

# **Understanding Innovation in Digital Media Artistic Production in Ireland**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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## **Acknowledgements**

Undertaking PhD research can be a daunting proposition. Like what I would imagine chipping away at an iceberg - blindfolded - might feel like, this work has required constant and steady input, no matter when it seemed as if a daily contribution was minuscule or directionless in the face of the overall project. While the work is also largely solitary, I have had the great fortune of gracious support from colleagues, friends and family. I wish to acknowledge those people and express my gratitude to them for how they have helped this process in so many ways.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to understand processes of innovation in digital media production. Traditional discourses on digital media have tended to foreground the role of technology, its effects and its influences. This thesis argues that a more rounded understanding of digital media can be obtained through considering the social, cultural, political and economic factors that also influence production. Furthermore, traditional discourses of innovation - based on studies of the manufacturing, industrial and knowledge-intensive business sectors - do not represent the types of innovation pertinent to production of cultural artefacts in the digital media sector.

Whilst some recent studies have greatly rectified this deficit by foregrounding the specific qualities of innovation in commercial digital media content production, this thesis suggests that these studies can be complemented with qualitative research on production within the artistic sector, where processes of creativity and innovation are combined with a non-commercial intentionality in producing digital media artefacts.

This thesis takes a critical approach to traditional discourses on the role of technology and innovation. Influenced by the Frankfurt School of critical theory, it sets out a theoretical framework where a socially, culturally and politically grounded aesthetic theory is combined with a consideration to temporal situatedness in Ireland's current 'crisis'. It situates Ireland as a postcolonial state and explores how this postcoloniality has influenced artistic production and art critique.

This framework forms the basis for an empirical study which explores digital art production in Ireland from the micro-individual level, through to the meso-institutional and macro-political economic levels. It does this using a combination of methods, from an ethnography of the digital art sector, qualitative interviews with artists and members of art institutions, and case studies of art works and events in the digital art sector.



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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction to the Research**

# **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research**

## **1.1 Introduction: Why Digital Art?**

The aim of this research thesis is to explore innovation in digital media, specifically in the realm of the artistic sector. There are a number of reasons for this choice of research theme.

First, the ‘culture industries’ have been recognised at a government level as potentially important sites of innovation and job creation in Ireland, as in many other countries (Preston, 2001) - a potential role that has received increasing attention over the years. Forfás (2006a) cited the creative arts along with digital media as important areas through which economic growth could be fostered. In 2009, the Western Development Commission published its report on the importance of the creative sector in the West of Ireland. They cited the importance of the sector, noting its strong growth potential, the high quality of employment that it generates, and also its contribution to innovation in other sectors. The report also noted how the sector plays an important social role, along with stimulating regional development (WDC, 2009).

Second, particular economic attention has been drawn to the cultural and artistic sector following the financial and banking crisis that emerged in Ireland in 2008. During this time, the government convened the Global Irish Economic Forum, held through the department of Foreign Affairs in September 2009. This forum encouraged members of the Irish diaspora to contribute their thoughts to a quasi ‘think-tank’ on economic recovery. The forum included prominent business professionals, but significantly, cultural producers were also invited to take part, with one of the eleven working groups focused on ‘what role can Ireland’s cultural and artistic capital play in developing our economy?’ (Global Irish Economic Forum report, September 2009, Dept of Foreign Affairs). One major theme that emerged from the forum was the ‘recognition of the importance of culture in promoting Ireland abroad and developing a unique brand for the country in new markets’ (ibid.). This was on the backdrop of a report that the Irish government had asked the economist, Colm McCarthy to produce on massive public spending cuts, published in July 2009. This report had recommended the abolition of

several arts institutions, including the Irish Film Board and Culture Ireland, along with the removal of the department of the arts (which would leave Ireland as the only member of the EU without such a senior department).

Third, it has been established that knowledge-intensive industries innovate differently from technical, pharmaceutical and manufacturing industries (Boden & Miles 2000, Howells & Tether 2004, Cawley & Preston 2004). There is more reliance on tacit knowledge in these industries than is traditionally understood within the pharmaceutical, manufacturing, and industrial sectors. Script/content, authoring and design are cited as crucial knowledge functions of the media industries, and equivalent to traditionally understood R&D functions. Within these knowledge-intensive service industries are a subset of industries that include the media and cultural sector. In this sector, specific types of creative, imaginative and intuitive forms of knowledge production play an especially important role. The innovation process in the media services draws on very distinct forms of knowledge, including creative, aesthetic, authoring and design capabilities or competencies, as well as tacit skills and experience-based knowledge.

Fourth, the arts sector is a specific segment of these creative industries, and provides a source of research into those distinct forms of knowledge production that shape, enhance and grow innovative practices. The cultural industries are largely driven by producing content for mass-consumption. In contrast to this, the artistic sector - while of course needing to function in capitalist societies - provides content that is often less driven by mass-consumption, or industrial modes of production, and where questions of artistic autonomy, social critique and even political comment are pertinent to the content producers. This sub-sector can be seen as complementary to the mass-media segments of the creative industries. Within the artistic sector is a cohort of artists who engage with digital technologies to varying degrees in their practices - both as tools and as an aesthetic medium in its own right. Therefore, this sector provides a rich field of insight into the specific skills, innovative practices, technological competencies and content production that have already been established as being crucial to innovation in knowledge-intensive sectors.

Thus, there exists a complex nexus of individual, social, cultural, political and economic factors linking the production of cultural artefacts in Ireland. This is particularly so within the artistic sector, where issues of intentionality, expression and critique converge with traditional discourses of innovation. It is therefore important that when considering broader implications for government policy regarding the ‘smart economy’ - and its close association with an encouragement of creativity and innovation - to have a rounded, thorough understanding of how the factors named above, shape, foster or hinder innovative and creative practices.

In this thesis then, the overall scope of the research is to investigate innovation in digital media through an analysis of the digital art sector in Ireland. It queries how artists appropriate digital tools for the production of digital art works. It explores what the potential sites of innovation are in the digital art sector and maps where that ‘R&D’ function exists for digital artists. The thesis also addresses innovation in digital media artistic production from the perspective of gatekeeping, enablement and support of digital practices. It problematises issues of support and representation of digital art and suggests conceptual, theoretical and visceral ‘specificities’ of digital art that potentially hinder its production in Ireland. It also examines the broader cultural, social and political situatedness of the sector and includes an analysis of policy-level discourses around ‘crisis’ and how in Ireland, art has become situated as a ‘rescuer’ for the country’s fiscal issues. It problematises this ‘turn to culture’ in the context of previous discourses about art, culture and the ‘role’ of art.

This thesis comprises several strands that methodologically provide a holistic mapping of the digital art sector. Along with the qualitative method of in-depth interviews with key actors in the sector, from artists to gatekeepers and cultural theorists, the sector is mapped through an ethnography of selected galleries, workshops and talks. This ethnography allows for an account of the sector that also enables the inclusion of a number of case-studies of specific artworks and arts organisations that serve as a complement to the interview data.

## 1.2 A Process-Based Depth Model of Enquiry

During the initial review of prior research, it became clear that this research project could potentially focus on the *technological* innovations that diffuse within digital art in Ireland; for example software imaging programs, digital video, digital signal processing, high-definition film formats etc. Such a focus could adopt a technology-centric framework to justify this approach. There are many such justifications available, attesting to the autonomy of technology and its effects, and whilst the sector or object of study does not pre-determine the theoretical perspective (i.e. ‘technological determinist’ studies of media content and culture are also in evidence, not just tech-centric studies of software and hardware technologies), nonetheless such an approach was deemed inappropriate for this research.

The relationship between new technologies, their adoption and their use is highly complex (Rogers 1966/1995). Their diffusion and appropriation cannot be explained through traditional determinist approaches which suggest the technology is autonomous and outside the bounds of societal influences. Instead, the review of the literature has elucidated that the diffusion of innovations and technologies is governed by complex societal, cultural, political and even personal factors.

With this in mind, the focus of this research will centre on the innovative *processes* within the digital art sector, as opposed to a concentration on the technological innovations. This approach is being taken in order to provide an understanding of the digital art sector that does not prioritise technology over individual volition, or societal factors or political ones. Instead this approach aims to consider the interrelationships between the technology, the artist, and the complex political, cultural and social domains in which they are situated.

The research tracks the interplay of (1) individual, (2) social, (3) cultural, (4) political and (5) economic factors from the micro level of analysis, to how the meso, institutional level shapes and influences the micro level, while it is itself also shaped by social and cultural factors. I also follow the interplay of factors through to the macro level, where political and economic factors shape policy decisions on innovation, the creative industries and ultimately the ‘smart economy’.

In adopting this three-level approach (micro, meso and macro), my aim is to provide a *depth-model* to help understand the innovative and creative processes that policy drivers wish to encourage, whilst also taking into account the many-layered aspects to cultural production. The intention of this depth-model is to avoid a 'flat' understanding of cultural production.

This model works as follows: prioritising intentionality, creativity and situatedness at a micro-level provides an understanding that places the individual 'cultural creator' as an innovator in their own right, whilst also acknowledging that the individual is also situated in a broader cultural and societal domain.

Then, at this second, meso level, the model reveals how questions of cultural gatekeeping and programming arise. Thus, a meso-level institutional analysis can be applied in order to understand the social and cultural dimensions to innovation.

Just as the individual cultural creator is situated however, so are the meso-level institutions themselves situated within a larger, macro-level system. The depth model allows for an investigation into this macro level, which helps to situate the individual processes of the cultural creator, the cultural and social processes at play at the meso-level institutional level, within a macro-level layer that takes account of broader political and economic forces that also shape innovative practices.

### **1.3 Goals, Questions and Themes**

As outlined in sections 1.1 and 1.2, the primary goal of this research is to adopt a process-based depth model to investigate innovation in the production of culture, specifically through a study of the digital art sector in Ireland. This broad goal is achieved by setting out a number of questions, explorations of which will break apart and elucidate the individual, social, cultural, political and economic factors that pertain to this study of digital art in Ireland. I propose to explore these thematic questions by a combination of methods that I describe in section 1.6 and further analyse in chapter 6.

#### *1.3.1 The Key Question*

The research centres around the major question: *how do artists innovate by interacting with (using, appropriating) digital technologies to produce artistic works in contemporary Ireland?* This major question raises some sub-questions, broadly themed under the five areas of (1) socio-cultural situatedness, (2) art, (3) technology, (4) innovation and (5) the political-economic dimension. It is difficult to separate these themes in the body of this research thesis. For example, art and technology are often understandably discussed alongside each other during interviews with digital art practitioners. Thus, the key themes are treated in the main thesis as interrelated, dialoguing strands of enquiry. However, my attempt in this section is to cluster the the sub-questions in a thematic way, in order to clarify the broad parameters of what is an interdisciplinary approach to the research.

#### *1.3.2 The Sub-Questions*

The first set of questions are centred around the theme of cultural or socio-cultural situatedness. This theme underpins much of the thesis - how the artist is situated within a broader cultural and societal domain, how gatekeepers are situated within institutional contexts, and how institutions themselves are situated within political and economic contexts. To interrogate this further, I propose to explore the specificities of cultural and historical situatedness, the specificities of cultural and historical situatedness of artistic practices and appropriations of digital technologies in the contemporary Irish setting.

