issues around race, ethnicity, faith, disability, sexuality, class and economic disadvantage – any social or institutional barriers that prevent people from participating in and enjoying the arts.

Which is followed by a list of associated actions

- Complete our race equality scheme action plan, including implementing our race equality toolkit for funded arts organisations, and acting on the Sustained Theatre consultation
- Improve disabled people’s take up of arts activity, raise the profile of disability-led arts and improve employment opportunities for disabled artists, by developing and implementing a new disability equality scheme and action plan
- Provide a development programme for Black and minority ethnic arts organisations, promote debates and showcases and maintain our commitment of a minimum of 10% of our Grants for the arts awards benefiting Black and minority ethnic artists and arts organisations.....

It is clear from this statement and the actions that proceed from it that it seeks to support very particular “diverse” constituencies and that a very selective view is taken of the need to “encompass a richer and more broad-ranging definition of diversity”. The Arts Council might be forgiven for intending to include through such policies but the reality and practice is that this is an exclusive approach that supports particular distinct and separate artists and the art they make, which may or may not be under a perceived threat of loss to, or absorption into, the prevailing (multi-)culture.

Then there are the good old-fashioned concepts of status quo and professional expertise. In the West and its ever-increasing spheres of influence culture as a definition of product tends to be either established art, the quality of which is recognised by its enduring nature, or the dynamic, new and exciting art or art forms that push the boundaries of taste and understanding and stretch the ties with history. The "creative deviance" celebrated by Landry and Bianchini (1995). The area where these definitions cross over reflect the understandings of the “culturally au fait” and, though there are ends to this spectrum, traditionally those who aspire to this status do so on common ground, the tradition of culture, embraced or rejected. The terms of reference are the same but the interpretations, the value judgements, are different. This is not surprising given the predominance of the technical rationalist western cultural tradition. John Paynter (1992) observes that

The misunderstandings that have arisen around the promotion of creativity in education are unfortunate. Although we now see a greater willingness to draw upon students' originality, imagination and inventiveness, and widespread agreement that the development of lateral, creative thinking is important for society's future, there are still many who find this a disquieting notion. They see creativity either as an impossible and pretentious goal (because they regard it as the province of a few very special minds) or as an open invitation to lawlessness, unproductive freedom and lowering of standards.

All of this misdirected rhetoric from government and its agencies blindly extolling the virtues of creativity, perhaps to combat the misgivings of some of the cultural gatekeepers referred to by Paynter, has created this cultural confusion that results in extraordinary and incomprehensible collaborations. One such recently took place between beat-boxers and a BBC orchestra that did not engage with any concepts of meaning, aesthetics or quality and resulted in a highly questionable piece of television whose purpose was only to sell "diversity". Such a misguided effort is shockingly no great surprise when it is put alongside the lack of moral direction from the government that led to approval for the sale to the press of the stories of the British marines captured by Iran earlier this year only to have that permission withdrawn a few days later in a shambolic display of inconsistent righteousness. Why are we confused about purpose and morality? It is recently reported that 61% of people in the UK admit to breaking the law (news.bbc.co.uk 26/6/07). How do we negotiate our certainties now?

Finally, there is the expectation that culture and creativity are forces and mechanisms that can be used to deliver specific social benefits. The alarming notion, for instance, that managed transformative experiences can be used to improve social cohesion. The following is to be found in the latest report of the Music Manifesto, a government sponsored campaign to promote music-making by whatever means:

Every child should be assured opportunities for transformative musical experiences that can help to raise attainment and self-esteem, lead to behavioural improvements and promote greater social cohesion. (Music Manifesto, 2006)

Is this a reasonable price to pay? Is the expectation of specific behavioural modification as an outcome not an intolerable demand on a process of enlightenment such as a musical experience? I do not disagree that behavioural change, perhaps for the better, may occur as a result of a transformative musical experience but I do not think it is reasonable or healthy to use music to determine and achieve specific and predetermined behavioural modification objectives.

