

British Council
Talking Without Borders Lecture
4 November 2009

Introduction

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Ladies and gentlemen, good morning and a warm welcome to this lecture and panel debate. It is part of our Talking Without Borders series, which we have arranged as part of our 75th anniversary celebrations. Today's discussion is entitled 'Patriotism, Autonomy and Subversion: The Role of the Arts in Democratic Change'.

During the year we have had the privilege of hearing from a wide range of speakers, starting with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who opened our lecture series in February. On our panel today we have as distinguished a group of speakers as we have had throughout the year, and I am grateful to all of you for taking the time to come along and take part in this.

We hope it is going to be a discussion which you take part in, rather than one where you simply listen and ask the odd question. I am particularly pleased to welcome Dr Benjamin Barber, best-selling writer, internationally renowned political theorist who will be talking about the role of the arts in democratic change. Then you will hear from our panel, led by Razia Iqbal, the BBC's art correspondent, followed by time for questions and for debate.

As an organisation we have had 75 years of global experience of building relationships between the UK and the rest of the world. Founded in 1934, at a time when some countries were manifesting their approach to international relations through rearmament, cultural exclusivity, economic nationalism and political nationalism, our standing point in 1934, which has continued to the present, is that cultural relations is about open honest exchange between people of all backgrounds. It is about exploring difference of course, but exploring difference in a way that we seek to understand and to trust each other, rather than to find ways in which we differ.

Of course that task is made much more complex in the present world; when we were founded 75 years ago it was a deliberately elitist organisation, communication between countries was largely based around communication through elites. That is no longer the case, the democratisation of the internet and new media has reshaped the way we think about each other, about language, and about the traditional categories in which we classify people, ideas and relationships. As an organisation we exist to seek to find common ground, shared understanding and genuine exchange.

Of all the ways in which we do this for me the most important is the arts. The arts has three critical contributions to make to that agenda of finding common ground. First of all it is a language of exchange, a medium through which people can have conversations. Language is not only physical languages, be it English or any other, but other forms which enable us to talk to each other and understand each other.

Secondly, if we are going to have an open and honest dialogue between ourselves and other people then we have to be clear about where we are coming from, and we have to be clear to others about the principles on which we are starting that discussion. It seems to me that the arts is above all else an expression of the society from which it springs – even if at times it might be seen as an anti expression. It is one of the best ways in which we can think, talk and express ourselves about what we understand of the world, the country, and the society in which we live.

Thirdly it above all else shapes and forms a subject for discussion. It is not unique in having those three characteristics, but I believe it is uniquely powerful as a means of generating discussion which gives us the opportunity to understand, exchange and find trust. I am delighted that we have such a powerful panel here to engage in that conversation. As part of our democratic processes I have to appear in front of the Foreign Affairs Committee shortly to get them to understand the role of cultural relations for the UK.

Therefore it is with great pleasure that I welcome the internationally renowned political theorist, Whitman professor emeritus at Rutgers University, distinguished senior fellow at Demos, President and Director of the international NGO CivWorld at Demos, and its international Interdependence Day event. His 17 books have made an impact all over the world, and include the best-selling *Jihad vs. McWorld*, but also recently and relevant to this discussion, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilise Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*. Dr Benjamin Barber.

Patriotism, Autonomy and Subversion: **The Role of the Arts in Democratic Change**

Dr Benjamin Barber

Walt Whitman Professor Emeritus, Rutgers University

I. Opening Remarks

Good morning, thank you for the kind introduction. It is a real pleasure, having been here in February when Bishop Tutu opened the 75th anniversary of the British Council lecture series with an extraordinary set of remarks concerning democracy, for me to be here. We are completing this series with a similar focus on issues of democracy, but from the perspective of the arts. This is a discussion of arts and democracy or arts and politics.

Last night going to the BBC for an interview my cab driver asked what I would be talking about. I said ‘politics and the arts’; he thought for a minute about it, and said ‘I get what they have in common, they are both useless’. I thought ‘well actually there is a man who understands something about modern art and modern politics’.

Today we are going to focus on issues of the arts and culture and their relationship to power. To politics, the state and to a particular kind of power, which is democratic power, which I will suggest will complicate the usual formulas we have when we think about art and politics. In fact usually when we think about art we think about something that is a certain way oppositional to and subversive of power, established order and conventional paradigms. Something that can make us both exhilarated and uncomfortable, but something that is not a perfect mirror of the society in

which it finds itself. Whether art has a conservative or a radical tone it does not simply mirror the society, and certainly does not mirror the conventional and established order of a democratic state.

If we understand art and the arts as a way of seeing and hearing through the imagination that allows us to see and hear anew, then we know that whatever its relationship to a state it is going to be one that is not entirely comfortable, either for the arts or the state. I think we think of that as a good thing.

II. Art in an Authoritarian State

The usual paradox posed in terms of the relationship between politics and the arts and states and the arts starts from the notion that the state has an interest in the arts because it can be of use to the state. Some people think in the first approach to something like the British Council, to cultural diplomacy, that the state is using art as an instrument of foreign policy, of international relationships. Often that make arties and those who work in 'the cultural industry' – a term I will talk about later – think that perhaps the state is treating artists as propagandists, as people who somehow are doing the work of the state.

Indeed when in an authoritarian state the arts work on behalf of the state we all feel uncomfortable. Then we are talking about propaganda, about agit art. It can be good art; Leni Riefenstahl was a wonderful filmmaker, but *Triumph Of The Will* – her great film about Hitler – is not exactly a work that would want to classify exclusively as a filmic work of art, because it was also a powerful and effective work of Nazi propaganda.

Shostakovich played a role as a composer in Stalinist times that was somewhat ambivalent, but from time to time it appeared that he was in effect celebrating Stalinism. There are also uses of artists who are no longer alive by regimes. The Nazis in particular used Wagner; Leni Riefenstahl used themes from Wagner's operas in *Triumph Of The Will*. There are also more vulgar uses of the arts; the Horst Wessel song can be thought of as a more vulgar use of the arts to make a point about the Nazis.

On the whole, under the circumstances of a tyrannical, authoritarian and dictatorial state the posture of the arts is unproblematic. Other than those who are allowed, or allow themselves, to be used for propaganda purposes, almost all artists and cultural workers either adopt a posture of neutrality with respect to the state – romantic inwardness, isolation in their imagination, or even more often they take an appropriately oppositional role. It is a subversive role to the extent that the arts are associated with freedom and diversity and plurality, their opposition to an authoritarian state is natural. No one is surprised that in Czechoslovakia, under the Soviet Union and the Nazis, artists find themselves in a usefully oppositional place. Not as politicians or as citizens, but because of the nature of their art.

Here we think about those artists who in one way or another undermined, subverted, questioned and criticised a variety of establishmentarian regimes. Molière took on clericalism in his own time and his plays, though funny and comedic, had a powerful role in undermining the clerical hierarchy of its time. We know that Brecht took on capitalism, Ibsen took on Victorianism, and that Shaw took on what he understood as the bourgeois hypocritical imperialism of his own culture. They were artists who quite naturally fell into opposition, in plays that in Brecht and Shaw's cases were overtly political, but in other cases – such as Ibsen – were not overtly political but nonetheless represented a powerful implicit critique of the societies in which they found themselves.

Jean-Paul Sartre went so far as to say that ‘during the Nazi occupation we never felt better’; he said ‘I never felt so free, than during the Nazi occupation’, the implication being that the very presence of tyranny engendered his own sense of liberty and opposition and his capacity to be an autonomous speaker. There are ways in which some people, in this country Tom Stoppard, Havel in Czech Republic today, have argued that in fact it is easier for artists to live under tyranny, and hang on to the freedom, autonomy, and the natural inclination to opposition and even subversion. President Chávez of Venezuela recently closed the public art museums, not very happy even with artists who had celebrated his revolution. There was a sigh of relief from a number of artists who had felt during this revolution they had to support him, but once he closed the public galleries and became a figure of censorship they were able to slip back into a more comfortable oppositional role.

James Agee once wrote that ‘a good artist is a deadly enemy of society’; even Nietzsche said ‘we have art in order not to perish of truth’, suggesting there may even be an opposition between the artist’s task and the philosopher’s task of finding truth.