Irish cultural identity is complex, having moved from a colony of the British empire to a post-colonial and late-developing society. What is striking and specific about this identity is that Ireland became a post-colonial entity during a historical period of rapid technological, cultural and social change comparable to that of the digital era - that of high modernism. Thus, the questions that I wish to engage with concerning this theme are: *how can we understand being culturally situated in contemporary Ireland? How is the contemporary digital age comparable with high modernism? How is Irish post-coloniality reflected in the Irish art world?*

On the second theme of art, existing critiques of art by scholars such as Adorno, Benjamin, Bourdieu and Lovejoy discuss art within broader social, cultural, political and even digital contexts. However, providing a conceptualisation of art itself is complex, being at once introspective, historically situated and also necessarily intellectually grounded, in this case, for the context of digital media production and a deep political-economic 'crisis'. Thus, my themed questions about art are: *what is my conceptualisation of art - including digital art - for the purposes of this research? What is the role of art, especially contemporary and/or digital art? What is the function of art? How is art produced and represented in Ireland, and, in particular, the role and place of the digital in contemporary art practices?*

On the third theme of technology, I wish to engage with the role and influence of the ICTs in artistic practice. In studies of innovation within services, it is acknowledged that technology, whilst necessary in some contexts, is not sufficient to produce innovations, and that the 'soft' skills such as tacit, design and authoring knowledge are important factors. Yet, digital media ICTs also comprise materially distinct and novel vehicles for expression, just as canvas is for the traditional media artist. Walter Benjamin advised the artist not to be dazzled by the spectacular effects the new technologies could afford, and instead advised the artist to make the technology a vehicle for their own autonomous voice. However, the 'spectacular effects' potentially offer both opportunities *and* challenges to artistic autonomy, with the artist being challenged to adopt and embrace the new technologies whilst at once not succumbing to some of the 'hype' and rhetoric that often accompanies discourse around technology, but instead, mounting a critique of the means of production of their day. Thus, I posit these questions in relation to technology: *are the ICTs a tool only, a medium only, or both a tool and a medium? What is the digital artists' relationship with technology in contemporary Ireland? Can and do artists critique cultural and socio-political trends and issues using the technological means of their day?*



Theme four is concerned with ideas of innovation. Considering the artist within culture, society and technology situates the artist as an innovator with various knowledges and competencies. However, the artist at the micro level, and the arts institutions at the meso level are themselves situated within a political structure, consisting of policies and frameworks that can either support or hinder innovative practices from the top down macro level of analysis. Thus, I wish to explore questions of policy discourse on innovation. Specifically, I ask: *how does existing policy discourse on innovation apply to the the art domain of the cultural sector, and especially to the digital media artist? How are digital artists represented at meso and macro levels? How are they supported through state funding? How is digital art critiqued, and its status or role valued or evaluated, by cultural gatekeepers at meso and macro levels?*

The fifth theme centres around art practices and how they are viewed in the political realm. I investigate how artistic production is viewed within a wider political structure, whilst also exploring how artists interact with political structures. This theme is also on the backdrop of economic, social and cultural crisis. The questions around this theme are: *what role do the arts have during the time of crisis in Ireland? How do artists see their role, politically?*

## 1.4 The Overall Theoretical Framework

Having introduced the broad parameters and key questions of the research, I now turn to map more fully the theoretical framework that underpins the research. As outlined in section 1.2, my approach is process-based, and it incorporates a framework whereby (a) the micro-level individual, (b) the meso-level social and cultural, and (c) the macro-level political and economic systems are considered. This approach enables a mapping of the *contextual* setting of the sector, even if it is challenging for its unknowns, rather than to utilise existing frameworks *in situ* as it were.

The framework can be thought of as comprising three ‘segments’, corresponding to the major considerations of the individual or ‘I’, the cultural/social or ‘We’, and the systems or ‘It’ realms of research, as described above<sup>1</sup>. There are a number of ways in which these three segments can be considered. Each individual segment can be considered in its own idiom, research on which would garner a thorough but contextual grounding in the area of choice. For example, applying systems theories to innovation would give an overview of the complexities at a macro, ‘It’ level. This suggests that conducting research into the psychology of innovation could give an insight into the micro ‘I’ level, and conducting research into cultural production and social shaping would garner insights into the meso ‘We’ level.

The framework can be mapped to the research on digital art in Ireland, by engaging with theories and scholars who have considered the micro, meso and macro levels of research on the main themes of the research - art, situatedness, technology, innovation and the political.

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<sup>1</sup> Influenced by the work of Ken Wilber (2001)

## 1.5 Applying the Framework to Relevant Literature

I believe that the tripartite framework proposed above provides a robust basis by which the literature and concepts relevant to the current study can be categorised, understood and evaluated. This framework also structures the research and guides it with due consideration to the complex production nexus of the digital media realm from (a) ground-level individual factors, through to (b) the broader social and cultural domains, and onwards to (c) the political and economic realms.

To summarise how the framework can guide appropriate research into the specific subject of innovation in digital media art in Ireland, I now introduce an application of the framework to the themes and subjects with which I have engaged in the review of existing literature. Some theorists and theories will be artificially divided between micro, meso and macro for the sake of clarity. However, in the body of the research, the key themes of the research, and the three levels of enquiry are much more interlinked.

### *1.5.1 Situatedness and Agency at the Micro Level*

The main research concerns at this level are how the artist interacts with technology, how they see their broader role in society, and how they interact with arts institutions.

An enquiry into the macro-level factors of artistic production could potentially start by investigating psychological theories of creativity and innovation. There is much work on this subject, the work of Tanja Sophie Schweizer being a good example of this<sup>2</sup>. So too is the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) who has researched extensively on the subject of creativity and the creative process individuals, analysing distinguishing characteristics and personality traits of creative people.

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<sup>2</sup> Schweizer (2006) has proposed a neurocognitive model for innovation, creativity and novelty-seeking. She reveals that from a neuropsychological perspective, individuals with high levels of novelty-seeking behaviour have certain personality traits requiring deliberate consideration in the workplace (Schweizer 2006). What is interesting about this postulation is that Schweizer not only considers the psychological consequences for the individual who has these personality traits, but she also considers the economic consequences for the companies who employ such individuals. This work is therefore valuable for offering an insight and potentially a management resource for the creative and cultural industries, who seek to employ and retain innovative, creative individuals in order to grow their business.

However, an in-depth study of psychological traits and neurocognitive tendencies was deemed at an early stage of the research to potentially lead the work down a complex, medical route. It was thus decided that in exploring the ‘I’, it is a social, situated, networked ‘I’ that is considered. This is partly influenced by the work of Carl Jung. Jung is best known as a psychologist, but particularly in works such as *The Undiscovered Self* (1958) he situated the psychological self, and the self’s associations with autonomy and agency, within a social world, associated with structure. Of course, this agency versus structure debate has a long history in analyses of cultural and social phenomena. One recent manifestation arises in debates on the role of digital technology and its relation to cultural change. The Actor-Network Theory of Bruno Latour, during a review of literature of technology and society was shown to have implications for the micro level, despite being more broadly operational on a meso level. Thus, agency with respect to technology is also of concern here, and broad theories of the technology/society relationship have influenced the research with respect to individual artists.

In terms of the artist as a situated producer of cultural texts, the work of Theodor Adorno has been highly influential for this particular study in framing the macro-level enquiry to a situated ‘I’, even though, again, his work and that of the Frankfurt School straddled the various levels of enquiry. Adorno posited a Marxist-influenced approach to cultural production in the modern setting, which had as a concern, the social, cultural and political influences on the situated individual.

### *1.5.2 Production and Gatekeeping at the Meso Level*

The main research concerns at the meso level are how institutions approach digital art, how they conceptualise, define and serve to shape and inform the practices of digital artists, and how they see the state in terms of funding and policy-making for the arts. The concerns also centre around the institutions’ relationships with artists, and the gatekeeping and taste making ‘currencies’ of the art world. This level of enquiry also focuses on a socially grounded view of technology.

Technological determinism promotes the idea that agency lies primarily with technologies; that the technologies are somehow autonomous and outside the influence of societal factors. It suggests that the technology acts upon society whilst standing

outside society (McLuhan, 1962, 1964, 1967; Castells, 1999). Such approaches imply that technology operates at a macro level, outside of societal and cultural domains. Yet this standpoint has proven to be problematic. By placing agency primarily with the technologies, it homogenises society and ignores influences on the origins and uses of new technologies. It can promote a form of hype around new technologies, and thus can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where society appears powerless to act upon it, thereby relinquishing power to the technology itself.

The social construction of technology approach attempted to delve further into the nuanced relationship between technology and society. Raymond Williams was a major innovator in this field, positing the view that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between technology and society which is usually ignored by the technological determinists (Williams, 1974). MacKenzie and Wajcman (1985) explored this relationship further in their work entitled *The Social Shaping of Technology*. They proposed a more nuanced relationship between technology and society, noting that technology can be shaped by many different social factors, for example, cultural prejudice, science, existing technologies, context within a system, and path dependence.

While the social construction of technology approach (SCOT) considered the complexities and nuances involved in the relationship between society and technology, it can be critiqued for undervaluing the role that technology may play in shaping society. This critique applies to social shaping of technology in its 'hardest' form. However, a further approach to the technology/society relationship, known as actor-network theory (ANT) has been advanced, which synthesises the view of both theoretical approaches. Bruno Latour, a major proponent of the ANT approach, suggests that technology and society are mutually constitutive. A key tenet of ANT is that society is intrinsically networked in nature, thus allowing for the standpoint that a technology can effect a societal network, but importantly that the technology is *not outside the network* and can itself be affected through being part of the hybrid network (Law, 1992; Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, and Kelly, 2003, 2009).

A second aspect of enquiry at the meso level of analysis is that of cultural production and art. Within the cultural studies canon, there has been a movement to conceptually group cultural artefacts that are produced for commercial reasons with cultural artefacts whose primary function is not for mass-consumption in a commercial way. The

movement regards all of these artefacts as cultural texts, and, also homogenises original creative works with interpretations or reworkings of existing texts (Hesmondhalgh 2007). Some cultural studies theorists, in asserting that there should not be a distinction between the validity of high art and popular culture have attested to the power of the consumer to interpret texts, thereby downgrading the status of the creator of such texts (Fiske 1989a). This ‘active audience/viewer’ trope of cultural studies has also been emphasised as a particularly prominent feature of modern art, according to many art-world theorists. However, this has gone as far as to suggest that the consumer can subvert the capitalist ideologies marked by popular culture, but this is a highly contested stance. For example, David Morley (2006) has called for the field of cultural studies to also consider high culture as an important area of research.

In contrast to this stance, critical theory can provide an alternate model of cultural production which considers not just cultural tastes of consumers, but how the consumers are culturally situated. Theodor Adorno has critiqued popular culture and challenged the view that the individual consumer has power within that meso level dynamic (Adorno, 1991). He notes that the primary aim of the ‘culture industries’ is not to inform, or even entertain its consumers, but to make a profit. In a sense, the consumer is being used as a money-making tool within a broader institutional domain. This calls into question the content being produced by the culture industries, as it is being created for profit and not primarily for pure expression or with consideration to aesthetics or truth. Far from being elitist, as has often been suggested of Adorno (Adorno, 1991), his concern is that by homogenising the study of high art with popular culture, the specific features of *both* fields are not fully respected. Walter Benjamin, a contemporary of Adorno, also warned of the dangers of commodification of culture. Whilst attesting to the emancipatory possibilities that emerge with mechanical reproduction, Benjamin also warns that the resulting loss of the genuine artistic ‘aura’ can lead to a loss of meaning, thereby commodifying the cultural text (Benjamin et al, 2008).

The third area of enquiry at this meso level is that of gatekeeping and taste making in the arts. Here, the work of Pierre Bourdieu also firmly situates the question of cultural production and cultural appropriation at the meso and also macro levels of analysis. He has questioned the notion of a ‘pure’ micro level aesthetic experience, instead positing that aesthetic taste is appropriated in a complex nexus of social, cultural and economic factors. He has provided, in his works *Distinction* (1984) and *The Rules of Art* (1996), an

exegesis on the concept of cultural capital, whereby economic and financial capital can be exchanged for cultural goods, thus increasing symbolic capital, or status. Bourdieu treats cultural production ‘as “position taking” in a field of possibilities, a market in which symbolic capital or cultural distinction are product, reward and resource: both means and end’ (Jenkins 2002: xii). Whilst this is a stance that is easily critiqued for its reductionism, nonetheless it provides a further model around which discussions about cultural gatekeeping and taste making by the art institutions and art critics, can be opened up.

An alternate institutionalist approach to cultural production emerged in the US in the 1970s, and is appropriate to this research for its unpacking of a production nexus with regard to the different sub-fields of culture. This school of thought attempted a practical and systematic meso-level analysis of the interconnected factors involved in the production of culture, addressing culture within social and economic contexts. Central figures in this approach include Richard Peterson, Narasimhan Anand, Paul Hirsch, Howard Becker and Diana Crane.

Applying this to Ireland reveals tensions at the meso level. The postcolonial theories of Spivak and Bhabha help to contextualise the Irish cultural identity, and in keeping with the theme of ‘situatedness’, this provides a historical, political and cultural relevance to artistic production in Ireland. Luke Gibbons and Terence Brown help to examine Irish identity more granularly. Finally, the work of Cyril Barrett, Tom Duddy and Declan McGonagle further contextualise Irish postcolonial identity to art critique in Ireland.

Refining the subject matter further, the survey of existing literature has also given consideration to theories of digital art. The work of Margot Lovejoy is considered for her wide-ranging overview of digital art, whilst also acknowledging the work of Walter Benjamin, and applying it to the digital age. Lovejoy’s work thus provides a continuity within a theoretical frame that employs a history-friendly approach. Along with Lovejoy, Lev Manovich has attempted a survey of the specificities of digital art and new media. Domenico Quaranta has problematised how new media and contemporary discourses on art both relate to digital media, and Martin Lister has provided an overview of key debates in the recent literature on new media. Finally, Nicolas Bourriaud addresses the debate between modernist and postmodernist concepts in art through positing a conceptual frame called ‘altermodernity’. Through these more

contemporary works, the literature review explores how the specificities of digital art - the aesthetics, the concerns, the possibilities - can be better understood.