Creativity and its fashionable uses

At this point in time we are subject to a range of interventions intended on improving our social and economic well-being, interventions that are intended to cure society's ills,

make us whole, make us tolerant, make us acquiescent, make us prosper. In many of these interventions "creativity" has become the hook, has become the bait to engage the bully (and the bullied), the kids with learning problems, the disaffected "yoof", the reluctant learner, the potential religious extremist, the young criminal and the unemployed layabout; all of whom are, and will continue to be, a cost to society if they don't change their ways and achieve their perceived and hoped for potential.

What will we change them into and how will we know we have changed them? Well it would seem that we can suggest that the frustrated can just become the successful, thereby achieving the status and fame to express their frustration but at the expense of meaning and sincerity because the achievement has no recognisable value, no permanence, beyond Warhol's famous fifteen minutes if they are lucky.

"Creativity" is one of the favoured buzzwords for this official approach to the problem. It has become the cure all, it is sold as the next big thing, the next fashion.

The ability to be creative has become a universal aspiration. To say that we are "creative" suggests we hold control over the world around us – in the home, in the workplace and in the garden. To be creative is to prove that you have freedom in society, shows that you have economic value to employers and can fashion meaning for other people. (Tims and Wright, 2007)

This is heady stuff. You can see how seductive this is, and all the better for the government if we seduce ourselves. Creative industries scored highest in the dream career survey carried out by Creative and Cultural Skills, the "sector" skills council, in 2005. This industrialisation of creativity – careers, sectors, skills councils and so on – takes us to some interesting re-inventions. In their recent pamphlet for the liberal think-tank DEMOS, Tims and Wright (2007) seek to clarify what they recognise as a fuzzy interface between creativity and the creative industries.

The collapse of established norms of what is and isn't good art, widening access to people, ideas and information around the world, expands the potential for the creation of new ideas, products and concepts.

The desire to learn new things has always been the springboard for creativity and innovation but if we want to maintain a significant edge in an internationally competitive environment it appears that we must hone these capacities. A recent policy document released by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (2007) states that

Innovation is now widely recognised to normally be an iterative, interdisciplinary and collaborative process rather than the work of one "heroic inventor". However, innovative teams, organisations and localities are made up of individuals, all of who play different roles in developing innovations. As such individual skills and attitudes are essential for creating, developing, diffusing and adopting an innovation.

Clearly our world is so confusing that we have to officially make explicit the implicit - the kind of thing we all can and would learn and know from experience, if we only had time and opportunity to have the experience - which is that we can create and innovate with others and that individual contributions to that team effort are critical to its success.

But “creativity thrives on not knowing” says a filmmaker quoted in the Demos pamphlet and Hartley in his recent book *The Creative Industries* (2004) says

creativity is an input not an output....people apply their creative talent to the creation of something else...

So, eventually we come back to the realisation that if we are to recognise creativity and innovation as truly culturally (and economically) influential factors in this modern world then we have to be confident that humans can achieve significant innovation and change for the good of society without pre-determining and, thereby, devaluing or confounding this process.

Distortions of the concepts of creativity and culture arising from the interests of multiculturalism, political correctness, economic progress, diversity, behavioural change and social conditioning confuse what we understand as the cultural and even the social parts of our lives. To some extent this is because these elements, creativity and culture, are identified as discrete in order that they can be developed to achieve these policy and political purposes. However, real people don't recognise these distinctions and even if they don't feel confidently creative or cultured it doesn't take long for these innate capacities to grow as part of an informed worldview.

The disaffected and disenfranchised?

So, are these people the disaffected and disenfranchised? Only if we allow them to be. The danger is that this proposition that culture and creativity are constructs somehow objectified and separated from the existence and desires of human beings is insidiously received and is often interpreted by people as an internal restraint rather than an external constraint. They come to believe that they are somehow responsible for not feeling, not being these received constructs; they are confused by what they thought they could be – adventurous, exploratory, and celebratory - and what they are told they can be – a slightly updated iteration of an established “successful” model. As a consequence there is little potential and encouragement for the emergence of a creative person, that is someone who understands the purpose and nature of creative activity and engages in it as ethical behaviour; as an integral part of the framework they use to understand, to value and to grow. Something that is their own resource of particular, contextualised and understood experience, learning and knowledge.