III. Art in a Democratic State

All of that works really well in authoritarian or dictatorial societies, but what happens in a democratic society? What happens to the naturally subversive oppositional contrarian role that artists feel so well manifests their independence, autonomy, their sense of freedom, their belief in diversity and their attachment to imagination? That becomes the great challenge; what is the role of the artist in a democratic society? Keep in mind the democratic state is one that has legitimated power; the point about the artist’s opposition, as indeed anyone’s opposition to authoritarianism, is that you are opposing an illegitimate form of power and an illegitimate state. Democracy, through the social contracts, through popular sovereignty, legitimises power, which is to say roots it in liberty – the rights of the people and indeed in the power of the people in a transparent system when it works the way it is supposed to.

In tyranny subversive art can champion freedom, liberalism, tolerance, participation, equality and justice. However, when the democratic state claims to operate, and does indeed do so, in the name of freedom, liberalism, tolerance, equality and justice then if the artist is oppositional they find themselves in a position where they seem to have to take on and oppose the very terms which define the context for artistic imagination and artistic creation.

This results in the ambivalent role of so many democratic artists. Walt Whitman, the great poet of American democracy, deeply wedded to American democracy, but at the same time ambivalent to its practices, suggests the dilemmas the democratic poet has when living in an apparently – to a degree at least – democratic society. In his poem *By Blue Ontario’s Shore* from *Leaves Of Grass*.

O I see flashing that this America is only you and me,
 Its power, weapons, testimony, are you and me,
 Its crimes, lies, thefts, defections, are you and me,
 Its Congress is you and me
 The war (that war so bloody and grim) was you and me,
 Natural and artificial are you and me,
 Freedom, language, poems, employments, are you and me,
 Past, present, future, are you and me.
 I dare not shirk any part of myself, nor any part of America good or bad.

There is the ambivalent patriotic poet embracing his country, even as he points to all of its failures, but identifies with the failures as well as the successes. That kind of ambivalence is the problem of the democratic artist. Again, the easy position is for the artist to go after and reflect and look at the insufficiencies and inadequacies of democracy.

In a democratic state like America with a long history of racism, with slavery in its past for the first 80 years of its republican history, somebody such as Richard Wright in *Native Son* can exercise his artistic freedom by pointing to the deep hypocrisy of the system. Nowadays Tony Kushner in *Angels in America* looks at the ambivalence about the gay world and homosexuality in terms that are powerful and critical, and yet in a way also loving of America. I think the ambivalence is characteristic of democratic art, but again easier when democracy is not working as well as it is supposed to. There you can embrace democratic values and still expose, talk about, write about and paint in ways that point to those problems.

Can the role of art be oppositional/subversive in a genuine democracy? What would that mean to resist a truly democratic society? Racist art, fascist art, even high art as an aristocratic hierarchical response to democratic art. Some of the discussions about high culture, and democratic or pop culture take that form: aristocratic high culture as an implicit critique of democratic pop culture. Again, this puts the artist in a very uncomfortable position. The American cultural diplomacy programme should really export *Rapture*, the series about Christians being taken to heaven on the day of judgment, as all others – Jews, Hindus, and non-believers – are sent below. Perhaps they should export Charles Murray's work grounding the idea of racial inequality in IQ. That would be another way to be oppositional, but clearly democracy is not going to do that.

The dilemma arises when fundamental democratic values prevail, then artists do not seem to be allowed a lot of latitude. They are not in a position where they can do the comfortable oppositional/subversive/altered state way where they help us re-envision the world in a way that, intentionally or not, discomferts political leaders and the establishment.

When the establishment itself is disestablished, when it is interested in constant change then artists either simply embrace it, or find themselves in a position where they have to oppose it. Having said all of this, this discussion, which has been the discussion of the democratic arts all the way back to Walt Whitman and before, since we have had democracy, is growingly and increasingly irrelevant to today's issue of the arts and democracy because of certain fundamental changes that have occurred in democracy.

These have changed the character of the debate. Putting on hold the picture I have drawn of the arts being uncomfortable with being oppositional to the state – but particularly uncomfortable when the state is democratic as the state then represents their own values – think about what has happened to democracy in the last 30 years, thanks to your great Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, our great President Ronald Reagan and others, who have managed to persuade us, and the world, of a new paradigm in which we live today. This suggests that the essence of democracy is not in the state, but in the marketplace. That democracy is defined, not by an active involved democratic state, but by the absence of democratic political intervention and the favouring of 'free' 'competitive' 'independent' markets –where real freedom and diversity are naturally protected against the monopolistic tendencies of the nanny state, which is always trying – with good will – to interfere and tell us how to live, think and imagine what sort of art to do.

This neo-liberal argument is so powerful that most of us do not even feel it. I was first in Britain in the 1950s, and that was a time when the Labour Party actually had some interest in labour, justice and equality. As we know since this time there is no Left party left, whether it is the Labour Party,

or the Social Democratic parties of Europe, the Socialist Party of France and certainly the Democratic Party of the United States. Over the last 40 years they have bought into the notion that the less of the state there is the better off we are, the freer we are.

A president I worked with, Bill Clinton, loved to talk not about democracy, but about the democratic market state, the liberal market state, as if markets actually defined what was essential about democracy. Meaning that private not public defined what was liberal about democracy.

In the face of this still dominant paradigm, Gordon Brown's problem is that he was here in the 1950s and 1960s too, and still has some vestiges of belief of the Labour Party having something to do with labour, and the British electorate have made it clear they do not share that belief. On the other hand President Obama has made it clear that he does not think democracy has much to do with public option and public intervention, but rather with the restoration of markets. His financial and health policies have moved him more and more towards that agreeable centre where the dominion of private markets over our lives and the claim that free markets define us is the common paradigm.

With this comes the notion that it is the consumer not the citizen who defines the primary participant in our life of liberty; if you want to be a free person be a consumer, even when it comes to politics. Politicians become a commodity to be bought and sold, marketed and consumed like any other commodity. The role of money, once thought to be corrupting to politics, becomes indispensable to politics as politicians see themselves as commodities requiring marketing and the need to be bought and sold.

The results this morning in Virginia and New Jersey were that Democrats were defeated and Republicans re-elected, as America comes to its senses and realises that a flirtation with Obama cannot be a flirtation with genuine democratic status views, but that we have to return to the market views which are far more popular on both sides of the political spectrum. In effect what we have seen is a passing of the idea of democratic sovereignty and popular government from the public realm and the state to the private realm and the market.

This is why consumers can play the role of citizens, because private people expressing private preferences are in effect in a position to make all of the public decisions. This fundamentally changes the character of the interaction of the arts and democracy. It is no longer about what it has been about for a couple of hundred years – the interaction with the state, be it un-free or democratic, but about their interaction with the market, commerce, consumerism, and money. Of course, artists as ever sensitive, thoughtful and reactive people were the first to understand this.

IV. New Relationship for the Arts and the Private Sector

The private sector is now the surrogate for the relationship between the arts and democracy, since we have bought into the claim that neo-liberal markets are the democratic institutions of our time. As I am sure you have understood it is not my view that democratic markets can replace the democratic state or the democratic government. However, this has become the dominant paradigm of our society, particularly in the UK and America, but increasingly now with Merkel and Sarkozy and others in the continent, and in Asia. The Nehru model of a strong state in India has been displaced by an increasingly market society. Even China, the most authoritarian political country in the world, has let go of the economy and created a form of very productive and efficient wild capitalism. While it has done little for liberty, justice or equality, it has done a great deal for productivity.

This has been a universal paradigm. Looking at Russia today, there is not much in terms of democracy or citizenship but consumerism and capitalism is healthy – in their most unhealthy forms. This universal paradigm is the paradigm within which artists today are working, and I think most artists would argue that they think much more about their relationship to money, to markets and consumerism than they do about their relationship to the state or government. To turn that around from my point of view I worry much more about forms of invisible censorship, control and dominion from apparently free private markets than I do about forms of control and dominion top down from the state, which is not much of an issue for us today. I think the new problem of democracy and the arts is about the relationship between democracy and commerce.