### *1.5.3 Innovation, the Crisis and the State at the Macro Level*

At the macro level enquiry, the main research concerns are of the state and the arts, the crisis (a crisis that is not just economic and financial, but social and cultural), the state's foregrounding of the arts since the Global Irish Forum at Farmleigh, and how these discourses map to policy. First though, this level of enquiry is concerned with systems of innovation.

Traditional frameworks of innovation tend to prioritise the macro level, focusing on national and regional *systems*, to explain modalities of innovation, with the manufacturing sector as the default site of analysis. Recent decades have seen complementary systems theories of innovation, posited by Lundvall (1992) and Nelson (1993), including some focused on sectoral specificities. Nelson explained the importance of empirical research on a country-by-country approach, whereas Lundvall suggested approaching the subject in a more thematic way. Mjoset applied an approach similar to Nelson in his 1992 study, including Ireland in a six-country study of national systems of innovation (Mjoset, 1992). Evolutionary theory has also influenced the systems of innovation approach, suggesting that innovators produce artefacts that are progressively superior to previous artefacts currently in existence (Edquist, 1997). This literature also yields the concept of 'path dependence' which can be fruitfully adapted to understand the parameters shaping innovation in the domain of digital art.

However, prior studies also identify certain flaws and gaps these frameworks. The social shaping of technology poses challenges to the evolutionary framework of what constitutes 'better' in technological development. It points out that what might be considered a 'better' technology in some areas might not be considered 'better' in others. It also reveals that sometimes the 'best' technology does not necessarily become widely adopted (MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999). Therefore, what could hold on a macro, supra-national context may, like technological determinism, not take into account some nuances in the innovation process, such as the meso level social factors that might cause an innovation to be either adopted or rejected (Rogers, 1966/1995).



Early studies of systems of innovation approaches focused on national systems. They were also critiqued for being too particular to specific industries (Nelson & Rosenberg, 1993), the authors thus calling for a sectoral approach to innovation. Works such as Pavitt and Patel (1991) attempted this, but only attempted to categorise more traditional or 'high-tech' industrial sectors. However, more recent work on services innovation yields evidence on how services innovation is very different to innovation processes in manufacturing, 'high tech', or technology supplying sectors. This points to an argument that the services sector warrants its own field of study. Boden & Miles (2000) noted that in traditional frameworks of innovation, the services sector has been largely ignored. Howells & Tether (2004) also explained the importance of researching innovation in the services sector by noting how the services sector accounts for a majority of employment and GDP in developed countries.

Within the recent research on innovation in the services sector, much attention falls on the knowledge-intensive services (K-IBS). However, most of the research engaging with K-IBS has focused on innovation in computer services and related managerial systems or business services. These may be viewed as equivalents to 'high tech' services, but which are very distinct and different to the media and cultural services sectors on several counts. In terms of innovative practices, there can be a 'special case' made for content production within the digital media sector, where traditional concepts of 'research and development' have their equivalents in the form of tacit knowledge, creative, authoring and design skills and content creation abilities (Cawley and Preston, 2004). The authors note that the software/technical knowledge is just one factor in this sector, observing that the most crucial supports or enablers of innovation in the sector also comprise novelty, entrepreneurship and idea-generation. This strand is further analysed and contextualised to digital media production in Ireland by Preston, Kerr and Cawley (2009). Their work provides an interdisciplinary conceptual and empirical frame in which to situate processes and practices in the area of digital media content production, and provides a contextualisation for digital media artistic production in Ireland.

## **1.6 Methodology**

### *1.6.1. A post-positivist methodological framework*

This research thesis employs methodologies that are essentially post-positivist. Whilst positivist approach has links with the ‘scientific method’, is associated with ‘objectivity’ and ‘verifiability’, it has limitations when applied to studies of culture. A post-positivist framework however, takes account of a multiplicity of potential knowledges, attests to a relative, not absolute, relativity and thus considers ‘situatedness’ in its approaches.

### *1.6.2 Qualitative Methods*

In keeping with a three-segment theoretical framework, I have employed methodological techniques of interviewing participants related to both the micro-level and meso-level influences. These interviews also provide an insight into macro-level discourses on funding, policy and the crisis, through engaging with participants who are practicing digital artists and representatives of arts organisations and institutions.

The methodological practice of ethnography has also been employed throughout the duration of the research project. This has included becoming involved with a digital arts and technology group in Dublin, regular gallery visits, and attending workshops on the artistic application of technologies. This is further complemented by the third methodological approach of case studies of artistic works and events in the digital art sector.

## 1.7 Thesis Guide and Chapter Outline

### 1.7.1 Thesis Guide

Following on from this introduction, this thesis will first analyse existing literature in the fields of technology and society, innovation, theories of art, cultural production, postcolonialism and Irish cultural identity. This is followed by a chapter outlining the methodologies employed (chapter 6), a brief overview of empirical findings (chapter 7), three chapters devoted to primary research findings (chapters 8-10) and a concluding chapter (chapter 11).

Chapters 2-5 explore the various subsets of existing literature that are relevant to this research approach to digital art in Ireland. This is to introduce the reader to the various sets of knowledge that have informed this thesis. As this introductory chapter has outlined, the thesis encompasses five major themes across three levels of enquiry. Thus, chapters 2-5 aim to provide a theoretical grounding that may be discussed across the themes and through the levels. For example, whilst chapter 2 discusses technology and its relationship with society, those theoretical perspectives are then applied in chapters 8-10 in specific ways according to the three level approach. Thus, in chapter 8, I discuss individual, or *micro* level opinions and concerns of artists working with technology, in chapter 9 I investigate technology at the *meso* level through a problematisation of technology at the level of gatekeepers at art museums, and in chapter 10 I interrogate how state institutions for the arts perceive a technology-focused artistic practice at a *macro* level. This general principle applies for all five themes across all three levels.

To guide the reader through this thesis, I suggest that the key themes be borne in mind, along with the overall aim of the thesis which is to explore, problematise and understand digital media cultural production in Ireland at three levels. Nonetheless, there is an attempt to focus in chapter 8 on the *micro* level of enquiry, in chapter 9 on the *meso* level, and in chapter 10 on the *macro* level. Thus, the reader will see that in chapter 8, formulations of the ‘digital aesthetic’ first introduced in chapter 4 will be discussed with individual artists at the micro level of enquiry. Chapter 8 also includes micro-level accounts of the role of technology in arts practice, along with a formulation of how artists innovate through three ‘features’ or characteristics of digital art.

The meso level of enquiry is foregrounded in chapter 9 where the opinions and concerns of the individual artists are taken as being ‘in discussion’ with the meso-level gatekeepers in arts institutions. This is to mirror the assertion in this introductory chapter that the three levels overlap, interact and dialogue with each other. Thus, whilst in chapter 9 I do include a problematisation of digital art practices from the micro level, where artists consider digital art to be under represented in Ireland, the chapter also introduces perspectives from the meso level, where gatekeepers at arts institutions reveal issues of collection, acquisition, exhibition, display and archival of digital works.

Again, whilst it is in practical terms nigh on impossible to separate the three, dialoguing levels of enquiry, an attempt is made in chapter 10 to foreground the macro level of enquiry, through analyses of the ‘role’ of art at a state level, an investigation of state-sponsored cultural funding bodies in Ireland and a case study of the state broadcaster with respect to art and culture. The methodology of case study is used again in this chapter with an analysis of funding for digital art through the case of a digital arts group.

In the next section below, I describe more granularly, chapter by chapter, what is included in this thesis, in an attempt to provide a ‘roadmap’ through the themes and levels of the thesis.

### *1.7.2 Thesis Chapter Outline*

Chapter 2 starts by analysing theories of technology, including that of technological determinism. This determinist perspective is then critiqued through theories of society in which technology is situated and contextualised. The work of McLuhan and Williams are discussed, and a third theory - actor-network theory - is then introduced as a ‘third way’ to interpret the place of technology in society. The chapter then moves on to a discourse on innovation - the processes and the systems involved in innovation. It then looks at diffusion of innovations, and how new innovations are adopted.

Chapter 3 moves on to look at the production of culture. It starts by providing an analysis of the Frankfurt School of critical theory through the work of Walter Benjamin

and Theodor Adorno, along with some personal correspondence between them, where they debated the role of art and the potential of new media. It also introduces the concept of the 'culture industry' through the writings of Adorno. The chapter then provides an alternate view to the production of culture through the work of Richard Peterson and others. This perspective is then critiqued through the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Finally, the chapter introduces the cultural theories of Pierre Bourdieu.

Chapter 4 moves into the subject area of art, looking at perspectives on art through cultural studies scholars such as Hesmondhalgh and Fiske. It critiques the cultural studies perspectives on art by introducing the work of Simon O'Sullivan and his theory of art as an encounter. The chapter then moves on to consider specifically digital art and aesthetics through the work of Lovejoy, Wood, Lister et al., Manovich, Quaranta and Bourriaud.

Chapter 5 is concerned with situating the research to Ireland. It explores postcolonial theory and Irish cultural identity since 1922. Concepts such as the social shaping of culture are explored with respect to Irish identity. The nexus of nationhood, identity and culture are explored, as is globalisation. The chapter also includes a critique of postcoloniality in Irish art criticism by an analysis of works by Irish cultural theorists as Tom Duddy, Luke Gibbons, Declan McGonagle and Ian Kilroy.

Chapter 6 centres on an outline of the methodological approaches. The justification for the methodology is expanded, as is the implementation of the methodologies of interviewing, case study and ethnography.

Chapter 7 introduces the empirical research on a themed basis and posits a 'spectrum' hypothesis of attitudes, practices and acceptances. It outlines the main themes that emerged during the research including innovation and the digital aesthetic, support and enablement of digital art practices, and the arts and digital art at a time of crisis.

Chapter 8 opens with the theme of technology - its use as a tool and/or medium, and its role in digital art. It explores the digital aesthetic which pays attention to a mode of production that incorporates technology, whilst being critical of it. It examines collaborative practices in terms of sites of innovation. It considers the use of open

source software in what is considered to be a political move on the part of artists, and it explores the practice of ‘repurposing’ materials in digital art practice as an act of either incremental or radical innovation.

Chapter 9 addresses the theme of support and enablement of digital art practices. It engages with issues of representation of digital art in galleries, problematises as to why cultural gatekeepers can be conceptually and ideologically opposed to foregrounding digital art practices, and it explores attitudes adopted and strategies employed by artists in the face of representational challenges, concluding by suggesting an opportunity for digital art to foreground itself in Ireland.

Chapter 10 analyses macro-level issues, including funding at the state level for the arts. The chapter also analyses media and political discourse in the arts and cultural sector. Here, the ‘role’ of the arts is foregrounded, as the economic and financial crisis spread, with attention turning to discourses of art as ‘rescuer’ to the economic difficulties.

Chapter 11 provides a summary review of the main findings of the research, and concludes the research thesis by identifying limitations within the research, whilst also suggesting possibilities for further research.

# **Chapter 2**

## **Technology, Society and Innovation**

## **Chapter 2: Technology, Society and Innovation**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I review the literature on theories of technology, society and innovation and seek to identify certain concepts and ideas which inform the theoretical framework for this study of digital art in Ireland. This chapter thus interrogates issues pertaining to themes three and four, technology and innovation, as introduced in section 1.3.2, and addresses the key questions therein. Whilst technological means have historically been available to artists, ranging from animal hair brushes and gouache of the Renaissance to the use of gyroscopes and electricity in the works of Moholy-Nagy and Duchamp, I suggest that in the current mode of production, significant attention is given in media and political discourses to the subject of technology and its role in our lives. The digital artist, situated in this zeitgeist is thus not immune to changes in the material means for creative expression nor to various discourses surrounding the potentials of technology. This chapter thus explores theories of society and technology with a view to situating technology as an important component in digital art production, whilst also recognising its place as merely one factor in the innovative process.



## 2.2 Technological Determinism

### 2.2.1 Introduction: *Of Galaxies and Villages*

Manuel Castells, a prominent professor of sociology, and champion of the information age has described Canadian communications theorist Marshall McLuhan as ‘the great visionary who revolutionised thinking in communications’ (Castells 1999: 357). Castells has also (metaphorically) named a galaxy after McLuhan, explaining that he did this ‘in homage to the revolutionary thinker’ who formulated the mass media electronic communication system ‘as a distinctive mode of cognitive expression’ (ibid.). Given this and other examples of the ongoing influence of McLuhan’s theories on contemporary discourse on technology and society, I will proceed to review his theories of media. In a wide-ranging overview of the features of new media, Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, and Kelly (2003/2009) provide a comprehensive analysis of McLuhan, his works and key concepts. Indeed, Lister et al. (2009) demonstrate that McLuhan’s views on the then ‘mass media’ of the 1960s have still powerful relevance, more than forty years after first publication. In reviewing the work of McLuhan, I will argue against its determinist stance around technology and its presumed relation to cultural and societal change.