So what is the human resource for a creative person? Hinde (2004) argues that the frame of reference is a personal morality, however that may have developed, and that

.....both culture and morality stem ultimately from "human nature" as it has been shaped by natural and cultural selection in interaction with the physical, biological and social environments that humans have experienced in evolutionary and historical time and that are experienced in the lifetime of each individual.
(Hinde, 2002)

Understanding, intent, purpose, collaboration and engagement; in the individual these are dynamic human values; activities that are believed in, engaged in and acted upon for a reason. These actions, and even the intentions that inspired them, recognise and rely upon "human nature" as the mechanism for relatively shared understandings. The value of a creation does not just exist for its creator. Others - audiences, collaborators and critics - will and must also have an understanding; the level to which that understanding is "informed" will vary but this variety does not, and should not, matter as individual and diverse perspectives are the basis of meaningful discourse.

Barthes (1977) mourned the loss of the amateur in the midst of the battle for cultural supremacy where the refined technique of overwhelming tradition fought the threat of dissolution by politically engineered multiculturalism as described above.

The amateur, a role defined much more by a style than by a technical imperfection, is no longer anywhere to be found: the professionals, pure specialists whose training remains entirely esoteric for the public...never offer that style of the perfect amateur the great value of ... touching off in us not satisfaction but desire.....

and he suggested that what was missing was

...the powerful germ of a disturbance of civilisation...

I believe that the amateur is still there in the, sometimes, raw but exciting form of the creative person because that possibility exists anywhere that confident human capacity and intuition are valued. Polanyi (1962) speaks of the personal participation of the knower in all acts of understanding in his definition of "personal knowledge".

The two words may seem to contradict each other: for true knowledge is deemed impersonal, universally established, objective. But the seeming contradiction is resolved by modifying the conception of knowing.

...Skilful knowing and doing is performed by subordinating a set of particulars, as clues and tools, to the shaping of a skilful achievement, whether practical or theoretical. Acts of comprehension are to this extent irreversible, and also non-critical.Comprehension is neither an arbitrary act nor a passive experience, but a responsible act claiming universal validity. Such knowing is indeed *objective* in the sense of establishing contact with a hidden reality: a

contact that is defined as the condition for anticipating an indeterminate range of yet unknown (and perhaps yet inconceivable) true implications.

The meaning of intentions and actions are understood and shared through human interaction, actual or not, because interaction is the context for communication and language, both of which are tools that individuals need to describe their hopes and fears, even to themselves.

So, there is a tension between the sort of short term governmental objectives outlined previously and the development of aptitudes and capacities that will support personal knowledge and lateral thinking in ways and to purposes that are based, with some degree of society's confidence, in the best interests of people. This may be idealistic but there is really no alternative but to be so. The questions this position begs are how do we achieve a platform that will enable this expectation to be realised? How do we (relatively) comfortably take the risks?

Daniel Dennett (2003) observes

Nicholas Maxwell defines freedom as “the capacity to achieve what is of value in a range of circumstances.” I think this is about as good a definition of freedom as could be. In particular, it appropriately leaves wide open the question of just what is of value. Our unique ability to reconsider our deepest convictions about what makes life worth living obliges us to take seriously the discovery that there is no palpable constraint on what we can consider. It is all up for grabs. To some people this is a fearful prospect, opening the gates to nihilism and relativism, letting go of God’s commandments and risking a plunge into anarchy.....(echoes of Paynter)

I think they should have more faith in their fellow human beings, and appreciate how amazingly subtle and adroit they are, how well equipped by nature and culture to formulate and participate in well-designed societal arrangements that maximise freedom for all. Far from being anarchic, such arrangements are – and must be – exquisitely tuned to strike a balance between shelter and elbow room.

CME's practice in this context

Most learning . . . is the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting. (Illich 1971)

A model for how we might encourage and stimulate real opportunities for many to be creative people, to understand and take the risks in that area Dennett defines as “between shelter and elbow room”, is the work of Community Music East Ltd. (CME). The particular effectiveness of the organisation's methodology is that it is based on a user-centred learning approach that manages to offer development through interest led activity to individuals in a mixed-ability group context. Using this approach CME manages to

support individuals on their learning journeys whilst maximising the benefits of groupwork and the development of transferable experience and skills. The organisation has set out the following vision, mission and values that express its intention to be influential in both the learning and the policy context.