V. Outcome

Under these new circumstances of a world in which we mistake consumers for citizens and free citizens for democracy, much of modern art, almost all of pop art as represented at the Tate Modern exhibition *Pop Life: Art in a Material World*, what you find at Saatchi's exhibitions from *Sensations* down to the present, what is there in Haring Warhol, Koons, Damien Hirst, much of Hollywood, the movies produced, the West End, Broadway, in many of the celebrity festivals. Counting them up on Google came up with eight or nine million entries for festivals. Most festivals focus on a celebrity personality or artist, almost everything happening in the arts today has turned artists, with or without their complicity and knowledge, into craven servants of ubiquitous consumer society which they affect to send up, but which in fact consumes them whole.

We can argue about the particular place of individual artists in that broad generalisations, some seem more guilty some less, but I would argue that the generalisation, despite the exceptions, holds. This pop art, which I think can be just called art, has not only sold out art's inclination to autonomy, its responsibility to subversion, its duty to opposition, and turned itself into a self-conscious instrument of commercial agit prop, consumerist propaganda, celebrity and cash. Also, more insidiously, as it helps itself to the proceeds of capitalism, it has used a self-consciousness of what it is doing to try to distance itself from what it in fact has embraced.

The modern artist does not get bought up without their knowledge, they sell out willingly and make that their artistic statement. Keith Haring's *New York Pop Shop* you can see replicated in the exhibition. His work is not simply sold in the museum shop, but on the exhibition floor in a store built into the room showing his works. In effect he is saying 'Let's be honest about it, that's my commentary...and that will be £10 for my latest t-shirt please'.

Tracey Emin said 'if we were listed it would be under "sell-out" in the shopping listing'. We are meant to think she is so brave in saying that, that she is doing a commentary on consumerism, rather than simply becoming part of it. Or Anthea Fraser, if you are looking for a little soft porn go into the room you are not supposed to go into with your children where Fraser is in bed screwing an art collector who has paid \$20,000 for the right to both have her in bed and then buy the video in which she and he appear together, and that is the new work of art. She says 'well art is in bed with collectors, so why not make the metaphor real, because my art statement is to be upfront and honest about it'. For \$20,000 you can buy not just the artwork, but the artist, her body, her sex, and that itself is meant to be an artistic statement. It may look just like porn to you, but it is not. Think of it this way, probably for \$1,000 you can buy a prostitute, this cost \$20,000 which suggests to me that Fraser's body is worth about \$1,000, but her statements about what she is doing is worth \$19,000, which is the difference that people are willing to pay for.

I say this not as a prude; this work is not offensive though it intends to be. A lot of the people who do it use phrases such as 'this work intentionally offends good taste, the conservative morals of our

time'. Of course the only reason it is offensive is because it offends absolutely nothing, it is completely a part of a pornographic society where women are exploited, used like sluts everywhere and pictured that way by Hollywood. Who is offended by that side of it? The pretence is that somehow we still live in a world of Puritans, where 'I will show you, I will not just portray a naked body...' or portray as Jeff Koons does himself engaged in an artistic act with a porn star who he plans to marry, but rather this has to be seen as a brave act, an act that is offensive to the puritan morals of our time.

Had this been done in the 17th century I would agree it was offensive to American and British Puritans. In 1633 a Puritan writer named Prynne produced a book called *Histriomastix*, which was an attempt to show the ways in which theatre and dance undermined the morals of a Puritan society. Among other things Prynne wrote

'Popular stage plays are the very pomps of the devil, which we renounce in baptism. They are sinful, heathenish, lewd, ungodly spectacles and most pernicious to corruptions. They should be condemned in all ages as intolerable mischiefs to churches, to republics, to the manners, minds and souls of men. Spectators meanwhile – that is you who go to the theatre I presume – are adulterers, adulteresses, whoremasters, whores, bawds, panderers, ruffians, roars, drunkards, prodigals, cheaters, idle, infame, base, profane and godless persons who hate all grace all goodness and make a mock of piety'.

Now I will agree that Anthea Fraser is a terrific answer to Prynne, but he has been dead for 300 or more years, and the society we live in sounds very much like the description of all sin which Prynne gives us. She is now mirroring that society not challenging it, but in the name of this kind of bravery, which allows her to suggest she is doing something that is genuinely artistic and oppositional. It is to parade shamelessness when we live in shameless times, and shamelessness is one more form of what one artist called 'teasing the *bourgeoisie*' which is what artists so often do. From my point of view artists are simply buying into and playing their appropriate role as salesmen and saleswomen for commercial society and little more than that.

What is clear is that as they buy into these claims of modern capitalism the arts simply subordinate themselves. These claims are very straightforward, and under-gird both modern market society and modern art. First, that markets are free and competitive and will always support a diversity of voices and approaches. That is a total myth. The myth is that when we democratise art by compelling artists to speak to broad audiences we do a genuinely democratic thing; we justify that by demonstrating the capacity of artworks to sell. Tickets sold measure the worth of an exhibition. Art products sold and their price represents their value in the society, and that is as it should be. That art itself is a produce, is a commodity, that we live in a culture industry that manufactures and produces art the way we produce other goods and services. That is a line which is widely-used in the art world by critics, artists and those who use the artists in the cultural diplomacy world. The most important myth is that popular demand is an independent and autonomous *vox populi* –voice of the people. That art, like capitalism, merely is giving people what they want.

If you complain as I have in *Jihad vs. McWorld* about McDonalds and Coke and Starbucks, those who manufacture them say 'you are just an elitist, you are an aristocrat. We give people what they want. They want fast food, that is not our fault, it is our job as capitalists to give people what they want. We are doing them a favour, if you don't like popular taste that is your problem. We are the true democrats, we give people what they want'.

That is exactly what the artists are saying, 'don't blame us'. Damien Hirst says it explicitly, 'don't blame us, this is what people want, it is what they buy, don't blame us if they pay millions of dollars for what you may think is crap – it is not, because they pay millions of dollars for it. It is their fault if there is a fault to be had, in any case all we are doing is assuaging popular taste'. That too is part of this new understanding of the demand economy as an autonomous expression of independent desires, wants and needs for quality and for art. As in the marketplace the consumer becomes the principal determiner of what is taste, art and value. The artist, always a bit ambivalent buys into it by making that the fundamental principal of what they do. Of course that is what Haring, Andy Warhol, Damien Hirst and other pop/modern artists do on the way to suggesting that this is probably good for democracy and good for the arts.

VI. Current Situation

The problem with this is that all of these principles of the free market are wrong. They do not actually describe how markets work and what they are. The truth about modern capitalism in its modern form is that markets are neither free nor competitive, nor productive of diversity and pluralism. They are coercive – if from below rather than above – monopolistic, they produce a uniform, homogenous and global commercial culture which looks more or less the same anywhere.

Anyone who has travelled knows that in a way that was not true just 50 years ago the world looks the same. This is not because citizens everywhere have agreed to pursue the same principles of justice and equality, but because the same products, chains, monopolies and global media empires determine content, output and commodity everywhere in the modern world. What you see in Tokyo in the way of hotels, newspapers and art are pretty much the same as what you see in Rio de Janeiro, Jakarta, New York, Rome and London. Common markets, common consumerism, common advertising, common films, common marketing and now common art are the rule.

The result is not greater diversity as the market mythology suggests, but far less diversity – a world of homogenous and ubiquitous consumerism. You hear that there was a RAND study of the arts 10 years ago which said the key to modern is 'a large commercial sector, characterised by fewer, but increasingly larger firms catering to popular mass markets on a global scale. This sector will seek to minimise the risks it takes by choosing conservative programming that relies on established stars and formats designed to appeal to the broadest possible audience'. The study goes on to say 'nothing wrong with that, because though this may lead to a decline of professional level live performances of the high arts, it is not clear that this is a threat to the public interest because if people wanted more of that they would ask for it and attend performances given'. That the arts are what they are because the arts are democratically giving people what they want and nothing more.

VII. Marketing

This is the most mischievous part of the mythology of modern markets. The idea is that markets democratise by levelling and broadening taste and then responding democratically to an audience, rather than the reality that markets on the one hand pander to audiences, but also are themselves responsible for manipulating, determining and compelling the tastes that they then say 'we just give people what they want' about.