### 2.2.2 *Technology, The Extensions of Man, Media Cold and Hot*

In *Understanding Media* (1964), McLuhan proposes one of his most famous aphorisms, that ‘the medium is the message’ (McLuhan 1964: 7), the tenet of this aphorism is that the content of the medium is unimportant, but that the medium itself actively shapes communication. This determinist viewpoint is underlined - quite literally - by the “Extensions of Man” subtitle of *Understanding Media*, underpinning how in McLuhan’s view, a medium, media or technology (he conflates the terms frequently) is ‘any extension of ourselves’ (ibid.: 7)<sup>3</sup>. McLuhan asserted that technological developments extended the human body outside the bounds of its bare corporeal reality, both spatially and temporally. He observed how historically, ‘during the mechanical ages we had

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3 In his 1967 work *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*, McLuhan furthers this point by noting how ‘societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication’ (McLuhan 1967, in Lister et al, 2003 – emphasis added).

extended our bodies in space' (ibid.), whilst in the current technological age 'we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time' (ibid.).

For McLuhan, these media and technology-based 'extensions' have societal effects, regardless of the content of the mediums. 'The personal and social consequences of any medium – that is, of any extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology' argued McLuhan (McLuhan 1964: 9). Thus, media and technology are *producers* of societal *effects*, acting upon society regardless of the content therein. To elucidate this point, McLuhan suggested a consideration of the light bulb as 'pure information'. He positioned the electric light as 'a medium without a message', and regardless of what the purpose of the use of the light is, the light has effects. He cites this example to reinforce his conviction that 'the medium is the message', positing that the content-empty medium of electric light 'shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action', causing both 'psychic and social' effects. For McLuhan, the 'content' or uses of the light are redundant, a distraction to understanding the 'character' of the medium under consideration, and even 'ineffectual in shaping the form of human association'.

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan posited the concepts of 'hot' and 'cold' media, based on degrees of 'definition' provided by such media channels (McLuhan 1964: 37). For McLuhan, 'a hot medium is one that extends one single sense in "high definition"'. This 'high definition' is not that kind which we currently know to be part of emergent TV broadcasting and DVD media. In McLuhan's world, 'high definition' is 'the state of being well filled with data', such as a photograph which fills the sense of sight with rich data. In contrast, a cartoon image is 'low definition' as 'very little visual information is provided'<sup>4</sup>. Extending these concepts to include issues of participation, McLuhan suggests a correlation between the 'definition' of a medium and the level of participation which it requires. For McLuhan, hot media forms do not 'leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience' and are therefore 'low in participation' or 'completion' of sensory information by the audience. Thus for McLuhan, the *effects* of

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4 Likewise, for auditory perception telephone is a 'cool' or 'low definition' medium, as 'the ear is given a meager amount of information', presumably by the compression of the audio signal itself, but also for McLuhan like speech where 'so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener'.

hot and cool mediums vary, again clearly placing the medium at the centre of influence.

McLuhan also associates art with its format as medium, rather than with any deference to the content of artistic works. This is specifically revealed during his contemplation of the artistic movement of Cubism, describing it as setting up ‘an interplay of planes and contradiction or dramatic conflict of patterns, light, textures that “drives home the message” by involvement’ (ibid.: 11). Thus, posits McLuhan, the ‘illusion of perspective’ in traditional art is dropped by the Cubist movement, ‘in favor of instant sensory awareness of the whole’. ‘Cubism’, opined McLuhan, ‘by seizing on instant total awareness, suddenly announced that the medium is the message’. He suggested that other disciplines can also be considered in this way, where ‘specialized segments of attention’ in the fields of science and the arts such as physics and poetry ‘have shifted to total field’. This shift for McLuhan is indeed total - and totalising - as resulting from this shift ‘we can now say, “The medium is the message” quite naturally’.

I posit that McLuhan’s reduction of art and society itself to passive receivers of technology or media is a technological determinist viewpoint, whose argument posits that technology drives social change. This view implies that technology stands outside of society as an autonomous entity, acts upon it but in itself is exogenous to society or culture. Determinism implies an uncritical inevitability about technological progress and change. I suggest that such determinism in, for example, the media and political institutions, is potentially detrimental to critiques of technology and its role in society. Evidence exists that such institutions do take this approach. Preston (2001) notes that the theory of technological determinism ‘is one that most frequently informs popular and journalistic accounts of the effects of impacts of new ICT’ (Preston 2001: 111). Lister et al, (2003) observe how McLuhan’s theories appeal to big business, stating that they serve ‘for corporate business’ as ‘a source of propaganda’ (Lister et al., 2003: 73), and how in a more general societal setting, it appeals to those who ‘see new media as bringing about radical cultural change or have some special interest in celebrating its potential’ (ibid.). MacKenzie and Wajcman also draw attention to the determinist tendency in the media, noting that ‘(w)hen this intertwining (between society and technology) is discussed in newspapers or other mass media, the dominant account of it can be summed up as technological determinism’ (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999: xiv).

I suggest that in these determinist propositions, McLuhan reduces the humanistic and

societal implications of media down to the scale of the technologies and media involved, irrespective of the content produced. This has implications for the cultural producer, and the producer of digital artefacts which are often heavily technology-based, but often utilise technology as *content* to critique technology. Thus, a reductionist view of technology as determining our communication stands at odds with the cultural producer who utilises digital technologies with a sensitivity to the medium as deliverer of content, conscious of its affordances and its limitations. In the chapter 2 addenda in appendix A I further develop my critique of technological determinism by means of two determinist stances on technology by Neil Postman and Manuel Castels that posit highly variant world views, yet similarly position technology as the driver of such worlds.

## 2.3 Technology as Determined: Social Shaping Theories

### 2.3.1 Introduction

Whilst technological determinist approaches to technology foregrounded the technological means as primary actors, critiques of such ideology sought a repositioning of the role of technology, arguing that the technology/society relationship was much more than a one-directional one. In this section I explore an early critique of McLuhanite determinism by Raymond Williams, and introduce theories of the social shaping of technology, which suggest that social factors often play a role in shaping technological artefacts in a way unacknowledged by the determinist stance.

### 2.3.2 Raymond Williams Challenges Determinism

The cultural theorist Raymond Williams was an early critic of the McLuhanite stance on technology and society. In his 1974 work *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, Williams posited that statements about the ‘effects’, or what was ‘brought about’ by various technologies brought up concerns. For Williams, the act of making such statements where ‘effects’ were already an *a priori* component to the debate, served to hide more complex philosophical questions. Such uncritically adopted tropes such as that of the effects of technology masked such questions as ‘whether it is reasonable to describe any technology as a cause, or, if we think of it as a cause, as what kind of cause, and in what relations with other kinds of causes’ (Williams 1974: 2). Williams therefore observed that if there is an implication of ‘effect’, there is also the implication of ‘cause’<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, according to Williams, once philosophical questions about technology are centred on effect, it is to the detriment of the exploration of cause.

Williams posited that whilst it is often difficult to engage in arguments of cause and effect when ‘we know how to do’ more practical empirical research such as surveys in the discipline of cultural studies, he nonetheless sees these more philosophical questions, those often regarded as ‘merely theoretical and abstract’, as fundamental to the

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5 For example, the ideology of a cause and effect relationship between television, society, culture and personhood

discipline (ibid.). He argued that the questions about the relationship between a technology and a society are, rather than difficult or abstract, hugely practical. Williams also observed that if debates centring around technology (Williams uses the example of television) are limited to issues of ‘cause’, or a phenomenon that ‘leads to’ another societal and cultural outcome, then, as passive receivers ‘we can at best modify or seek to control its effects’ (ibid.). Williams also considers the corollary; if we do concede that technology as an effect, what are the causes that has resulted in its particular use?

Thus, such questions undermine the simplistic determinism that centres around the causes and effects of technology, that positions technology as the major actor. Williams’ enquiries on the social and cultural determinants of technology are now seen to ‘have been a major, shaping contribution to the constitution of an academic discipline’ (Lister et al., 2003: 73). The questions bring the role of society as an influence on technological change to the foreground. Whilst McLuhan set apart technology and humankind, Williams worked to find out the underlying social dimension to technology, asking cultural critics to contemplate why the technology may have been developed, why it was adopted, why it was successful or why it failed. This enquiry led to the emergence of studies about human agency, path determinism, the relationship between technology and politics, and that between technology and science. Where McLuhan saw ‘mankind’ as a homogeneous entity – glorified users of tools – Williams’ enquiry demanded that we include ‘mankind’ in its myriad, complex social, cultural, political and scientific dimensions once again at the hub of discourses around technology. For Williams, just as with old technologies and media, new ICTs such as television can be the basis of good or poor cultural productions.

### *2.3.3 MacKenzie and Wajcman: Social Shaping of Technology*

Following on from the work of Williams, Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman developed the study of technology within the context of social dynamics further in their 1985 work *The Social Shaping of Technology*. In this work, they collated essays together to explore the social shaping model of the technology/society relationship<sup>6</sup>. The authors

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<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, I refer to the second edition of the work from 1999, where the editors explain that in the time between editions it has become more accepted that there exists a two-way relationship between technology and society.

observe how the social sciences are behind disciplines such as engineering in their discourses of technology, in so far as engineers have long accepted that the technological superiority of an object cannot alone counter more ‘social’ issues of expense, aesthetic unattractiveness, the object being unfit for purpose, or politically problematic dimensions, which can all cause a technologically superior object to nonetheless fail<sup>7</sup>. Thus, for the authors, existing discourses of technology within the discipline of sociology amounted to ‘a naive technological determinism’ (ibid.) that was simplistic, both politically and intellectually. This position encouraged political passivity and reduced critical discourse to positions that adopted an uncritical embracing of technology, a defensive adaptation to it, or a rejection of it. The authors, echoing the sentiments of Raymond Williams posited how determinist accounts of technology reduce the complex relationship between technology and society ‘to a simple cause and effect sequence’ (ibid.) in which no consideration is given to how social actors and the interrelationships between them affect the things they make.

#### *2.3.4 The Multiple Shapings of Technology*

MacKenzie and Wajcman explored the debate on the society and technology relationship through case studies, in an exercise that acknowledges the surface-level ‘common sense’ ideology of technological determinism, whilst undermining it with analyses that uncover the social dimension to the cases. One such case study by Langdon Winner tells the story of Robert Moses, who was involved in the construction of New York infrastructure from about the 1920s to 1970s. Moses had overpasses and bridges built with nine feet of clearance, an insignificant detail in construction to the technological determinist.

However, from evidence cited in Moses’ biography, the height of the overpasses was more sinister in its intent, designed to discourage the passage of public transport through certain wealthy areas, thus reflecting Moses’ ‘social-class bias and racial prejudice’ (Winner, in MacKenzie and Wajcman, 1999) by confining the poorer classes

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<sup>7</sup> It was a social scientist named John Law who coined the phrase ‘heterogeneous engineering’ to be understood as the engineering of social relations as well as of physical objects, whereas on a practical level engineers had been aware of this much earlier. The authors also referred to the work of Misa (1988) who observed that technology is ‘both socially shaped and society-shaping’ (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999). It was therefore on that backdrop that they collated their second edition

to the poorer areas<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the technology of Moses' bridges alone did not determine the passage of people, rather the technology was shaped by the social biases of Moses. In a technological determinist lens, this example explains how specific designs or applications of technology can literally shape society through bridge construction. However, the further analysis revealed how complex social concerns of prejudice and politics determined how the technology was manifested.

For MacKenzie and Wajcman, technological systems too are constrained by other 'social' factors outside technology. They argue that amongst the 'goals' of a system are the economic goals of cutting costs and increasing profit, thus suggesting that 'typically, technological decisions are also economic decisions' (ibid.) and thus can not be considered outside that economic sphere. In this way, technology is embedded within market competition, which forces change on the technological systems, making any discourse around the 'autonomy' or 'separateness' of technology from societal influences naïve indeed. Whilst Mackenzie and Wajcman cited Edison's consideration of 'profit and loss' in the design of his light bulb, another source of electric light – the fluorescent light – was the subject of some economic controversy, cited in Bijker's study of the technology and society relationship. When General Electric wished to introduce the fluorescent light into circulation in 1938, the electricity companies objected, protesting that its efficiency would damage their profits. After much struggle, the design of the light was changed, but that change attracted the attention of government antitrust investigators who sued GE. However, in another twist to the story, GE were able to defend against the suit with the help of the war department by claiming that such interference would hinder the war effort. So in this case, politics, big business and economics all converged to result in a highly complex technology and society relationship (Bijker 1995).

