

### AGM Lecture RSA 2013

Frankly I never questioned it at the beginning of my career but there came a creeping realization that there was an alternative view -

A justification requirement -

A measurement requirement -

A value judgment

Needed for the Arts

Which created an overall sense of a value driven - and potentially therefore a valueless, activity.

#### How it all seemed to begin:

- I will start with Arts for Arts Sake
- Artistic creation exists because it exists
- Any influence it has for good (and yes it has great influence for good) is a by-product and not the reason for its creation
- The selfless and selfish artist driven by a creative desire
- The creative act cannot come from a need to make the world a better place but from a need to create.
- A better world is created because it has art in it
- Also name of Tessa Jowell document - How we loved it – how it validated everything we wanted to say

But this it began to be clear was not enough.

The selfish artist, the scrounger artist, the sponge soaking up public money needed to be justified, to prove our value to society - and this chimed with our belief as artists that we were not appreciated and needed to get justification to prove our value.

As artists we knew our creative process could and did make the world a better place and we could prove it because of the effect art had.

The act of theatre is what happens in the space between the performer and the audience. The emotional response, the change in perspective, the pleasure, the pain - good art changes things, it changes you.

#### So it became:

Art for Art's Sake + Measurable Impact = Value

#### Why did this need to happen?

Partly increasing pressure on public spending – regardless of makeup of government.

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Partly because of the Lottery – huge amounts of public money diverted to arts buildings.

Partly because of the nature of the world we now live in, if you can't measure it can't be claimed as true.

Because truth is stronger than belief.

We wanted to demonstrate how the act of creating something – the creative process itself - was a benefit, a learning process, a self-defining process that could be shared and celebrated and through that make the world a better place.

So we set about looking for things that we knew art did which could be shared = not because that process would create more great art, in fact the quality of the art was not the point, it was the process of creation and what that did, that was the point.

We developed creative practice and skills and looked for links that could both improve society and also be measured.

Now we were cooking!

### So came our articulation of the Social Impact of Art

We promoted the impact that our process as artists had on society. We developed strategies and activities that focused on wellbeing, creativity as a method of learning, arts in prisons, arts in hospitals, care homes, schools, libraries, and homeless centres.

We carved money out of budgets for education departments, and some of us even got brave enough to lobby governments on educational policy.

It helped us to raise money – in fact I would say it was the biggest key we had to unlock considerable amounts of money for the arts – and it still is.

Define and measure improved social value through creative programmes and then, oh yes surely and inevitably, we will be asked, and we will be very willing, to increase it.

Hard, very hard indeed to measure social impact – did a sculpture course heal mental health illness, did listening to music improve your longevity, did dance help a child to learn, did you stop taking drugs because you found self-expression through painting?

No pure base line. No one going to take their child and deny it any creative learning process or experience and see if it had any detrimental effect.

But it works, people see it working, they believe it works because actually they want it to work

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And folks are finding ways to measure the practically immeasurable – the RSA has several projects doing just this - right now.

So then, just as things were getting complicated and hard to actually measure, came Economic and Environmental impact:

Ah now you are talking – something we really can measure at last!

And why not it's real, it's true and its existence creates the evidence and therefore the belief that there is a connection between a healthy functioning society and a creative and stimulating environment.

Artists and public needed and wanted (indeed still want and need) better, more public, more open, more accessible buildings.

Capital investment requires evidence of need, of value, of community support and engagement, of enhanced value of investment.

And why not – why should public money be spent on the notion of a belief that in the end its good for society and to make the world a better place to live in ...it must be proved and if it can be measured – measure it.

The National Lottery has been the single biggest value in = additional value out, programme ever created in the UK and thanks to John Major focused on Arts and Education.

In towns, cities all over the country the massive impact of environmental and economic improvement is tangible and measurable and the arts have been right at the centre of driving this social change programme.

Look at Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, the South Bank,

So it became:

Art 4 Arts Sake + Social Impact + Economic and Environmental Impact = Value.

But it still isn't enough.

The ghost of the sponger is still at the door.

We suffer the 'see saw' of attention - the political rhetoric that perfumes the air leading up to an election. I don't believe there ever would be a manifesto that didn't have an arts policy.

But an Arts policy in a silo is not an articulation of value.

There is absolutely no joined up thinking on a policy for the Arts as an industry or as a function fundamental to the cultural identity and a prosperous future for the

UK.

Further...

We are in the middle of yet another half-baked and half delivered programme of change in education.

Chairman of Headmasters and Mistresses Conference and Head of Magdalene College School Tim Hands said two weeks ago we are facing the implementation of:

"A curriculum that is prescriptive not liberal, functionalist not humanist" Which exemplifies "The intrusion of the state and the disappearance of love".

The drop in desire to study many Arts subjects (14% in schools) has been caused directly as a result of the perception by parents and the current government that these are not subjects that will be of value to you in your future life. To quote Liz Truss "We are rebalancing the curriculum towards high value subjects".

In addition we are in the middle of the most radical change in local government funding this country has seen since the Second World War.

The current inequalities in LA funding for the Arts will increase. In some areas funding will be radically reduced or possibly eliminated.