Vision Statement:

To see increased individual growth and prosperity developed through learner-centred education activity

Mission Statement:

To promote opportunity through the process of music making and creative media activity

Core Values:

- To promote the highest quality of user-centred learning activity through creative participation
- To provide services and resources to the widest range of users, particularly those who are educationally, culturally, socially and economically disadvantaged
- To develop individual aspiration and growth
- To be dynamic, innovative, opportunistic and resilient

Key concepts that underline this approach are captured in Antonio Gramsci's observation:

Culture.....is the organization, the disciplining of one's inner self; it is the appropriation of one's own personality; it is the conquest of a superior consciousness whereby it becomes possible to understand one's own historical value, function in life, rights and duties. (Gramsci 1975)

and expressed through strategic educational practice principles identified by Laurence Stenhouse (1975) and applied by CME in a community context as follows:

1. To initiate and develop in [participants] a process of question-posing (the inquiry method);
2. To teach a research methodology where [participants] can look for information to answer questions they have raised and use the framework developed in the course....and apply it to new areas;
3. To help [participants] develop the ability to use a variety of first-hand sources as evidence from which to develop hypotheses and draw conclusions;
4. To conduct....discussions in which [participants] learn to listen to others as well as express their own views;
5. To legitimise the search; that is, to give sanction and support to open-ended discussions where definitive answers to many questions are not found;
6. To encourage [participants] to reflect on their own experiences;
7. To create a new role for the teacher, in which he becomes a resource rather than an authority. (Stenhouse1975)

CME addresses the expectations of participants by developing and offering participative activities and progression infrastructures that are relevant and useful to its primary user groups. CME adds value to this offer by forming discrete initiatives into joined up provision, supporting the development of participants through and between CME courses and activities and to other provision in a structured way that is based on their individual need and potential.

The impact of this activity is that hard to reach learners, often those most marginalised, are engaged, valued, encouraged and supported leading to unexpected achievements by individuals, often accredited, that enable them to progress to other and further learning and development opportunities. Critically this activity takes place in a conscious relationship with other provision, both formal and informal. Once participants become active in their own learning and development it is essential that the broadest range of opportunity for progression is available to them. This will include offers from other informal providers as well as pathways through to more formal further education opportunities.

The purpose and benefits of these intentions and activities are echoed in the observations of Matarasso (1997) that participation in the arts can

- Increase people's confidence and sense of self-worth
- Extend involvement in social activity
- Give people influence over how they are seen by others
- Stimulate interest and confidence in the arts
- Provide a forum to explore personal rights and responsibilities
- Contribute to the educational development of children
- Encourage adults to take up education and training opportunities
- Help build new skills and work experience
- Contribute to people's employability
- Help people take up or develop careers in the arts

CME's approach is collective and collegiate. In terms of its aesthetic and underlying educational objectives the activity is well summed up by John Cage (1968) when he wrote:

Art instead of an object made by one person is a process set in motion by a group of people. Art's socialised. It isn't someone saying something but a group of people doing things, giving everyone (including those involved) the opportunity to have experiences that they would otherwise not have had.

A CME project has recently been developed to support young people who are leaving or have left local authority care and are not in employment, education or training. CME will deliver a series of creative music and media workshops which will engage the young people in positive learning experiences, in order to raise their aspirations and confidence and motivate them to pursue further activity.

The purpose of the project is to enable the participants drawn from the most vulnerable care leavers to move from institutional life to independent and autonomous living in the community. It would appear that Social Services, who are CME's partners in this initiative, identify various issues for these young people including a high level of dependence on the care system, a tendency to under-achieve in mainstream education - in 2005 only 5% of looked after children in Norfolk achieved 5 A-C GCSE grades (12% in 2002), compared to the region's mainstream average of 52.6% (Continyou, 2005) - and a general reluctance to move beyond the small group of peers who have had similar life experiences so far.