For MacKenzie and Wajcman, the determinist stance regarding the 'best' technology is also under question. A determinist stance suggests that regardless of economic, social or political challenges, the 'best' technology will be the successful technology. In response to this, MacKenzie and Wajcman suggest that the notion of the best technology is complex, and what is 'best' from one point of view might not be 'best' from another. Therefore, the subjective perception of 'best' makes inherent in the

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<sup>8</sup> In a double confinement, Moses later vetoed a proposal to extend the rail network from Long Island to Jones Beach.



argument of the technological determinist the implication that human nature is also involved. The authors further observe how technologies ‘often manifest increasing returns to adoption’ (ibid.), with performance of a technology often improving as it is used, where user experience is related to the object designers in an iterative process. These incremental improvements can further strengthen and fine-tune the technology. Likewise, vulnerabilities (known as ‘reverse salients’) in the technology are also potentially discovered and then eliminated or reduced as the technology is utilised. The benefits of early adoption can also affect what becomes regarded as the ‘best’ technology<sup>9</sup>.

### 2.3.5 Social Construction of Technology

Moving on from the social *shaping* approaches outlined above, the concept of the social *construction* of technology (or SCOT) was developed by Wiebe Bijker and Trevor Pinch. SCOT takes into account ‘relevant social groups’, observing how ‘those groups who share a meaning of the artefact’ can affect the development of a technology (Kline & Pinch, in MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1999). Such groups include advertisers, engineers and consumers as obvious agents of influence, but they also point out that other groups can all attach different meanings to a technology. The ‘meaning’ that these disparate groups attach to the technology can explain potential development paths of the technology. They term this the ‘interpretative flexibility’ of an artefact (ibid.). Kline and Pinch also suggest that interpretative flexibility has an end point where ‘closure’ and ‘stabilisation’ of the technology occurs. The mechanisms of closure and stabilisation thus cause certain technologies to achieve some dominance<sup>10</sup>. However, it is also possible for new problems to emerge in an established, stable technology and for another spate of interpretative flexibility to occur in once again, an iterative process. Thus, for Kline and Pinch, the interpretative flexibility of a technological artefact renders it subject to different interpretations depending on use by variant social groups. Thus, one

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9 The QWERTY computer keyboard serves as an illustration. This design of computer keyboard lays in its historical genesis in the typewriter, where it was important to separate keys in such a way as to minimise the likelihood of them being hit together and jamming the typewriter. Thus, the design had a historically early adoption in the mechanical typewriter, and even though the electronic keyboard negated the need to have such a keyboard layout, the keyboard design did not change, despite it now having been shown to be less effective and productive as the DVORAK layout.

10 Although in the case of aircraft technology, the authors observe how jet engine and the propeller engine co-exist, both having reached closure and stability in their own, disparate ways.

cannot assume that a technology will have the same meaning 'for all spaces, times and communities' (ibid.), where one social group may adopt a technology readily yet another one may reject it outright, for reasons other than technological ones.

Thus, the 'social shaping of technology' work of Williams, Bijker, MacKenzie, Wajcman, Kline and Pinch has largely aimed to counter the determinist stance - whether utopian or dystopian - asking the researcher to consider complex interactions of technological development, adoption, use and success within a broader societal, political and economic domain. I suggest that such a standpoint regarding technology is highly pertinent to the study of digital art, where technology and aesthetics are often intertwined. I suggest that to adopt a determinist stance in the survey of digital art would fetishise the technological component to the detriment of the aesthetic, cultural, political and economic factors involved in art-making. However, the social shaping approach itself has not been without its own critique, through the negating of the effects of technology and an excessive foregrounding of the social dimension in its 'hard' form in social construction of technology (SCOT) theories. In the next section, I outline a 'third way' of actor-network theory and suggest that for the study of digital art - where technology plays an important role - it is a viable model through which to examine the complex connections between technology and art, where technology holds a significant place, but is also significantly examined and critiqued.

## 2.4 The Third Way of Actor-Network Theory

### 2.4.1 Introduction: Agency Vs Structure

The work of Bruno Latour and his various collaborators including Shirley Strum has also proved an important influence on how the relationship with technology and society is currently conceptualised in the social sciences<sup>11</sup>. From studies in primatology, Latour and Strum concluded that technology is constitutive of human society, positing the erroneousness of overly socially determinist stances to theorise social relations independently of technology<sup>12</sup>. Thus any theory of society which disregards societal relationship with technology amounts to 'baboon theory' due to its focus on primitive behaviour patterns that disregard the embedded technological dimensions inherent in modern human societal interactions (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999). Rather for Latour, both humans and technology possess *agency* within a broader sociological web of influence.

The sociological debate around agency and structure has centred on the ability of the individual human to act with free will whilst also situated within conflicting social structures, where individuals act according to social norms, minimising their individuality in favour of group acceptance. Pierre Bourdieu<sup>13</sup> attempted to dismantle the dualistic nature of the debate around agency and structure, instead maintaining that the subjective and objective parts of social interaction are interlinked into a more

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11 Latour and Strum investigated into the field of primatology, and found that within baboon societies, there are not just fixed social structures that the individual baboons fit into. Rather, the individuals are constantly renegotiating their roles and the social structure results from this individual organisation rather than the other way around. Their point is that primatologists view baboons similarly to the way sociologists view human structure - that humans are actors, creating their structure in and through interaction. However, primate societies are limited temporally and spatially but human societies have histories and geographies beyond the immediate time span so are infinitely more complex. Latour and Strum also cite the use of 'material resources and symbols' (Latour and Strum in MacKenzie, 1999) as a difference between the societies. They say that it is particularly the use of material resources that make human society as we know viable. This therefore makes the technological sphere part of what makes society possible, instead of being a sphere separate from society.

12 See the chapter 2 addenda in appendix A for an account of Latour's case study which analyses the complex factors which led to the failure of the Paris transport system *Aramis*

13 whose cultural theories I discuss further in chapter 4

symbiotic relationship (Marshall & Scott: 2005)<sup>14</sup>.

Actor Network Theory explores concepts of mutual agency between human and technological ‘actors’. Therefore I suggest that the work of Bruno Latour attempts to transcend the dualistic approach to agency and structure, technology and society, in a framework applicable to a survey of digital art, where technology is integral to the practice, yet is often explored, shaped and reworked by the practitioner.

#### *2.4.2 Actor-Network Theory*

Actor-network theory suggests that the concept of ‘agency’ usually attributed to humans in sociological studies also extends to non-humans. Key to Latour’s theory is the inclusion of a networked dimension, where agency occurs within a network of other agents, both human and non-human. Here, Latour’s theory becomes controversial, as it breaks down the relationship between society and individual, or between culture and nature. As Lister et al (2003) observe, the case of Hubert Dreyfus who challenged a computer to beat him at chess (and lost) showed the lengths to which certain parties would go to guard their ‘specialness’ as humans. However, in an actor-network context, the machine invented to meet Dreyfus’ challenge would not have existed without human motivation for it to exist. Nor would the human interaction with the machine happen without the machine existing. Third, the game itself was dependent on the human and machine both existing and having motivation to interact. Therefore, the Dreyfus example serves to elucidate the combined agency between human, machine and game. All agents ‘acted’ in an interdependent sphere to arrive at a complex outcome. Whilst this is just one example of how actor-network theory can be applied to debates on ‘man vs machine’ Latour posits that similar consideration be given to major institutions and organisations. Thus, according to actor-network theory, humans do not just create the networks of organisations in a socially determinist way; nor are they acted upon by them in a technologically determinist stance, but both ‘agents’ are in an interdependent

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<sup>14</sup> As a brief aside, I also note that CG Jung described this conflict between human agency and structure, positing the view that researchers need to take into account the individuality of social agents when conceptualising human interactions with society. He elucidated the struggle between human agency and social structure, observing how, in the act of negation of individuality, ‘(t)he individual is increasingly deprived of the moral decision as to how he should live his own life, and instead is ruled, fed, clothed and educated as a social unit, accommodated in the appropriate housing unit, and amused in accordance with the standards that give pleasure and satisfaction to the masses’ (Jung 1958).

relationship<sup>15</sup>.

### 2.4.3 Society and Network

Latour's work is important for our discussion around technology and its relative position in society. One important premise of actor-network theory is that society is intrinsically networked. On initial reflection, this premise appears logical – we can imagine our personal and professional lives as built around groups of people who in turn engage other groups of people in a broad social web of interconnections. However it is not as intuitive to think of society not just as social networks of *people*, but of people *and corresponding materials*. John Law helps to contextualise this viewpoint. He suggests that knowledge in itself is social, it is a product of a network, but it is also material. For Law, knowledge is a combination of the non-human (computers, microscopes and such), but also of the human, in the form of researchers, scientists and the skills they possess. Therefore, science, or the gathering of knowledge can be termed 'heterogeneous engineering' because it brings together discrete entities of social, technical and textual spheres into heterogeneous networks of people and objects. Actor-network theory extends this to the social dimension, including family, suggesting social society is also organised into a network of these heterogeneous materials (Law: 1992). Therefore, in discussing the social, actor-network theory suggests that we include humans, texts, literature, but also machines and any other material that acts as an agent. Law posits how 'almost all of our interactions with other people are mediated through objects of one kind or another', offering the example of he himself 'speaking' to the audience through a text which he has created on a computer. The text could be in printed format or could have travelled through another network of the postal system. However, myriad actor-networks of humans and non-humans have resulted in his being able to

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15 John Law (1992) further expands on this, observing how 'Napoleons are no different in kind to small-time hustlers, and IBMs to wheel-stalls' (Law 1992) when viewed through the framework of actor-network theory. For Law, this is explained by positing that actor-network theory does not presuppose a hierarchical view of society; rather that it looks at the interactions between agents, why some are more stable and thus, why some gain in size and power. Law argues further into his paper that resonances exist between actor-network theory and Foucauldian thought, and certainly power relationships are common to both. However, Law points out that 'a relatively stable network is one embodied in and performed by a range of durable materials' (ibid.), thus critiquing the Foucauldian perspective where only human actors introduce instability into networks. Those materials, crucially to this theory, can take the form of both human and non-human parts, rendering power relationships more complex and yet more fluid than traditional power discourses allow for.

communicate with his audience, in an intrinsically social, *mutual* communication<sup>16</sup>.

In the next section, I move on to issues pertaining to theme four of the key questions, that of innovation.

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16 This stance is also controversial, raising ethical questions in that it denies any of the ‘specialness’ about humans in its denial of a hierarchy between humans and objects. However, Law addresses this critique by suggesting the need to distinguish between the fields of ethics and sociology. He posits how a consideration of these areas as separate fields of enquiry could yield benefits by them informing each other. For Law, whilst on a point of analysis or understanding within the actor-network framework there is not a difference between people and objects, it certainly does not follow that human rights should not be afforded, or that human actors are reduced to machine status in a real-life situation. Law posits how actor-network theory could inform ethics by shedding a deeper light on situations of people who are being kept alive by machines, precisely because of actor-network theory allowing for a richer conceptualisation of human-technology relationships than the traditional dualistic and hierarchical model (Law: 1992.).

## 2.5 Theories of Innovation

### 2.5.1 Introduction: Defining Innovation

Innovation must be distinguished from invention, as Schumpeter (1939) amongst others observed during the inter-war depression - whilst at the same time identifying ‘multiple’ types of innovations other than the technological which have economic or social implications. Innovation thus implies the existence of an invention, coupled with the successful ‘birthing’ of that idea into the arena where it can be adopted for use. However, the term ‘innovation’ has many different contextual meanings depending on which academic discipline one is viewing innovation from. I therefore investigate theories of innovation and how innovations diffuse, with the view to analysing implications for innovation within the sphere of cultural production of digital media.

Within an Irish context, the term ‘innovation’ has been recently defined in a report from the government policy advisory board for enterprise and science, *Forfás*, as ‘the creative process of exploiting new ideas’ (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2008: 2)<sup>17</sup>. Everett M. Rogers describes innovation as ‘an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption’ (Rogers 1966: 11) . This expands on the Forfás definition, as Rogers stipulates how an innovation can take the form of a practice or an object, and not only an idea for such. Furthermore, an important component of innovation is the *perception* of that idea, practice or object as new. This provides an important contrast with Forfás’ process-based definition in that Rogers incorporates the social processes involved in an individual or an adopting group who perceives the entity as an innovation. For Rogers, the perception of ‘newness’ therefore, is not an absolute and objective concept, the implication suggesting that what may be innovative in some circles or amongst some individuals may not be considered innovative amongst others.

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<sup>17</sup> This definition is quite illuminating, in so far as it describes what Forfás considers to constitute an innovation: *new ideas*. The definition then describes an act of mediation of these ideas, a mediation that they term ‘exploitation’. It then proceeds to describe how this mediation occurs, which is through a ‘creative process’. In this definition is a highly dynamic model of innovation, consisting of the idea, the mediation of the idea through its exploitation, and the process through which the idea is mediated, all resulting in the genesis of an innovation. This model is potentially useful for cultural production of digital media as it describes the initial idea, in this case an artistic one, its ‘mediation’ by the cultural producer, whilst acknowledging the process through which the idea matures.