The settlement for centralized arts and heritage funding in the recent spending review could have been worse - but not much worse.

Social Services – face massive change and reductions.

We, the people, are going to be running many functions previously delivered by government...

Libraries, community centres, community arts projects, reading programmes, citizens' advice, transition projects for prisoners, community programmes for drug users - are all under resourced and over stretched.

The context in which we approach an analysis of the value the arts provide is the lens through which we must now find ways to develop a new rhetoric.

I am Chairing the Warwick Commission on the Future of Cultural Value. AHRC is investing in a massive research and evaluation project. Many others in the UK are working to find ways to express the intangible, sometimes immeasurable, massive role that the Arts play in the cultural identity of this country.

The papers from the RSA series of seminars, held jointly with Arts Council England, will be published in November, and explore new ways for the arts to create, understand and articulate its value.

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- Martin Smith asks for a new industrial strategy for the arts.
- Alex Jones asks for cities to be more intelligent about the way they understand the impact of cultural spending on regeneration
- Mandy Barnett and Daniel Fujiwara argue that the cultural sector needs to agree a single framework within which to talk about value.
- And Sue Horner, in calling for a 'grand partnership' between education and culture.

Perhaps in all this miasma of activity we need to get back into the helicopter and look down on it all.

The key for me was the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games. I think Danny Boyle has set in train something truly catalytic.

That event proved that the arts define the culture of our nation and that event celebrated the culture of our nation through art.

My view therefore is that actually the equation looks like this:

$$\frac{\text{A4A sake + Cultural Identity}}{\text{Social, Economic \& Environmental Impact}} = \text{Value}$$

So what do we actually mean by cultural identity?

We commonly use the term "culture" in a very broad anthropological sense to describe the customs and beliefs of a society. Culture can include language, religion, cuisine, social habits, values and other characteristics of our shared national identity.

In the pluralist and multicultural climate of England today, culture in this anthropological sense is always evolving and adapting to new influences.

But "culture" can also be used in a more limited way to refer to the arts in particular.

The Warwick Commission is interested in the interaction between these two definitions.

- To what extent is Britain's culture defined by its arts culture?
- In what ways have artists contributed to a vibrant, adaptable and comprehensive culture in this country?
- In what ways have artists failed to have their contribution recognized? The synergies comprehended the loss of "us" anticipated as a risk to society?
- In what way can we nail once and for all that Art is not the extra, the luxury, the irrelevant when it comes to the really important things in life?

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The idea of a cultural ecosystem is emerging to enable us to determine the vital connections between policy, artistic practices, education and investment that are required for a high-achieving and healthy cultural economy.

We need to examine how we have failed as artists to join the dots, to contribute.

- How isolationist are we?
- How much are we still seen as aloof?
- Not for 'the people'?
- Not for people who are not people like us?

I believe that culture is part of a vital value system. You can see very quickly how art and its associated activities – creative thought and freedom of expression – are the first things that crumble as a society breaks down.

As value judgments and other peoples values clash with your own they increasingly become dangerous activities, they have to be repressed and in many cases the art itself must be destroyed, artists imprisoned, books burned, antiquities smashed, images destroyed.

The reverse of this must also therefore be the case – that art, creative thought and freedom of expression are a vital ingredient, the glue that holds our culture together and defines it for what it is.

It's existence and its integration into everything we do is fundamental to a healthy society, a proud society, national value, a national sense of cultural identity.

As artists, if we are to be valued, we need to shed considerably more daylight on the role we play. And I would suggest that we are as much to blame as anyone for the fact that we are not "seen".

We are not on the boards of business, retail, or banks, we are not governors of schools, sitting on planning committees, local enterprise partnerships, regional plans, "we" don't stand as councillors, "we" don't stand as MP's, "we" don't become the secretary of State for the Arts, "we" don't become Prime Minister.

"We" are not formally engaged in consultations over planning policy, educational policy, health, transport, law and order.

The case for wider community and social engagement is made very eloquently in a Theatre's Trust report this week "Thriving Theatres".

In this room a month back Ken Robinson quoted a recent IBM Report. The top two aptitudes needed for a business to succeed and for a person to succeed in business: 2) Adaptability 1) Creativity.

What are the aptitudes and capabilities that employers want from school leavers and university graduates? The evidence is there from what the CBI says- our educational process is not matching the demand.

The evidence is there – we all just need to take up the challenge. The Creative Industries are simply not seen as being a vital part of an all-important, symbiotic, Ecosystem

This is not about policy change this is about behavioural change – BY ARTISTS working with national and local authorities, with business and educationalists to recognise and increase how cultural contribution can enrich society and enhance our cultural identity.

It is absolutely not the role of politicians to lead this thinking – although across all parties the facts is it would get their universal support – It is us that must change the agenda and policy will follow.

“The chief problem is how to place Art within the other modes of social activity, how to incorporate it into the texture of a particular pattern of life.”  
(Clifford Geertz “Art as a Cultural System”)

And that is what the RSA is all about:

So let's unpack two new ideas:

#### A GCSE in Arts

Over the next few months, led by chair of our family of academies Sue Horner, the RSA will be working with education and cultural partners to test the feasibility of a new GCSE, or possibly a double GCSE in the arts, develop young people's cultural knowledge and practice/performance across at least two art forms.