Fast food was big in the Garden of Eden and now today we are just giving people what they want. As if the multi-billion dollar marketing industry has nothing to do with what people want, as if the character of what the arts offer people has nothing to do with determining what popular taste is like. As if education is irrelevant and has nothing to do with wants, needs, and tastes, but somehow

consumers are born with autonomous preferences that producers in the supply/demand economy satisfy. That is all mythology, but you can see the way cultural critics buy into it. 'Well maybe it is a bit of decline in a certain kind of art, but that is just because the arts are so democratic and are giving people what they want'.

The Tate Modern puts on *Pop Life; The Arts in a Material Society*, but pop life, pop art, popovers, pop burgers are what people want, and we are simply giving it to them. Marketing is different from advertising. Advertising lets people know what commodities are out there, and why you might want this one over that one. Marketing has the specific purpose of trying to figure how to sell you things that you do not necessarily want or need. It speaks to a new capitalism; the old capitalism produced real goods to meet the real needs people had for services and commodities. The new capitalism does not manufacture goods to meet real needs; it manufactures needs to sell all the goods it has.

The chief instrument of manufacturing need is marketing. It did not exist until 1935 or so; advertising was what you did. Saatchi himself gave a great example of what he thinks a good brand is in his autobiography. He noted that he had been using Head & Shoulders the anti-dandruff shampoo for over 15 years. The first five years he found it tremendously useful, but continued to use it for the next 10 years, though he had gone bald. There is a good brand, keep using it long after you have any need for it. The attempt to create brand loyalty in children for things they may or may not want is what marketing is all about.

What is the artist going to do about that? David Hare might have a play that takes on the financial crisis, Tony Kushner may do that, but most of what goes on is about product placement in films, so the film becomes a marketing device, and the artist claims to be, in a certain way, 'brave' in being willing to front up to this reality of marketing.

In the catalogue from the Tate Modern there is a group of extraordinary essays which go even further than the artists do in justifying and rationalising the ideology which promotes the artist's own point of view. For example Jeff Koons is talked about in the essay on him in that first appearance he made on Swedish TV where he was naked, and also the pornographic film *Made in Heaven* he made, with his wife Cicciolina – the porn star who had to renounce doing porn when he married her. The essayist says 'his appearing naked on Swedish TV was one small act of bravery in a feat of artistic self-determination that would secure his status as the representative artist of the moment'. I always thought that artistic bravery had something to do with writing plays in communist Czechoslovakia, the way Havel did, or Salman Rushdie risking death, a *fatwa* for writing about Islam from his point of view, but apparently appearing naked on TV is today the new bravery, or having sex in a museum on film, as Anthea Fraser does, is the new bravery.

Serrano's artwork *Piss Christ*, with the cross in urine; I would argue that it is no more brave to put a cross in urine in a boldly materialist, sexual, or even atheist society, then it was bold and brave for the Danish cartoonists, parodying Mohammed in the dominantly Christian sexual society of Copenhagen, than for Anthea Fraser to sell her body in a pornographic society. Context is everything. When the Danish cartoonists first did their work I suggested they do it in Cairo or Tehran; that would be a brave act. To do it in Copenhagen, where the Muslim minority are working hard to be integrated and are frustrated with very little power and status in society; that is not an act of bravery, it is an act of commerce. Often these so-called acts of bravery, which are supposed to define and rationalise, sell out, because when selling out to commercial society becomes a form of bravery, how nicely that rationalises the big profits made by people like Damien Hirst. He is not just doing it and charging, he is not just embedding a skull with diamonds and

selling it for £55 million, he is also commenting on our commercial society when he does it, all the way to the now bankrupt banks, which have been bailed out by the irrelevant democratic state.

VIII. Ubiquity of Commerce

If the reality is that markets are none of the things they claim to be; not free, but monopolistic; not diverse, but homogenising; not liberal, but illiberal; not productive of genuine pluralism and different voices, but univocal, then it would seem to me that the relationship of artists to it could quite naturally go back to what it has always been - oppositional, contrarian, exposing. Not every play has to be about capitalism, as Davie Hare has written about, but at least can refuse to implicate itself in a cultural values as measured by what people will buy and art itself is a thing and actually a commodity. It is mind-boggling, because the key thing about modern markets and modern commerce is their ubiquity; they are literally everywhere, and everywhere the same. You go to the airport and you have to go through a mall on the way to the plane; when you get through the mall and on the plane they come with the duty free cart, you get off at the other end and you are routed back through a market again, you get on the taxi and the bus and there is advertising everywhere. The ubiquity of commerce is amazing.

I used to go to the Soviet Union in the old days, and everywhere I looked there was political propaganda. When politics, even good politics, subsumes everything else and permeates the culture, we rightly call that totalitarianism. If you go to parts of the fundamentalist Muslim world religious slogans, mosques, dominate the landscape; everything is about Sharia, and we say that is theocracy, we do not like it. Religion has a vital role to play in modern society, but it should not take over everything. Ubiquitous politics is totalitarianism, ubiquitous religion is theocracy, but ubiquitous markets are liberty – pluralism, commerce everywhere we welcome; that is a sign and symbol of modern freedom. I have never understood that; my problem with commerce is not that it is there, commerce is a necessary aspect of our lives, but that it is everywhere and can be avoided nowhere, including in the theatres, museums, schools. It is in those institutions we have always thought of as minimally independent of the dominion of markets, and maximally we have hoped would educate, train, and engender an imaginative perspective that allowed us to look somewhat critically at our world, particularly the homogenous monopolising world of established power, which finds itself in the marketplace.

IX. Society and Commerce

The reality today is that we live in a democratic society defined by a commerce that is anything but democratic, but is tyrannising, homogenising, corrupting, commodifying, debasing, depreciating, infantilising, and is an instrument of the single-minded, dehumanised obsession with profit, money and materialism. Playing - as so many artists and film-makers do - on the periphery of that homogenising, ubiquitous, corrupted society, and pretending that you are somehow doing the work of imagination, the work of art, is, to me, the most dispiriting aspect. The University of Maryland has bought into Pepsi-Cola and the Pepsi-Cola logo. In the deep south three years ago, when an American high school student went to school on Coke day, because Coca-Cola had given \$5,000 to the school, wearing a Pepsi shirt, as an act of subversion, he was suspended from the school by the principal. That tells you everything about where this society is.

We should not have to go to the theatre and watch the equivalent of television; we should not have to go to the Tate Museum to see pornography and advertising, there is plenty of that around us, and it does not make a big statement to have it in the museums; we should not have to go to the New York Public Library to see fashion. Commerce has infected every institution in its ubiquitous

outreach to consume society, and it has done it not against the crying opposition of educators and artists, but with their complicity. They have created the very pedagogical aesthetic and artistic rationalisations that allow them to pretend they are not doing what they are doing, which is whoring for the commercial society. We ought to recognise that that society does not represent democracy at all, and certainly does not represent art.

X. Excellence

In this climate, where the democratic market claims to represent equality, freedom, liberty and pluralism, but does not, the democratic state has new and powerful responsibilities, not just for democratic values, but also for art and education. The values that democracy shares with both education and the arts, are the values of cultivating imagination; the artist, the key to invention, creativity, innovation, inspiration; that capacity to help us see a little differently. For the citizen, imagination as the key to seeing across the gap of race, ethnicity, and gender, to see the other as someone not so unlike us; to find common ground; to understand the interdependence of the modern world in which we live; what is the bigot, but a man or woman without imagination? Democracy and the arts share this commitment to imagination, and a democratic state today has to cultivate imagination. The democratic state has to guarantee pluralism and diversity, because although it has a legal monopoly on force, it is a popularly sanctioned and democratic monopoly, and it needs to use its monopoly to guarantee the pluralism and diversity of a society whose market structures, which pretend to be pluralistic and diverse, actually overcome.