Garcia and Calantone observe how the OECD considers innovation to be ‘an iterative process initiated by the perception of a new market and / or new service opportunity for a technology-based invention which leads to development, production, and marketing tasks striving for the commercial success of the invention’ (Garcia, Rosanna and Clinton, Roger 2002: 112). They suggest two implications for this definition; first that technological innovation is invention combined with market development, and second the process is iterative, implying scope for new innovations and re-introductions of existing innovations. Charles Edquist suggests a similarly economic account of innovation, positing that ‘innovations are new creations of economic significance’ (Edquist 1997: 1). This definition implies that there are two aspects to innovation; the creative entity combined with the successful transfer of the creative entity into the marketplace.

Whilst these economic perspectives on innovation broadly support Garcia and Calantone’s observation that innovations are a two-forked entity comprising the idea/invention and the adoption of the invention, I suggest that within this definition, no scope is left for innovation in the cultural production of digital media, due to the coupling of invention and market development. In a sector where intentionality and expression operate to the foreground of the market, definitions which couple invention with the market suggest that these cultural artefacts are not innovative<sup>18</sup>. Also, whilst digital media artefacts produced with an artistic or cultural intention often utilise technology to an extensive degree, the artefacts are not ‘technology-based’ but ‘conceptual’ or ‘contemporary’ art objects. Thus, a granular definition of innovation which includes the foregrounding of market and technological dimensions is inadequate in describing artistic and/or cultural innovations.

From this short analysis of these descriptions of innovation, it is evident that the concept of innovation is multidimensional and potentially concerns many different academic disciplines, including economics (Schumpeter<sup>19</sup>; OECD, Edquist), communication

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18 A brief account of the psychological dimensions to innovation, such as personality traits and neurocognitive processes, which may be applicable to a discussion of creativity and innovation in the arts, can be found in the chapter 2 addenda of appendix A

19 Schumpeter is the best known [but not only] early exponent of the perspective that innovation is multidimensional. His work serves to underline the extent of the long/big “lag” between that insight and actual policy practices - even today (Schumpeter (1939). Also see Preston (2001) for an account of the Schumpeterian approach.



studies (Rogers), science (OECD), politics (Forfás) and psychology (Forfás, Rogers), management and marketing (Garcia, and Calantone, 2002) as well as the interdisciplinary field of ‘innovation studies’. Garcia and Calantone (2002) posit that the myriad nature of the studies of innovation has led to a confusion, rather than elucidation of innovation studies. They observe that ‘fifteen constructs and at least 51 distinct scale items’ have been used in 21 studies dealing with product innovativeness in the field of new product development (NPD) (Garcia, Rosanna and Roger Calantone 2002: 111), leading to a confusion of what dimensions of innovation are actually measured. Combined with the cross-disciplinary approach of many of the studies, a lack of consensus on terminologies also ensues. The authors therefore suggest a need for consensus on defining ‘innovativeness’, noting how researchers class their own work as ‘new’ when it may be a ‘re-labelling’ of existing concepts that had been defined and researched in another discipline. Thus, research from a different field to the researchers own may be ignored even though the research may be pertinent<sup>20</sup>.

Thus, a framework of innovation that allows for a more matrix-like application of interdisciplinary literature broadens the discourse of innovation to include innovative practices and processes in a sector such as digital media cultural production, where a conscious decoupling of production from market concerns is to the fore.

### *2.5.2 Systems of Innovation*

The main theoretical origins of systems of innovation approaches were interactive learning theory and evolutionary theory, suggesting that the process of innovation is a process of interactive learning (Edquist 1997: 5). This, Edquist notes, is complimentary to systems of innovation as ‘interactivity paves the way for a systemic approach’ (ibid.: 5). Lundvall also concurs with this suggestion as ‘it is assumed that all learning is predominantly an interactive and, therefore, a socially embedded process which cannot be understood without taking into consideration its institutional and cultural context’ (Lundvall 1992: 1). However, in a somewhat determinist stance, Edquist also uncovers the origins of innovation studies in evolutionary theory, suggesting that innovation (and technical change) can be seen as an evolutionary process. According to

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<sup>20</sup> Please see the chapter 2 addenda in appendix A for a further account of Garcia and Calantone’s work

this process, the innovator creates an object that is superior to existing objects. ‘Technical change clearly is an evolutionary process’ suggests Nelson, ‘the innovation generator keeps on producing entities superior to those earlier in existence, and adjustment forces work slowly’ (Nelson, 1987: 16, quoted in Edquist, 1997). However, as seen earlier, the social shaping approach to technology challenges traditional notions of what constitutes ‘better’ or superior in technological development (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999), and thus stands at odds with the evolutionary theory origins of systems of innovation theories.

However, notwithstanding the theoretical origins of the approach, Edquist in his 1997 work elucidates the basic tenets of a framework for systematically analysing innovation, observing that innovation processes occur ‘in interaction between institutional and organizational elements which together may be called “systems of innovation”’ (Edquist 1997: preface). The approach, Edquist claims, provides a framework for the empirical study of innovations, and helps with a better understanding of the innovation process. For Edquist, a strength of the systems of innovation framework is in the systematic study of the interaction between companies and a broader social and political context. ‘Firms almost never innovate in isolation’, observed Edquist (*ibid.*: 1), rather they interact with other firms, universities, research institutes and government ministries, and influenced by institutions that impose restrictions on or incentives to innovation. e.g. imposing cultural norms, laws, social rules, technical standards. Thus, these firms in their interactions with each other and with the institutions are elements of a system, within which innovations emerge. However, the concept of an ‘institution’ or ‘organisation’ is inherently vague (*ibid.*: 41). Edquist along with Johnson note how the concept of an institution and its effect on innovation ‘is not at all clear in the literature and various scholars mean very different things when they use the term “institution”’ (*ibid.*: 41).

Nonetheless, despite these observations and reservations, the systems of innovation approach - including the concepts of national, regional and sectoral innovation - provides a useful conceptual backdrop to a study of innovation in digital media. I thus outline the national, regional and sectoral approaches to the study of innovation in the chapter 2 addenda of appendix A.

### 2.5.3 Clusters of Innovation in the Cultural Industries

Whilst a sectoral approach to innovation has relevance for describing innovation in the cultural sphere, it is also worthwhile to consider the role of clusters in the systems of innovation approach. Clusters include aspects of the national, regional and sectoral systems in a hybrid of these frameworks<sup>21</sup>. This approach to innovation could prove particularly beneficial to encouraging discourse on innovation in the cultural and media industries. The ‘creative clusters’ approach has been much favoured by consultants such as the Richard Florida and the Comedia consultancy group as well as urban policy and related policy advisers. However, it has also been subject of much criticism by critical geographers, not least for its neglect of grounded studies of the growth trends in the media and cultural services sectors, lack of attention to the low levels of income of much cultural workers and for a tendency to be harnessed to economic boosterism and property-centred development strategies (e.g. in the work of Anne Markusen).

David Hesmondhalgh supplements the general literature on clusters of innovation with an account of innovation in the cultural and creative industries (Hesmondhalgh: 2007). He outlines how the concept of *creative clusters* emerged in the 1990s<sup>22</sup>, and analyses a study by Landry and Bianchini of how ‘the industries of the twenty-first century will depend increasingly on the generation of knowledge through creativity and innovation matched with rigorous systems of control’ (Landry and Bianchini, 1995: 12 in Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 142). The concept of the creative city was also mooted at this time, whilst policy in the UK saw a merging of the project of urban regeneration with creativity, leading to the ‘creative city’ trope. Landry and Bianchini offered ‘creative’ solutions to urban planning issues and posited a symbiotic relationship between the cultural industries and creative cities, in that the cities needed creativity, and creativity needed creative cities within which to thrive (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 142).

Mommaas suggested that the clustering of the creative industries to promote urban regeneration was a strategic move, observing that ‘cultural clustering strategies represent a next stage in the ongoing use of culture and the arts as urban regeneration

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21 For details of an EU report on innovation clusters, please see the chapter 2 addenda of appendix A

22 with some influence from the Comedia consultancy group who were consulted for policy-making in the UK.

resources' (Mommaas, 2004: 508 in Hesmondhalgh 2007: 143). Thus, an ongoing 'trope' in innovation policy has centred on the clustering of creative industries, of which the digital media industries are a subset. I suggest therefore that in this survey of digital art in Ireland, a mindful awareness of these tropes can help explain the foregrounding of the digital media industry, and artistic sector. However, the digital media industry is also a *service* which innovates differently to industries traditionally surveyed by systems of innovation frameworks (pharmaceutical, industrial etc). I therefore suggest that a brief outline of innovation in the services sector will also yield results for the consideration of the digital media sector.

#### 2.5.4 Innovation and Services

The services sector has been described, somewhat comically, as being involved with 'things that could be bought or sold but not dropped on one's foot' (Boden and Miles 2000.: 7). In the traditional studies of systems of innovation, the services sector has been ignored in favour of manufacturing. However, with predominant growth in the services sector, Boden and Miles have called for a careful examination of innovation in the services. They outlined how (1) traditional indicators of innovation have not included innovation in services, (2) when studies of innovation in services *have been* carried out, there emerge more complex dynamics than previously considered, (3) services are among the leading *active* users<sup>23</sup> of ICTs, and (4) services aid innovation in other firms (ibid.: 9). Howells and Tether also stress the importance of services, noting that 'the service sector has a dominant role in the developed economies, accounting for about two thirds of employment and GDP' (Howells and Tether 2004: 11), and thus represent potential for economic growth. Howells and Tether observe how traditional discourses situated services as technologically backward, and as passive adopters of technologies that originated in the manufacturing sector (ibid). However, this is often not the case, with services not only adopting technology, but *adapting* it creatively, thus reflecting back to other sectors a challenge for further innovations.

Also within the services sector are a subset of knowledge-intensive business services (K-IBS), also analysed in discourses of innovation. As Howells and Tether have observed,

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<sup>23</sup> i.e. are not using ICTs solely for consumption purposes.

‘the service sector is becoming an ever more important focus for innovative activity within the emerging “knowledge economy”’. For the authors, ““knowledge-intensive business services” (KIBS), such as those involved in market research, design, engineering and technical services, are particularly important economic actors’ (ibid.: 12). As Cawley and Preston note through Manuel Castells’ observation, ‘the media industries may be defined as typical of the “intangible”, information-intensive growth sectors deemed to characterise the contemporary “knowledge” or “network” society’ (Cawley and Preston 2004: 119).

Thus, for Cawley and Preston, the functions involved in the innovation process in the media sector is of significance importance, noting how for the media industries, differences in the research and development (R&D) and knowledge functions exist, compared with other sectors. For Cawley and Preston, script/content, authoring, design, and direction of the object are crucial knowledge and innovation functions of the media industries, the authors positing how these functions are equivalent to traditionally understood R&D functions (ibid.: 127). Thus, an innovation in this sector can involve the ‘packaging’ of information into new products and services, in an innovation process ‘based on novel publishing entrepreneurial ideas/knowledge rather than purely technical knowledge’ (ibid.: 127). This suggests that the traditional understanding of innovation as facilitated by technical tools must also be expanded to include *creative* tools, with technical tools and skills being ‘necessary but not sufficient’ for successful innovation strategies in the digital media sector (ibid.: 128)<sup>24</sup>.

These findings, along with those from Preston and Kerr (2003 - see footnote 25) underpin how, in the digital media sector, major sources of innovation are in the area of authoring and design skills, with a strong design or authoring portfolio valued more than years of experience. Preston and Kerr’s study also found that software competency is a straightforward process of learning, whereas achieving creative competency is not as

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24 Further research by Preston and Kerr suggested that within digital media companies, ‘occupations whose core function involved media production and design were more numerous than programming, IT and management’ occupations in the companies, thus further highlighting the ‘creative’ tools and skills fostering innovation in digital media.

Cawley and Preston provide further information from the Preston and Kerr analysis which found that there was a large input of non-technological knowledge in the digital media sector. The findings included how (1) media content authoring and design posts accounted for 34% of total jobs in the firms, (2) management, sales, marketing accounted for 20%, (3) software development, IT and system support were 15% and (4) quality control and testing were 19% (Preston and Kerr, 2003 in Cawley and Preston 2004: 128-129)

linear a process. Thus, within discourses of K-IBS services, I suggest that digital media industries innovate with a less reliance on ICTs than traditionally discussed in theories of innovation. Whilst the digital media industries are 'knowledge-intensive', the added complexities pertaining to innovation in the digital media industries be considered in discourses of innovation.