It takes Michael Gove's passion for 'cultural literacy' as necessary but not sufficient to develop young people's cultural identities and capacities to the full.

We need to look at this as scientists did with the creation of the science double GCSE– and hopefully have the same affect. The RSA has a proud history in Educational advances.

And...

#### Place Centred Commissioning

In promoting the arts as part of “the good society” the RSA has the strength of its wide research and innovation remit. Whilst we have been working with Artistic leaders to develop a new case for arts investment, the RSA's work with local government has opened up a new way of thinking.

As I have already said looking at overall cuts in central government, council funding, of up to a third, alongside rising needs and a patchy economic recovery, it is clear that unless we as members of our local community think and act very differently, we face managing a major decline in both service standards and the

quality of the public domain.

The forms of local leadership now needed involve a number of elements:

- The development and articulation of an ambitious, distinctive and achievable vision.
- The bringing together of the key local actors from the public, private, civic and third sector and the inculcation of a deep and authentic commitment to collaboration (which, to mean anything, must involve a willingness to make short term sacrifices in individual organisations in pursuit of shared goals).
- A rich engagement with the broader public, including identifying and winning buy in for actions local citizens can contribute to, themselves.

'Vision', 'collaboration' and 'public engagement' are all the kind of warm words that tend to get attached to various local coordinating bodies, like, for example, the Local Strategic Partnerships set up by the last Labour Government or the Local Enterprise Partnerships of this government.

The harsh reality is that these bodies tend to be little more than committees which organisations and individuals either treat with disdain or through which they steadfastly pursue their own bureaucratic self-interest. Artists are rarely invited to join the party.

How can rhetorical commitments to new forms of leadership, innovative practice and generous collaboration turn into something real? This is where arts organisations and artists can come in.

Their ethos, their method, their creativity can act as the catalyst for new ways of being and thinking. This is something we saw happen when we helped bring arts practice and method to the local coordination body in Peterborough as part of our Citizen Power project – final report launched this week.

The question thus changes: instead of 'how can we persuade the government and the public to protect the arts in tough times?' it becomes 'how can arts and heritage organisations be prime movers in enabling places not only to survive but to prosper in these difficult times?'

For arts organisations and artists to make this offer and make it credibly they will need to examine their own ways of working. They will in essence need to see themselves as commissioned by the places, in which they are based, a concept which, if taken seriously, is complex and challenging.

To act as place catalysts will involve developing a nuanced and grounded understanding of their locality, its people, its needs, its culture, and its challenges. It will mean fending off those – and this will include some of its traditional allies – who see such an idea as instrumental or parochial (as used to be the case with



theatre in education). And it will involve the organisations showing how successful engagement in place leadership depends on being able also to create art and culture of intrinsic merit.

It will mean bridging the gap between the amateur and the professional, the teacher and the learner, the have and have not, the castle, the keeper and the key to the gate...

Many arts organisations and artists would rightly claim to already be catalysts for local change just as many arts organisations claim to subsume their interest to the broader good of their locality. But not many and such claims are hollow unless they are manifested in a genuine commitment to self-examination, financial prioritisation and heart-felt rhetorical reorientation.

So how do we make it happen – well we have done it before:

Art practice has changed - it can change again. We know that such a change of orientation and ambition can be achieved.

Over the last thirty years our larger cultural organisations have moved from basic audience development (bums on seats) – to far more sophisticated forms of audience engagement and participation – especially through their education programmes. Many smaller organisations led the way built, as many of them were, on principles around socially engaged practice.

If the ghost of first NT director Laurence Olivier visited the National Theatre today, his biggest surprise might not be the levels of technology involved in current productions, or even the incredible NT Live.

It would probably be the shock of an education department that employs twenty people and many more freelancers, is nationally broad and locally deep, with its own programme to nurture young talent. A commitment of this scale would thirty years ago have been unthinkable, unrealistic, and frankly undesired.

It's now time for a shift that is just as fundamental to the arts and its relationship to the wider society –

Like all shifts, the future is already out there - 'place-based commissioning' resonates with Joan Littlewood's Theatre workshop process in the Theatre Royal Stratford East, over fifty years ago, and her vision for People's Palaces all over the country. It was the principle of the founding of West Yorkshire Playhouse, of the National Theatre of Scotland, the National Theatre of Wales.

Current practice to learn from includes the RSA work in Peterborough, as well as Haring Woods and Forest Fringe. The larger institutions, arts policy and arts funding will need to boldly go where some people already are.

So to return to the beginning and the equation and remember a time before it became necessary to draw this on a board. When art was taken for granted as

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part of our culture in common. When art was inseparable from craft and making things, and our everyday use of story, song, dance. Perhaps it is our fault as artists that we have appeared to grow apart from our culture in common.

Art for its own sake sought to place art beyond value, beyond the messiness of the market and everyday life. But in our age of course no activity is beyond the reach of value and we must ask again, what is the real and irreducible value of the arts in our lives, our culture and make sure we play our part in the well-being of society as a whole.