Money speaks in monotonies; multi-vocality is the responsibility of the democratic state and democratic public institutions, whether museums, galleries, or public theatres. The democratic state also, like the artist, has to ensure that liberty and competition are permitted. I am not here to say what art is or is not, the one thing I know is that it needs a lot of diversity and competition, as does democracy. We know the arts are healthy when we disagree deeply about what they are, and I would not mind if commercial art was one small part of it, but when it dominates we have no competition or pluralism. Again, it becomes the duty and responsibility of the democratic state to assure the liberty and competition that the free market, which speaks in its name, actually ignores. Finally, it is the role of the state to uphold excellence. That is not a very popular word today, but the myth of democracy is that it levels down; it creates a common mediocrity, but has never been democracy's mission. The mission of democracy has always been to level up, and the citizen is precisely a private, selfish consumer who has levelled up into a prudent, thoughtful, deliberative public citizen, who can think about public issues in a way that private consumers cannot. The aspiration of democracy is not to mass preferences, but in turning private consumers into public citizens, who can deliberate, think about the other, think about common ground, and create a world of public things that define what it means to live in a free society.

My belief is that in education and particularly in the arts, a commitment to excellence is crucial, not because there is just one form of excellence, or because I, an artist, or critic has a right to impose that, but because the aspiration to a kind of excellence or set of standards, however they are defined, seems crucial. When we say the only standard is the standard of the marketplace, of money, price, the mission ticket, we are abdicating altogether the quest for excellence, however ambiguous, complicated, or contentious that might be. That means that once again democratic institutions have to take up the cause of excellence.

XI. Risk

Like artists, citizens are not born but are made through education, experience, and particularly the taking of risk. We have seen in capitalist banks and institutions a reckless willingness to take risks with other people's money, but to no longer fund in the business community the real risks that good entrepreneurial capitalism has to necessarily take for innovation and creating new products. We have seen banks that take inordinate risks, but when they are paid off by the state to survive, do nothing to put money back into the risky home-owners who are trying to hang on to a home, or the risky businesses that are trying to get back into businesses, but keep the money to stave off any price they might pay. What we have seen in capitalism is not the privatisation, but the socialisation of risk. Capitalists are socialists in the sense that they want the state, you and me, to take all the risks, and they will take all the profits; privatisation of profit, socialisation of risk.

In fact, both citizens and artists need to be risk-takers. The people taking the risks today are not supposed to be doing it, the big banks unregulated by the state; those who should do it are citizens, artists, museums, theatres, curators, and artistic directors. I walked through the Tate Modern two days ago, and I did not see a hint of risk anywhere, although everybody talked about it, but nobody did it; that is the character of the new arts. Some may think it is a sad day when someone like me suggests we ought to have more confidence in the Foreign Office, the British Council's home, to understand, distribute, maintain, and sustain art values, than in the free market or the Tate Modern, but that is what I am saying. I am saying that our democratic institutions both understand it better, and are more likely to sustain both civic democratic and arts values than the private market is.

XII. Conclusion

Some will think it is a sad day when I have more confidence in the monopoly of the BBC or public television in the US to guarantee fairness, pluralism and eccentricity than I do in capitalism's 1,000 look-a-like broadcasts and arts venues. When you recognise that those thousands of venues are owned by at most six global media firms, and that the so-called tyranny of a democratic government has been displaced by the real tyranny of Rupert Murdoch and the News Corporation, then we know the times we live in have indeed changed. The new tyrants are not Bill Clinton, but Bill Gates. President Hu of China, when he visited the US, stopped first in Seattle to have a two day meeting with Bill Gates, and went on to visit President Bush as an afterthought. He gets western society very well, unfortunately. My suggestion is we need the equivalents of Bill Clinton as the repositories of trust for the arts, education, and all of our public goods.

Having confidence in the BBC or the British Council is not to have confidence in the nanny state, but to have a confidence in the virtues of democracy, the institutions created by a democratic citizenry. The reality is that democracy needs the arts more than the arts need democracy. The arts have flourished under many systems of tyranny and authoritarianism where, though it is a rough ride for artists, they are always aware of their freedom, independence, and critical imagination. Though the arts do not need democracy, democracy needs the arts; it cannot flourish, maybe not even survive, without an arts culture, which is defined by democratic values: freedom; cantankerousness; diversity; subversiveness; and eccentricity – the characteristics not only of the good artist, but the good citizen. Democracy can offer a home for both artists and citizens, for the contrarian virtues that are indispensable to democratic life. If you do not find those virtues in the West End, Tate Modern or Capital Radio, then go back and look at the BBC, National Theatre, Barbican, or even look at the latest British Council project, now celebrating its 75th anniversary.

Panel Commentary

Razia Iqbal, BBC

Dr Barber, thank you very much for a both entertaining and thought-provoking lecture. Each of our panellists is going to give a five minute response to Dr Barber's lecture. Paul Heritage is Professor of Drama and Performance at Queen Mary, University of London, and he is also the Director of Peoples Palace Projects, which is an arts organisation established to advance the practice and understanding of art for social justice. Whether working in Brazil, Azerbaijan, or here in the UK, his organisation works to the explicit purpose of using art to make a difference in people's lives.

Professor Paul Heritage, People's Palace Project

What an amazing opportunity to respond to that lecture and to think about how we cannot be craven in the world that Dr Barber describes. As Razia said, the organisation I work with, People's Palace Projects, is about promoting the idea of the arts playing a very active role in society to promote social justice, so often I seem to be at the end of the table with the idea of faith and belief in the arts as serving a useful purpose. What Benjamin has described is a world in which that has increasingly become a very peripheral position to hold, and one in which I sometimes feel very defensive. Your lecture gives a wonderful opportunity to not feel that; to feel that we should go out and look for other ways. Is it possible to think and act outside that paradigm that Benjamin Barber describes?

When you talked about travelling to find the world as a homogenous whole, you mentioned Rio de Janeiro. I have had the privilege in partnership with the British Council and the Barbican to work a lot in Rio, and would like to mention both Vigário Gera, a favela in Rio, and West Everton, in the northern part of Liverpool, which was Capital of Culture last year. When we go to look for something difficult, the place where we can be outside those paradigms, it is perhaps in a community like Vigário Gera; a favela; a ghetto; a shanty town; that is by its nature outside of the structures of the state. It is a very commercial world, because it is one that is dominated by the drug traffickers, a certain sort of commerce, but it is pre-modern, that society that you have seen in films or have images of, in that it is the world of the gun, armed traders that control, rather than a democratic structure. The arts flourish in that structure; we have already seen the oppositional role that was described in the lecture. The arts have flourished all over Brazil in response to social crisis.

Through the British Council letting me visit there a lot, and through the imagination of the Barbican in setting up the partnerships we have been able to learn from some of those projects and possibilities where the arts have to set up a different value system. In those societies I would argue that what is described in the lecture, the ubiquity of commercialism, and the way in which the arts respond to those crises; no, it is possible that the arts that emerge from those communities engage people in cultural activity as an opposition, as an alternative to that commercial traction and the violence of those communities. It is a great privilege to work in those situations and to see the way in which the arts can give us a faith in producing a different visibility for a range of peoples normally outside of that ubiquity.

I am grateful to the British Council, DCMS, and the Arts Council for a new project that we are going to do together. In Brazil I would strongly argue that the government has found a way of

focusing those cultural energies that are already there in society, that are part of a long tradition of the Brazilian nationhood in how they define themselves through cultural activity. They have found a way of stimulating those points of culture, not by the state inventing culture or art, and not by commercial activity inventing art and cultural exchange, but by the participation of people in whole ways in which they define themselves. The striking thing about visiting Brazil for the first time, when the British Council took me up there to lecture on Shakespeare in 1991, in the cultural exchanges I have been able to work on, was to discover the ways in which that participation reflects meanly on our own culture, and the way we have been disengaged from cultural activity that is in any way meaningful. What the British Council, DCMS and Arts Council have set up for next year is a programme that allows art institutions, planners and funders to swap that knowledge and experience of what Brazilians call the social technology of the arts, about how it works in those circumstances, with us. That is the sort of cultural diplomacy we need; one in which we can have an exchange where we can understand, from those very places that Benjamin Barber is indicating almost do not exist anymore in the world, I would say there is an incredible vibrancy around those sorts of things all over the world.