The current group is made up of eight participants, four young men and four young women. Group members have known each other certainly back into their teens, in some cases earlier. The age profile, 20-24 years old, is higher than the expected range when the project was developed. In this instance, the first cohort to go through as part of a larger programme, the closeness of these individuals and their reluctance to share this experience with other, younger participants suggest a very strong bond that has survived a significant period after their official departure from care at the age of 18.

This group appears to be made up of couples and the boys came already in some sort of a band. The project began with the boys doing things; song-writing, sequencing, performing and messing about - engaging in creative activity but minimising the seriousness of that process - and the girls looking on; not engaging, acting as a faithful audience. The musical activity is focused on developing techniques and material in a rap format. The leader of the band, who also demands the most attention of the tutors, is Jim. He is the rapper, very quick, very astute, with loads of ideas and very rapid "brain to mouth" coordination, as one of the tutors describes it; an essential attribute for organising streams of consciousness and improvising original rap lyrics.

Jim expresses many familiar and complex tensions as a creative producer; he knows the "value of stuff", what is good and what is bad, but is ambivalent about his own work. He believes it is good and wants it to be better but will tend to "dis" it himself, before anyone else does: "dis" coming from "disrespect" - in this instance a comprehensive put down (self-delivered) and a way of diverting an expectation of more specific criticism, negative or positive, from a colleague or a tutor. Jim does also seek legitimisation and a degree of comfort in the opinion of people who know (tutors); but not for long. The apparent logic that if something is worth doing it is worth doing well also means greater effort and, consequently, greater risk; so, they stay in the comfort zone.....

Slowly, the girls were persuaded to start making a film. They began by capturing the boys' activity, a sort of rock video come documentary, initially to occupy them whilst the boys played. And then they started to make a film about themselves. Suddenly they realised their role as creators; after the fact through the band film, but then consciously and currently in making their own. The focus of their film is some kind of dance routine but as they become more involved in the making and creating processes the original purpose is becoming less clear. As they grow in confidence, experimenting with production techniques and approaches, making decisions about content, developing

critical capacity their consensus about the activity is dissipating; an inevitable stage in the collaborative creative process at this early point.

Halfway through the programme the girls are now more active and working on a separate project. The nature of their relationships with the boys is also inevitably changing. In some ways, because the girls are involved in something new, their adventure is less fettered with expectations and role models. This makes them freer than the boys who are becoming more aware of, and at times more resistant to, the need to work harder to polish their creative product and perfect their performance. As one of the tutors observed "the boys are still consumers, though they want to be good and think they are or can be good they aren't yet confident enough in their creativity to take the risk, to do whatever it is that will make them stand out. They are not yet clear about difference; their originality is still subordinate to the received models of successful pop stars". They are on the cusp and there is still four weeks to go....

Lawrence Stenhouse, the influential educational thinker, argued powerfully for the benefit of enquiry-based methodologies of teaching. The fundamental premise for such an approach is that students, of whatever kind in whatever situation, learn best when they inform and understand the learning process; when why and what they learn is relevant to them. A crucial part of that relevance is the significance of their lives and the knowledge and experience base they have already developed, their culture. Stenhouse (1975) observed that

As well as being a product of social action, culture is also a determinant of it. It determines who can talk to whom about what. We talk to one another by virtue of what is common in the cultures we have learned; we are unable to talk to one another when we lack common experience.

So, I hope that I have illustrated my view that cultural confusion is promoted by government and its agencies in order to meet short term and predetermined objectives that should not be attached to something as vital as culture. This misguided view, to be very generous, has led to the appropriation of creativity, apparently the symbol and indicator of a healthy culture, as fashionable and sexy; as a finite concept defined only by its economic success. Hopefully, I have been able to argue that seeing the world in this way is counter-intuitive to the way most human beings think and is not likely to bring about any improvement in the lives of many in society in the medium to long term; indeed such views undermine the development of innate capacities to understand and value what we do, who we are and how we relate to others in practical philosophical and creative terms unless we establish opportunities for such legitimate and "common experiences" to take place.

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