## 2.6 Diffusion of Innovations

### 2.6.1 Introduction

Whilst systems of innovation frameworks foreground the processes, contexts and sites of innovation, the adoption or diffusion of those innovations is also of importance. Rogers posits that diffusion is ‘the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system’ (Rogers 1966: 5)<sup>25</sup>. Thus, diffusion is a process of information and ideas sharing in a ‘special type’ of communication, the content of which pertains to the ‘newness’ of the idea. For Rogers, ‘newness’ implies uncertainty in that ‘new’ is untested, unchartered and unexplored. Uncertainty, according to Rogers, is the degree to which alternates are possible, thus also implying unpredictability. However, for Rogers, this unpredictability can be mitigated by the provision of information, also suggesting that technological innovations embody information, therefore reducing uncertainty. He suggests how the adoption solar panels for water heating reduces uncertainty about fuel prices. This leads Rogers to consider how diffusion acts as ‘a kind of social change’, as when new ideas are invented, diffused, and are adopted or rejected, consequences exist, which can lead to social change (ibid.: 6). Finally for Rogers, diffusion can be spontaneous and unplanned or managed and planned<sup>26</sup>.

### 2.6.2 Rogers’ Diffusion Model

For Rogers, innovations diffuse through four major aspects; (1) the innovation, (2) the communication channels, (3) time and (4) the social system. These are outlined below.

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<sup>25</sup> Rogers observes that ‘communication’ implies an exchange between two or more people, thus foregrounding the social dimension to the diffusion of innovations

<sup>26</sup> Rogers provided case studies in diffusion as part of his work. See an account of these in the chapter 2 addenda of appendix A

### 1. *The innovation*

For Rogers, it matters little about the *objective* newness of an innovation, but rather that it is *perceived* as being new. Therefore, the ‘newness’ of the innovation lies in the changing perception of the adopting group. Rogers thus suggests that it is worthwhile to study the mechanisms of early and late adopters of innovations.

### 2. *Communication channels*

Rogers posits that channels of communication are important for the effective diffusion of an innovation, observing how ‘mass media channels are often the most rapid and efficient means to inform an audience of potential adopters about the existence of an innovation’ (Rogers 1966: 18)<sup>27</sup>. However, mass media is not the only effective communication channel for the diffusion of innovations. For Rogers, interpersonal communication can prove more effective at diffusing an innovation to an individual, especially if education or socioeconomic standing are similar between the sender and receiver of the communication<sup>28</sup>. Thus, Rogers notes, the diffusion process is highly social in nature, with a social preference amongst adopting groups for a peer-evaluation of the innovation rather than relying on disinterested observations alone. This *homophily*, which is ‘the degree to which two or more individuals who interact are similar in certain attributes, such as beliefs, education, social status, and the like’ (ibid.: 18), suggests how communication is more effective when there is a greater degree of homophily between individuals.

### 3. *Time*

Rogers includes time as a factor in the innovation process, as in between an individual hearing about an innovation, and deciding whether to adopt it or not, is the medium of time. This process is five-fold, through which an individual ‘passes from first knowledge

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<sup>27</sup> This has implications for the cultural industries, who at once are involved in innovating, and are also shaped by innovations.

<sup>28</sup> This suggests a parallel with the work of Pierre Bourdieu on social and cultural capital. See chapter 4 for an account of Bourdieu’s research on capital.



of an innovation to forming an attitude toward the innovation, to a decision to adopt or reject, to implementation and use of the new idea, and to confirmation of this decision' (ibid.: 20), or in summary; knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. However, akin to the *reverse salience* concept in social shaping of technology models, Rogers observes how in an act of what he terms *discontinuance*, a user who has previously 'confirmed' the adoption of an innovation can then become unhappy with it and subsequently reject it (ibid.: 21).

#### 4. *The Social System*

Rogers considers the diffusion of innovations to be a social process. A social group possesses a commonality of goals, and shares the construction of joint problem-solving processes to achieve these common goals. Thus, innovations occur in social structures, the boundaries of which can affect the diffusion of the innovation<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> While noting the dearth of research on how the social structures affects diffusion, he recounts a study by Katz to show how an adoption of innovations are affected by social factors. Katz studied the adoption of family planning amongst two women, each in one of two villages in Korea, finding that despite other similarities (age, family background, socioeconomic and educational areas) adoption of family planning depended on how the social group perceived family planning. The study found that with the adoption of family planning in one village at less than half that in the other, the observed woman in that village showed less likelihood to adopt the innovation herself than the woman in the other observed village with the higher rate of adoption.

## 2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed certain key schools and theories of the complex relationship between technology, society and innovation. This review has identified certain concepts that directly relate to specific sub-questions related to themes three and four of the key research questions (i.e.. those pertaining to technology and innovation) as listed in the previous chapter. Sections 2.2-2.4 expanded on themes which relate to the key questions in theme three, which centres around technology, its place in digital media, its contested status as a tool for creation, or a McLuhanite ‘medium’ in its own right. Whilst a determinist stance around digital technologies was shown to be problematic, likewise was a ‘hard’ social shaping approach. I argued that a framework such as actor-network theory that accounted for mutual agency between human and non-human actors better situated technology without fetishising it. This is particularly relevant to research on digital media art, where technology resides as both a tool and a medium, yet is used to critique itself, revealing a complex relationship between the artistic ‘actors’ and the means at their disposal.

Sections 2.5 and 2.6 analysed the existent literature on innovation that link up with the key questions within theme four. These questions pertained to how we may understand innovation for the artistic sector in terms of how the channels or means of innovation, along with what constitutes innovation itself, are viewed through a lens of innovation studies. Garcia and Calantone, Edquist, Boden and Miles and Lundvall were reviewed for their conceptualisations of innovation, its sites and how it can be formulated in ‘systems’ approaches. Rogers’ study of diffusion of innovations revealed a complex nexus of factors in the diffusion process. However, the work is not without a critique of idealism and universalism. Flynn and Preston have suggested that the work made simplistic assumptions that ‘innovations diffuse within a context marked by an autonomous or free market and that diffusion is driven by the demands of individual consumers freely exercising their market power’ (Preston and Flynn 1999: 439)<sup>30</sup>. Clearly some of Rogers (1966) ideas are now very dated given the huge expansion of the innovation studies field in subsequent 45 years. Some of his ideas on ‘diffusion’ would also be incompatible with much subsequent social shaping and SCOT perspectives

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<sup>30</sup> They do observe that Rogers somewhat adapted his work in later editions, yet there still existed criticisms about the theoretical underpinning.

highlighting the flexibility and mutability/changeability (e.g. across social groups or settings) of what constitutes - even technological - 'innovations'.

Likewise, definitions of innovation were critiqued for foregrounding a simplistic 'market' stance which implied that for a product or service to be innovative, it needed to show commercial success. In the context of non-commercial production of digital media, such as artistic production, a sector-based or cluster-based approach is robust, yet can be supplemented with the macro-level accounts of innovation that emerge from theories of innovation that pertain to national and regional accounts. Thus, existing theories of innovation do not rest easy when applied to non-commercial production of digital media, revealing gaps in the understanding of traditional theories of innovation to account for the skills required to innovate in the artistic or cultural sector, along with an account of the motivation for such creations, as they stand outside market-based motivations.

# **Chapter 3**

## **The Production of Culture**

## **Chapter 3: The Production of Culture**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I explore theories of cultural and artistic production. This is in order to inform my frameworks concerning the key theme (number two) of art as identified in chapter 1 whilst situating artistic and cultural production within cultural, social, economic and political spheres. Thus, this chapter focusses on meso and macro levels, addressing how artistic production is a civic and social endeavour, according to the Frankfurt School, to how it is economically situated, in the case of the production of culture perspective, to a political and class-based dimension, as argued by Bourdieu.

This chapter follows up the initial argument expressed in chapter 1 that issues of cultural production cannot be analysed in isolation from other macro-level influences, and presents these three main cultural theories to reveal the multiple facets that interact and intervene in a 'nexus' of cultural production. I suggest that this 'nexus' of factors has particular relevance to a survey of digital media art. The artist is situated, as argued in chapter 1, and so is the cultural artefact produced. This chapter, in revealing aspects of a production 'chain', accounts for the specificities of production in contemporary late-capitalism, whilst also following through on discussions of technology from the previous chapter, as in the case of the analysis of Benjamin's exegesis on the then 'new media' technology of film.

I suggest that this chapter is a 'sister' of chapter 4, as in this thesis, 'cultural production' and 'art' are linked by the overall theoretical framework that examines production in a situated, embedded context. Thus, whilst I could have furthered the discussion of Adorno's 'culture industry' by following up with an account of postmodern aesthetics by Jameson, that discussion is left until chapter 4, where 'art' is threaded through a modernist, postmodernist, digital and finally 'altermodernist' lens.

### 3.2 The Frankfurt School of Critical Theory

The Marxist-influenced Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute of Social Research), otherwise known as the Frankfurt School<sup>31</sup>, produced many novel and influential analyses of media and cultural production, including a critical aesthetic theory and a dialectical critique of mass culture. Central figures in this school were Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. Although both authors were members of the Institut pre-WWII, their work continues to have significant relevance to current discourses on media, popular culture and the culture industries.

Walter Benjamin's essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*<sup>32</sup> documents some of the significant issues that he considered to exist within traditional concepts of high art, cultural expression and the social functions of art and culture. In accord with the overall ethos of the School itself, he situated these issues in the context

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31 The Frankfurt School was influenced by philosophers and theorists such as George Steiner and György Lukács, who discussed issues of 'reification' (Jay 1996: 173). Such influences were to mark the aesthetic philosophy of the Frankfurt School as different from orthodox Marxist expositions of aesthetic theory, associated with the international communist movement. As Jay notes, 'if ... the Institut refused to fetishize economics or politics, it was also equally reluctant to treat culture as a realm apart in society' (ibid.: 176). Thus, the Frankfurt School is of particular interest in that it explored the complex nexus between cultural production and the embeddedness of a collective culture within society. They embedded their aesthetic and cultural theories within the political and economic zeitgeist of modernity, and were sensitive to capitalist modes of production. In fact, Fredric Jameson considers the work of Theodor Adorno to be unique in his understanding of late capitalism, observing Adorno's 'unique emphasis on the presence of late capitalism as a totality within the very forms of our concepts or of the works of art themselves' (Jameson 2007: 9). Jameson also maintains that 'no other Marxist theoretician has ever staged this relationship between the universal and the particular, the system and the detail, with this kind of single-minded yet wide-ranging attention' (ibid.).

The Institut's critical aesthetic theory went beyond orthodox Marxist aesthetic theory; they rejected the orthodox Marxist position on art as only having legitimacy when it is mobilised in a political context. However, they also challenged the belief that art was an expression of only individual or subjective experience. As Jay reminds us, Horkheimer wrote his doctoral thesis on Kant's Critique of Judgement, thus influencing his views on common human experience, where 'an element of common humanity, of shared hope for the potential of mankind, informed every aesthetic act' (ibid.). Thus, in situating the artist, the Frankfurt School considered the complex relationships between the individual artist, the artwork itself, the culture in which it is embedded, whilst also stressing the interconnectedness of all of these facets within the societal and political frameworks and ideologies of the time.

32 I have chosen to use the alternately titled, second, extended version of Benjamin's essay, translated and cited in a recent collection of his work (Benjamin et al. 2008). As the editors note, it is 'a revision and expansion (by seven manuscript pages) of the first version of the essay ... the second version represents the form in which Benjamin originally wished to see the work published' (ibid.: 42). Hansen notes that Benjamin considered it his '*Ur-text*' (Hansen 2004: 4). It contains the original ending to the text; 'Such is the aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art' (Ibid.). As Jay notes however, 'the printed version replaced "Fascism" with "the totalitarian doctrine" and "Communism" with "the constructive forces of mankind" ... on the same page, the original "imperialistic warfare" was changed to "modern warfare"' (Jay 1996: 205). Bloch et al note how 'its preface, which directly invoked Marx, was omitted altogether' (Bloch 1980: 106).

of the political moment in which he lived. The essay also provides an exegesis on the potential of the then new media of film, to change the dominant political ideologies of the day and to liberate society from traditional hierarchical structures. I suggest that this essay has valuable resonances today, in a parallel time of economic, political and cultural crisis<sup>33</sup>.

Theodor Adorno offered a critique of Benjamin's essay, positing his own critical observations on the workings and influence of the culture industries and their relationship with society. While Adorno's works have been branded 'elitist' in some cultural studies discourses, Bernstein (1991), Jameson (2007) and Slater & Tonkiss (2001) testify to the complexity, richness and continuing validity of his work as a critical theory of aesthetics and culture - especially valid in today's moment of crisis in late capitalism - and worth revisiting for its complex and considered insights into art, culture and politics.

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<sup>33</sup> A view paralleled by Margot Lovejoy, whose work is analysed in chapter 4.