One part of the programme that we are working on looks at how and where we would make those connections in this country; where do we find the energies that we need? Where do we most need that art to be operative and to work? How do we test out what our society is like today; where we have gone and what we go to? I was in West Everton last week as part of the research to set up this joint programme with Brazil. West Everton has one of the highest indices of poverty in the country; the life expectancy is 15 years less than the national average, in a city that was the Capital of Culture last year. It is five minutes by taxi from the city centre, and there is not one single pub in the area, which only 30 years ago would have 30 pubs; there has been a gradual disintegration of a cultural network of how a community defines itself. Two weeks ago an off duty policeman was killed coming out of a gay club in the centre of Liverpool; battered to death by a group of young lads. Most of those young lads came from the West Everton, Kirkdale, Northern Liverpool areas, that are so completely lacking in any sort of cultural participation, and any engagement in any way to socialise around their own communities. How disconnected and fragmented those communities have become.

Having the opportunity to work with organisations that come out of communities of violence, that have found ways of responding to them, and that make links with communities in our own country that have become part of a homogeneity of our culture, but very much outside of it, your lecture gives a wonderful inspiration to us, to find that need again. This particular project, Points of Contact, which the British Council has helped to set up, can at least explore some of those. To finish, I would say that I loved what you said about diversity and the challenge to ubiquity. President Lula comes to Britain on Friday, and when he was elected and started his eight years of government, he selected Gilberto Gil to be their Minister of Culture, who has made such powerful performances here at the Barbican. One of the first things that Gilberto Gil said in 2004, in a lecture in Berlin, was that, 'Brazil is Brazil, because it is diverse'. I wonder if we could say in Britain that it is our diversity that defines who we are; to spend more time trying to make Britain somehow diverse, finding ways in which we can perform and stimulate; that is a much bigger challenge. That is one of the powerful challenges that came across to me from the lecture, and your association between democracy and diversity in that way; it is best at those moments when we can find that ubiquity, not of commerce, but of creativity, and where we can find that will not be in a whole nation state, but it may be in those small moments – the four days of carnival, in the creativity that happens for a night in a club. It is that that is a powerful challenge to us all.

Razia Iqbal

Grayson Perry is a Turner Prize-winning artist, best known for his elaborately-painted ceramic vases, which at first glance seem classically decorative, but on closer inspection are covered with narrative and commentaries dealing with cultural, social, and political subjects. He has exhibited regularly and increasingly around the world, for nearly three decades. His current exhibition, the Walthamstow Tapestry, is running until the middle of November at the Victoria Miro Gallery in London, and he also appears on television and has a cultural column in *The Times*. Why did I think it was in *The Independent*?

Grayson Perry

The Times; they paid better. I enjoyed the lecture. I recognise what Benjamin was talking about, about what Keith Haring was doing, who calls it subversive complicity; it is that dubious fence-sitting that artists do. As an artist, one feels that the role one is handed, the conventional orthodoxy, because modern art makes out this big deal that it is somehow a rebel, but in fact it has a very orthodox role, which is like the fool in the traditional court. It will say the sort of thing that sounds as if it is really shocking, but in fact it is complicit with the market. I see how the art world works like the old advert for Babycham, where the girl goes into the bar and she says, 'I'll have a Babycham', and at the time that was a really naff drink to order. It is my job as the artist to be that girl and say, 'I will use pottery', and then the cool dude, who is the collector, comes in, and he goes, 'yeah, I'll have a Babycham'. Then everyone in the bar wants a Babycham after that, because the cool dude has given it the seal of approval.

In being a rebel you think, 'yeah, I am really sticking it to the man', that you are somehow against the dominant forces in society, and you can kid yourself that that is the idea. Of course, capitalism as a system needs rebels, constantly, to supply it with new ideas; it is a dynamic system, it needs new things to sell the whole time. The largest industry, the fashion industry, depends on a six month cycle of rebellion somehow, that you can be complicit in. As an artist I am aware that the most rebellious thing you could do in a capitalist society is nothing, and particularly earn nothing, because then you spend nothing. Those guys at Ad Busters, who had Buy Nothing Day; that just means you will buy twice as much the day after.

A lot of the ideas that Benjamin is talking about are current in my work; I have actually based artworks on *Consume*, which I read a couple of years ago. If I had to picture who I am rebelling against as an artist in a free society, it is vulgar people. I have just done a piece in my show called the Westfield Vase; when I go to Westfield it is like a death star of the capitalist empire that has landed in Shepherd's Bush. My personal name for the people who believe in the capitalist consumer project, I call them, 'the girls with straight hair'; they have ironed out their humanity in the name of following fashion. In somehow trying to hold up these old school ideas that Benjamin mentioned; they come across as quite tweedy in a way, nowadays rebellion is a kind of sophisticated snobbery. It is not about the power of the people; power to the establishment, the elite are now the underdogs. A guy was talking about bloggers, and he said, 'these bloody citizen journalists; they are really getting in the way. How about a citizen surgeon? You would not use them.' As an artist, if I characterised where I stand as a rebel, fighter and investigator of society, it is standing up for quite old fashioned things. In *Consume*, Benjamin boils it down to consumerism will give us the easy, simple, and fast, and my job as an artist is to make the difficult, the hard, and the slow, which are quite old school values, and that is why I am a great fan of things like hand-made crafts; in a world where everything is being made easier, and laziness is a given, sincerity is the new shocking.

Razia Iqbal

Natalie Haynes is a stand-up comedian, writer and broadcaster. She is a regular panellist on *Newsnight Review* and Radio 4. With her background in learning and teaching classics, her next book is called *The Ancient Guide to Modern Life*, due to be published next year.

Natalie Haynes

I wanted to talk about a slightly older democracy than 200 years ago, namely the first one, Athens, fifth century BC, and the role that mockery of a democratic state played at that point, because I think it is important. Athens is not democracy like we have democracy; we have representative democracy, where we vote for somebody and then they go and vote for stuff on our behalf. In Athens - and we have to bypass the fact that women, foreigners and slaves are not voting; this is just Athenian men we are talking about, but for that I apologise - you turn up and you vote yourself on the issues of the day. You go to big hill, called the Pnyx, everyone debates, and then you raise your hand for what proposal you are for against, and these are big things like going to war against Sparta or a campaign against Sicily.

The power of ancient Athenians was invested in rhetoric; the ability you had to turn up and say something really convincingly. The great statesman of ancient Athens is Pericles, who has an incredible capacity to persuade; he is old money, elite, and as the fifth century advances, a man called Cleon, a tanner, and not old money. As this is happening, Aristophanes, who is easily the finest comic playwright ever, is quite happy to mock everything about the Athenian state. He mocks the democracy itself, he mocks the fact that they make poor decisions, and he does so at the same time as being incredibly smutty. He is capable of making extremely personal and ungenerous remarks about Cleon; he turns him in *The Knights* into a sausage-seller, something even more low rent than a tanner, as if such a thing were possible. Only last week the BBC Trust got slightly grouchy with Frankie Boyle, for making personal comments about Rebecca Adlington; he said that she looks a little bit like somebody reflected in the back of a spoon. It is a profoundly ungenerous remark; it is no less funny for it - it is cruel, but cruelty is what comics have always provided, and the fact that we now disapprove of them is simply a fad.

Here, I would say, democracy is crucial. If you want to mock something you need to do it under democracy. Once the Athenian democracy falls, at the end of the fifth century BC, then you end up with Kings in Rome and Emperors, and contemporary mockery disintegrates. Old comedy, like Aristophanes, was replaced by new comedy; new comedy is very much like *My Family*; just give it a miss. It takes satire, the only form of art the Romans created, before you get mockery of actual people again. This is key; Juvenal write *Satire 4*, which is about a giant turbot that has been caught and they want to take it to the Emperor Domitian, and cook it for him, but they know that they will screw it up - it is too big for the dish that they have got - and they know if they get it wrong they will probably be put to death. It is a really funny satire, but it is about something that has already happened; by the time Juvenal is writing about Domitian, Domitian cannot hurt him, for the good reason that had he written it contemporaneously with Domitian, he would have been dead by Christmas.

My suggestion would be for comedy to retain its role as mocking those in power, and I think that we do. *Spitting Image* is an excellent example; I challenge you to try to think of John Major in a colour other than grey. David Steel blames *Spitting Image* for destroying his political career, because he was always pocket-sized; it is very hard to take him seriously. Michael Heseltine is still popular; he was Tarzan so why not. It is surprising how much impact political comedy does have; I recommend you go and see Christian Mungiu's *Tales from the Golden Age*, a film about Romania

under Ceausescu; it is fun. He could not possibly have made a film mocking Ceausescu during the reign of Ceausescu; he would have been put to death, and now he can. It took oppression to inspire him, and then it took democracy to give him a place to voice it.

The final thing I would like to say is that it seems strange that nobody has mentioned the internet today, and if we are going to talk about democratisation of art in the face of money; this is crucial. It is undoubtedly the case, with the exception of the hallowed BBC, that it is very hard to get programmes made without vast amounts of funding, and huge amounts of interference, which almost invariably creates something very slightly worse than it would have been if nobody had to be involved; there is, nonetheless, an alternative. I was in LA a couple of weeks ago and I went to see a screening of a friend of mine's thing; it is called *Dr Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, which has won an Emmy. It was created while the writer's strike was on, with no studio interference, no studio money, and they produced this sing-along musical that is now on DVD. It is incredibly successful, they have big screenings of it, and people turn up. It is possible to create art from the ground up; I admit that you need the resources you have from having played the system first, but in a double bill with *Dr Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* was an internet show called *The Guild*, which you can see for free at watchtheguild.com.

The Guild was created by an actress called Felicia Day, who was bored that she only got sent for homogenous roles, and decided that she would write her own more interesting thing. She writes, stars, and executive produces, but she is not an evil lunatic like Mel Gibson, so you can have all the skills. She cast a few friends, and they put together a series, but then they ran out of money. Fans sent in donations, and they waited until they had enough cash, and then they made another episode. All the costumes were provided by fans, who saw the pictures in the credits of the show, and made costumes for the performers, because they wanted to. It is possible, and this is what the internet gives us, to take away some of the lines of interference between artist and consumer, and not big money Charles Saatchi collector consumer, but the ordinary person sitting at home who wants to watch something online. It does not have to be the case that nobody makes any money, people are prepared to put small amounts of money where their consuming mouths are. If Obama can get \$100 million through \$5 and \$10 donations, I do not see why that is not at least a bit of a paradigm for the arts.

Razia Iqbal

Before I open it up to the floor, I would like Dr Barber to comment a little bit, but before you do that I want to ask you a question. It seems that there probably are not that many artists who do not want to see their work being seen by as many people as possible, so are you talking about measuring success in a different way, that is not to do with money, because every artist, writer and playwright would want to have as many people as possible share their ideas?

Benjamin Barber

That is true; the question is whether that is the only, or perhaps the first thing you want. It is naturally part of being an artist to want to speak to your audience, to communicate to your audience, and not to have an audience is a problem. However, when that defines what you do as an artist, when your eye is on your audience or the number of admission tickets you might sell, then that becomes distorting. The artist is in communication with a public and audience, and so there has to be an interest in that, but an interest is one thing, obsession is another, and obsession has become another.

Paul Heritage said something very important; people who are on the margins of what defines the arts in a big way today, are the key to change. There are a great many groups and artists on the internet, community art around the world, that are doing very important things, but they are on the margin of a society that defines its centre by money, profit and capitalism; the question is how we can bring the periphery to the centre, and put the centre on the periphery. I am glad you reminded us of how much is happening on the 'periphery', and I say that not to depreciate the importance of what is being done, but to define where it sits in terms of the dominant paradigm that we have today. Berlusconi defined Italian democracy by saying, 'we are not and will not be a multicultural society; we are a mono-cultural society and proud of it'. Increasingly Europe, despite its efforts to overcome frontiers and the old nationalist borders of World War II, is increasingly trying to build new walls around itself that say we are ultimately Christian, not multi-religious; we are ultimately white, not coloured; and the whole populist opposition to immigration is a cry against diversity.

We should acknowledge that diversity is hard; we know in our own families and communities that it is nice to be around people like you, there is a comfort zone there. The democracy in Athens was born from a homogeneous society; the Athenians, 20,000 men, shared the same values, spoke the same language, had the same outlook, and it made democracy easy. Democracy in multicultural societies is very hard, because to find common ground, consensus is hard. I do not want to diminish how hard it is to make democracy work in multiculturalism, but it is essential, if it is to work, that it makes diversity and pluralism part of its founding definition. That is why some of the success with multiculturalism in the US, despite slavery, comes out of the *e pluribus unum*; the notion that the unity of the country comes from diversity.

The point about the internet is so important, and you are quite right to say that it represents possibilities and opportunities that are democratic, artistic and inexpensive, but we also want to remember that the internet – hardware and software platforms – is a largely owned subsidiary of the same global media corporations I have been talking about. They work in the opposite direction of the architecture of the internet, which is lateral, democratic, inviting, and cheap; they are trying to find ways to monetise the internet, and they are looking for ways that their ownership can be translated into the dominant paradigm. New technologies always reflect the culture that produces them, and in a commercial pornographic culture like ours, it should not surprise us that though these experiments are there, they are exciting, 95 or 98% of hits on the internet come from commerce, advertising, and pornography. I say that not as a prude, but just to say that it is sad that this invented, new, democratic technology is being used for the most part for the purposes of the most ancient profession in the world, and for the commercial inclinations of our own society. I have some comments on Grayson Perry, but perhaps you would like to open it up first, and if you give me a chance to make a closing comment.

Questions & Answers

Pat Cane, The Play Ethic

What did you think about popular front arts? In the late 1980s and early 1990s in Scotland there was a collection of artists that came together to argue for the Scottish Parliament; we were part of that argument, and we got it. What did you think about the relationship between patriotism and autonomy? Secondly, I am a commercial musician; if you look at the history of pop music in the 20th Century, it cannot be thought about other than in this frantic relationship with markets. The favela markets that Paul Heritage talks about, where the energy comes through from people on the hustle trying to get their sub-cultural accent on the world, and trying to find a market for it; I agree

that the liberal arts must have a strong state democratic input, to keep certain standards up, and obviously the relationship between art schools and pop is interesting. State subsidised art schools generate crazy market-rapacious pop stars. I still think that at certain levels below the corporate level the relation between arts and the markets is messier, and we need to be a bit more fine grained in how we talk about it at different levels and scales.

Participant

I wanted to make a point about feeling that nothing has really changed; since time immemorial we have been opposing things, and opposition is just a form of dependency. When you are talking about independency, Ben, you have not addressed the point of what independency really is; if I am opposing a regime I am still a part of that regime, because in pulling against it I have to take reference to what the regime wants me to do. The truth in my opinion is that an artist being independent is something very different from that; it is not about paying attention to the regime, it is about paying attention to what the artist feels and they want to do for themselves first. Whether we are pulling with the regime, or pulling against it, effectively we are doing the same thing either way and we have not moved on. The effect of your very gracious address was to take the role of the artist in the past, who would have said this regime is bad, we need to change it; you have taken on that role in an adverse sense, to give us the opposition. What we crave in society over time has been a barrier to push against, and that barrier was always provided in a co-dependent format; the artist who is co-dependent with his audience, and that is not very functional. An independent artist needs to stand on his own ground and say what he says regardless of his audience, or with his audience; it does not really matter.

Zoe Willistock, University of Warwick

What is the role of past art and past architecture in modern democracies?

Benjamin Barber

I think popular front art to me represents very much what I am talking about; what you said is exactly right; I like the phrase the 'frantic relationship' to markets that leaves artists feeling uncertain. I acknowledge that even the people I have been very critical of are artists, and they are working in that messy zone. The problem is when you are in a mess it does count on where you come out of the mess, because sooner or later you emerge from the mess and say you are here or there, and your problem is not the mess and the need for ambiguity, but where so many artists seem to come out of the mess, which is on the wrong side of the street. You are particularly right in saying that in music we see a particular character or messiness; I like popular music, I like folk rock, and whether you are talking about Springsteen or The Beatles, or you might be talking about more cutting edge artists, those are wonderful artists, and they have that messy relationship with money. One's feeling with someone like Springsteen is that he seems to come out enough on the other side, whether it is in giving free tickets, or in what he has written and how he has been received, or his relationship to the working class in New Jersey, as well as the middle class that listens to him; that suggests he has come out the right way. It is a good reminder that these things are always messier than a one hour lecture can give them their due.

Opposition versus independence; I started out by saying you can be patriotic and for the state, a propagandist for it, you can be independent neutral, just speak your own voice – this is your point – or you can be oppositional. The only problem with what you said is that to be independent is itself a form of dependency; independent of what? In talking about a romantic inwardness of the early

19th Century, Wordsworth was being independent of the new industrial state, the celebration of nature is itself a response to industrialism, and so on. It is hard to think of what it truly means to be independent, because we are all beings who live in a culture, and are responding to it, but you are quite right to say there is a difference between the specific opposition of popular front arts, and the kind of thing that an imaginative person pursuing their own agenda might do as an artist. My focus today was on the subversive implications, but that is another important thing.

Razia Iqbal

Could Grayson comment on what this gentleman was saying about the role of the artist and why the artist does what they do?

Grayson Perry

Somebody once said, if you give me a fulcrum and somewhere to stand I can move the world, so it is always going to be an opposition. Whatever you do, you cannot deny that the world out there exists, and its systems; even if you do not know that you are being in opposition to them, you are. In the end all the artist has got to do is do what they want, and that is the hard thing to find out, because that needs an awful lot of self-awareness that not that many people have. My job is to constantly tune my self-awareness, and be aware of those influences on me. I do not worry about one thing, in the end I have to go where my motivation is. I just wanted to reply to the question about art of the past, because all of my influences are pre-1900; I am a very bad audience for contemporary art on the whole, I like some of it, but I love little, if any, of it. What I like about art in the past is that I use it as a measure of standards in terms of aesthetics and craftsmanship; I set myself up against the great masters of the past, which is perhaps hubristic. Their standards were not the market standards on the whole; they were religious or traditional standards, so put inordinate lifetimes of effort and skill into things, for very little money, and that gives me different reasons for doing art.

Paul Heritage

In West Everton, one of the examples they do have of work is the Liverpool Philharmonic, which has now established a programme in primary schools, and has a very good relationship with past art in that way. What is interesting about that is participation in that art; it is not necessarily the fact they are learning Mahler, Beethoven or Bach, it is more the fact that they are playing scales and they have got the discipline of that participation in art. Richard Sonet makes such a brilliant point in his opening chapter on respect; it is what we are doing, the infrastructure of that. What is interesting in relation to the popular front and what Benjamin Barber was saying about the periphery is that so many of our models in this country, and there are brilliant models for the way in which the arts are intervening in society in Britain, are virtually always from the centre to the periphery; they are almost always from the outside of the community into it. In fact, the examples of truly transformational art are in a different direction, and have a different relationship with the periphery; what is exciting is when the periphery stays almost on the periphery, and is not a model that comes to the centre. That is very powerful; the way in which the periphery has its own aesthetic, and therefore possibly its own commerce – that is an extraordinary power and one we find difficult in the UK.

Grayson Perry

In the history of sub-culture in Britain we have constantly seen it become subsumed faster and faster by the market. I think of *The Face* magazine; one minute we had subcultures that bottomed along in the 1950s for years, before anybody really noticed them, and all of a sudden magazines like *The Face* came along, and if someone wore a different t-shirt on a football stand one week, suddenly it was a double-paged spread in a magazine, then it became a mass phenomenon, and then it was diluted, and the aesthetic never had a chance to really get going. In a way, if you want to retain the power of those peripheral cultures, just avoid being popular and entering the market. Going back to the internet; that is a great place for that to happen, the sub-cultures of the world are digital.

Don Cummings, Institute of Ideas

I was interested that Dr Barber tended to associate the public with the state in his lecture, as opposed to the private market, but the demise of a public sphere that is independent of the state as well as the market, an idea of citizenship as a relationship between citizens rather than with the state. When it comes to the point about pornographic or offensive art not really being offensive, you are right; it is not offensive to the market, because the market does not make judgments. Now I think, is it the business of the democratic state to take offense at that kind of thing? That is precisely why a democratic state is not enough for a good society. We are not very good at engaging more critically as citizens; we tend to leave taking offense to reactionaries, whether religious, or whatever, and think that the proper attitude to the arts is a cool and detached one, but that is a consumer attitude, and as long as we leave it at that then even anti-consumerism becomes another product: a Michael Moore film; an anti-McDonald's t-shirt; even a good book like *Consumed*. So for it to count we actually have to take it more seriously, and that means being critical of the BBC, as well as Murdoch and the *Daily Mail*, because if we put our faith in an increasingly illegitimate state, to guarantee excellence in the arts, we are doomed. It is up to more of a public culture to be part of that, and be critical, and not be ashamed or embarrassed about saying, 'this is offensive; I am annoyed about this', and engage with it on some level other than this cool consumer detachment.

Participant

I would like to make two comments; the first is about exhibitions that you can add to pop life, I would add the ultra-modern exhibition to that list, which is supposed to bring a kind of enlightenment of the change in the local culture, local art, that can oppose the situation we are in. Most of the artists there were British, and all the art that was there was mainly mainstream art, and no image were shown over the internet; it is maybe the last museum that has nothing on the internet, no images or virtual tools. The second comment is that British society is currently fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and it is supposed to be a democratic society; I hear nothing about the fact that there is zero press coverage of everything that is going on there, a total blackout. We know that the fighting is in the middle of a civilian society, and you hear nothing about what is going on there. I would assume that a democratic society would hear much more, not only from society, but also from the art side, and you hear nothing about it.

Benjamin Barber

There is no question that we still have to be concerned with subverting and opposing even the democratic state, not just in its hypocrisies, but in the power it holds. Democratic power is

democratic, is legitimate, but it is still power. The founders of the US distrusted power, and particularly distrusted democratic power; so there certainly is a reason to continue to distrust, question and be sceptical about even democratic power – that is important. Taking the second part of your question about the Afghan war; the free media are not free. The free media are wholly owned; the free media are to a large extent doing the work of the dominant money paradigm, so you cannot expect that they are going to go to Afghanistan or Iraq and tell you a story that is important in making judgements about those as a citizen. As Grayson says, this is old time stuff; if you want to figure out what is going on ask who owns it, above anything; ask who owns the media and that will tell you a lot about what the media is doing.

It turns out that we need to question the BBC; the fact that in some abstract sense the public own the BBC, whereas in other cases for-profit global corporations own the rest of the media, tells us why, to the extent we are going to get any news about that, we are more likely to get it from the official organ of state that has the most to lose in telling the truth, because they have troops there. It was the British Council that exported *Black Watch*, a play about the closing down of that great Scottish regiment following the tragedies that befell it in its war overseas; they sent that out as a representation. I cannot imagine the British Government could have been very happy with that, but that is precisely what a democratic society can do, it can send out that criticism, and it can do the sorts of investigation that the wholly owned, private free media, in fact no longer do.

I appreciate Grayson's work; he answers that question about past and present brilliantly, because the past is not the past, Greek art and Greek drama are all present in what we do today, and there is no playwright, no comedian – even Neil Simon gets Aristophanes and understands his importance, and Arthur Miller get Aeschylus, and so on. The whole point about artists is that past and present, that frontier disappears for them; they do not think of doing contemporary art or old art. They help make those borders disappear for us, and that is a powerful thing that artists do. The most telling thing that Grayson said, and I agree with it, is that in an odd way those rebelling against the market are an old establishment; there is something establishmentarian about that, and you will notice I wore a corporate outfit here, a suit and tie, to make what was, from my point of view, a radical critique. That is interesting, but as with all of us I have my own messiness about these things, so I want to end by [undoes tie and shirt] letting you know...

Grayson Perry

Do not give in to the desperation to be cool.

Benjamin Barber

...that we all have our own way of wearing the things that we criticise, and I want you to know that though my clothes are establishment, underneath this is what I am wearing; so the messiness is in my head too.

Razia Iqbal

I would like to thank Dr Benjamin Barber for a very stimulating morning. My experience of these discussions is always that this is just the beginning of every conversation. My thanks to the Barbican and the British Council, and Paul Heritage, Grayson Perry and Natalie Haynes; thank you for coming.

This Full Transcript was produced by Ubiquis ☎ +44 (0) 20 7269 0370