### 3.3 Walter Benjamin's Aesthetic and Cultural Theory

#### 3.3.1 *The Aura*

In his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, Benjamin developed his concept of the artistic 'aura'<sup>34</sup>, the concept of which I briefly investigate to situate Benjamin's views on artistic autonomy and the function of artistic works. Benjamin conceptualised the aura as 'a highly sensitive core' of an artwork, a core 'more vulnerable than that of any natural object' (Benjamin et al. 2008: 22). That core, for Benjamin, was the artwork's 'authenticity' (ibid.), which Benjamin saw as 'the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it' (ibid.). Thus, for Benjamin, the artistic aura corresponded to its essence as an 'authentic' object, combined with a sense of the physical and historical narrative accompanying it.

For Benjamin, reproduction invalidated the 'physical duration' of the artistic object and thereby challenged the history associated with the object. 'Since the historical testimony is founded on the physical duration', posited Benjamin, 'the former, too is jeopardized by reproduction, in which the physical duration plays no part' (Benjamin et al. 2008: 22). Thus, the historical narrative, so important for the existence of an artwork, is greatly diminished, if not obliterated. For Benjamin, 'what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object, the weight it derives from tradition' (ibid.). This process of technological reproduction ultimately caused, for Benjamin a 'withering' of the aura. Thus, I suggest that the aura can be conceptualised as a metanarrative, or a rhetoric surrounding an object - a mythology or even a certain Jungian archetypal significance that accompanies a work of art. Therefore, the loss of aura through reproduction throws into doubt the authenticity of the work, with the reproduction mounting a challenge to the historical testimony that accompanies a work of art.

However, the concept of the aura has been somewhat contested by commentators, with some scholars equating the aura with a corrupt, capitalist, hegemonic elitism that surrounded certain art (Jennings in Benjamin et al. 2008, Kul-Want & Piero 2007). A

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<sup>34</sup> First discussed briefly in Benjamin's 1931 work, *Little History of Photography*



further presentation on the letters between Adorno and Benjamin talks of ‘Benjamin’s attack on aesthetic “aura” as a vestige of bourgeois culture’ (Bloch 1980: 106). Certainly Benjamin himself critiqued the *manipulation* of the aura. In the introduction to his essay, for example, he distanced himself from the notion that his own work could be manipulated by Fascism by claiming that ‘in what follows, the concepts which are introduced into the theory of art differ from those now current in that they are completely useless for the purposes of fascism. On the other hand, they are useful for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art’ (Benjamin et al. 2008: 20).

Despite the reticence on Benjamin’s part to have his hypothesis of the aura appropriated by corrupt ideologies, I posit that Benjamin did not wish to ‘attack’ and deconstruct the aura, as commentators have suggested (e.g. Bolter et al: 2006). Rather, Benjamin witnessed what he believed was the inappropriate manipulation of the powerful properties of the aura. Thus, Benjamin wished to redress that manipulation by providing an exegesis on how new media forms had the potential to *distribute* the positive power of the aura - its authenticity - and thereby illuminate society. This relationship between the cultural product, the producers, the culture industries and the aura of a cultural object is still ongoing today. I thus posit that similar consideration is still required today, in order to define and critique the ‘auratic’ properties of cultural objects, and to understand the place of culture and art at a time of great technological change that is also marked at a time of crisis.

### 3.3.2 *New Media, Old Cults of Beauty*

According to Benjamin, ‘the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction’, that of photography, became increasingly evident during his lifetime, and precipitated a change for the aura, and also for modes of artistic production. Benjamin argued that since prehistoric times, the work of art was based in ‘ritual’<sup>35</sup>, a basis that continued into Renaissance times and beyond, noting that although this ritualistic fascination with the object may have become secularised in modern times, the ritualistic element exists up to modern times in the form of the “cult of beauty”. Due to this fundamental basis in

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35 insofar as ‘the elk depicted by Stone Age man on the walls of his cave is an instrument of magic, and is exhibited to others only coincidentally; what matters is that the spirits see it’ (Benjamin et al. 2008: 25)

mythical thinking, the aura - that is the authenticity and testimony of the work - became vulnerable to any means by which its ritual status could be diminished. Of course, photographic reproduction, with its ability to disseminate a work of art, threatened the physical presence - the 'here and now' - of an original work of art. Reproduction closed the gap between the artwork and the audience by allowing the artwork to be disseminated by various means, previously unavailable. The result of this is that 'insofar as the age of technological reproducibility separated art from its basis in cult, all semblance of art's autonomy disappeared forever' (ibid.: 28).

Benjamin argued that due to the threat to ritual-based artistic production, the art world reacted to the threat to its aura 'with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* - that is, with a theology of art' that 'in turn gave rise to a negative theology, in the form of an idea of "pure" art, which rejects not only any social function but any definition in terms of a representational content' (ibid.: 24). Therefore, art reacted to the threat to authenticity with an extreme attempt at artistic autonomy.

Therefore, for Benjamin, the aura was to be preserved and valued, yet liberated from its exploitation at the hands of extreme artistic autonomy in the form of *l'art pour l'art*. While Benjamin attested to the power of the artistic message, he could not attest to manipulation of the aura that denied the social and cultural spheres in which the artist and the artistic message were embedded. This reveals a complexity pertinent to cultural production, insofar as the ethereal and economically unquantifiable quality of 'aura' of a cultural product is nonetheless a powerful force that can be mobilised by the artist, by political hierarchies and by the culture industry - each with different and complex motivations. This complexity of 'aura' persists in today's knowledge-based mode of cultural production, and therefore its potential mobilisation needs to be considered in academic analyses of cultural production in the digital age.

### 3.3.3 *New Media and Cultural Romanticism*

Despite Benjamin's lucidity in relation to the auratic qualities of cultural artefacts, he exhibited a certain romanticism about the ability of culture to liberate 'the masses'. Benjamin's convictions reveal complexities pertaining to cultural production that are also pertinent in today's moment of crisis. Benjamin stressed the social function of art,

specifically explaining that ‘the primary social function of art today is to rehearse that interplay’ between nature and humanity. He argued how this social function has been particularly applicable in film, noting that ‘the function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily’ (Benjamin et al. 2008: 26). Thus, Benjamin attested to the liberating power of the then new media of film in its ability to reveal realities about the ‘apparatus’ in which human society is enmeshed, and also to afford, through a new means of perception in the ‘apparatus’ of the film camera, the ability to human beings to negotiate and react to that apparatus. He was concerned with how city-dwellers were required ‘to relinquish their humanity in the face of an apparatus’ (ibid.: 31). Film however, came to the liberation of these individuals as in the act of visiting a cinema, these workers ‘witness the film actor taking revenge on their behalf not only by asserting his humanity (or what appears to them as such) against the apparatus, but by placing that apparatus in the service of his triumph’ (ibid.). He observed that in doing so, the technology offered a certain, if temporary psychic liberation to such oppressed workers, illustrating that ‘dealing with this apparatus also teaches them that technology will release them from their enslavement to the powers of the apparatus’<sup>36</sup> in what could be argued is a technological determinist perspective typical of radical moderns.

Benjamin continued his acclaim of this new media of film, listing qualities such as ‘a capacity for improvement’ (ibid.: 28) that renounced rigid eternal values, and proposing that just as newspaper letters to the editor, letters of complaint, and reviews afforded literary expression to the masses, ‘all this can readily be applied to film, where shifts that in literature took place over centuries have occurred in a decade’ (ibid.: 34). According to Benjamin, it was the mechanism of capitalism that obstructed this process, declaring that ‘in western Europe today, the capitalist exploitation of film obstructs the human being’s legitimate claim to being reproduced’ (ibid.). The benefit of this legitimate right to technological reproduction was, for Benjamin ‘understanding themselves and therefore their class’ (ibid.). Benjamin thus saw film as a means by which society could understand itself more, and thus self-illuminate.

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36 However, this liberation from enslavement to the apparatus did come with a caveat, Benjamin specifying that this would happen ‘only when humanity’s whole constitution has adapted itself to the new productive forces’ (ibid.: 26).

For Benjamin, this process of self-illumination by means of film technology was facilitated by the material characteristics of the technology, positing that reality could not be hidden from a camera, and that no illusion could be hidden behind a camera lens. For Benjamin, ‘the illusory nature of film is of the second degree; it is the result of editing’ (ibid.: 35), but that the primary technique of film-making could provide deeper insights into the fabric of reality. ‘In the film studio the apparatus has penetrated so deeply into reality that a pure view of that reality, free of the foreign body of equipment, is the result of a special procedure - namely, the shooting by the specially adjusted photographic device and the assembly of that shot with others of the same kind’ (ibid.) posited Benjamin. While it could be posited that film is a highly mediated form of reality, Benjamin attested to transcendence of that mediation due to the profound ways in which the camera technology could penetrate reality and offer multiple views of it, or as Benjamin termed it ‘the most intensive interpenetration of reality with equipment’ (ibid.).

Just as the camera lens could provide insights into reality, for Benjamin it could also provide insights into alternate realities, observing that ‘thanks to the camera, the individual perceptions of the psychotic or the dreamer can be appropriated by collective perception’ (ibid.: 38). While this appropriation through technology may not be wholly desired, Benjamin used this negative application to suggest that ‘this same technologization has created the possibility of psychic immunization against such mass psychoses’. He posited that cinema can mitigate this ‘by means of certain films in which the forced development of sadistic fantasies or masochistic delusions can prevent their natural and dangerous maturation in the masses’ (ibid.). Here, Benjamin is referring to slapstick comedies and Disney films, claiming that such films ‘trigger a therapeutic release of unconscious energies’, and that ‘collective laughter is one such preemptive and healing outbreak of mass psychosis’ (ibid.).

Thus, with these features of expressive liberation of the working class, the technical abilities of film to provide an enhanced view of reality, and its abilities to make alternate realities conscious, Benjamin displayed a romanticism, and even a determinism about the new film technology. As much as he critiqued the narcissism of the content of *l’art pour l’art*, we see a failure on Benjamin’s part to critique the *content* of film - presuming that the nature of the technology would produce a cause-and-effect scenario whereby the proletariat would be liberated by these deeper views of the world around it. As

much as he provided caveats in his work pertaining to the misuse of the aura, he did not significantly critique the auratic properties that potentially pertained to the film industry. This has ramifications for the romanticism that can surround the properties of today's new media technologies and cultural objects. Thus, this analysis of Benjamin's work reveals both his intuition, shrewdness of vision about the potential of the auratic qualities of an object, and also the shortcomings of his critique of the new media technology of the day.

### 3.4 Art and Politics - Adorno's Critique of Benjamin

#### 3.4.1 Adorno on the Aura

Benjamin's friend and colleague Theodor Adorno mounted his critique of Benjamin's essay, in both personal letters and more formally and polemically in his essay *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*. Whilst there was accord with Benjamin regarding the aura, Adorno noting that 'I need not assure you that I am fully aware of the magical element in the bourgeois work of art' (Bloch 1980: 121), Adorno challenged Benjamin on his belief that use-value of this powerful aura can be employed in what he saw as a utilitarian fashion. Adorno made this point clear in correspondence, flatly remarking that 'I now find it disquieting ... that you now casually transfer the concept of magical aura to the "autonomous work of art" and flatly assign to the latter a counter-revolutionary function' (ibid.). For Adorno, the 'autonomous work of art' was art which was not produced for commercial purposes, and thus did not have the constraints or pressures of the 'culture industry' attached, leaving it relatively more 'autonomous' than those cultural goods produced with a profit motive.

For Adorno, the 'autonomous work of art' was more complex. Just as he congratulated Benjamin on his treatment of the concepts, he criticised him for his one-sided view of autonomous art, noting that 'dialectical though your essay may be, it is not so in the case of the autonomous work of art itself' (ibid.). Adorno acknowledged how Benjamin's analysis of the aura over-emphasised the mythic and ritual aspects to the work of art to the detriment of a more rounded exploration of the aura, positing that 'it seems to me that the centre of the autonomous work of art does not itself belong on the side of myth ... but is inherently dialectical; within itself it juxtaposes the magical and the mark of freedom' (ibid.). Whereas as for Benjamin, the centre of the work of art - its auratic core - was rooted in myth, Adorno here reminded Benjamin that the nature and function of the work of art is more complex - founded both in a historical myth but also a forward-looking sense of potential - and thus the artist's role is also complex within this nexus of production and reception of art and culture.

While Benjamin strongly attested to the liberating qualities of new media technology in the form of film, Adorno observed that far from having been freed from a bourgeois

type of aura, the film lent itself just as much to having ‘an aural character’ as traditional ‘high’ art. Polemically, Adorno quipped that ‘the idea that a reactionary is turned into a member of the avant-garde by expert knowledge of Chaplin’s films strikes me as out-and-out romanticization’ (ibid.: 123). Thus, Adorno revealed his disbelief of how the negative manifestation of the aura could be deconstructed by the mass-culture phenomenon of the film, rather observing how film dissemination has lent itself to the construction of a different, and potentially equally insidious type of aura. The aura which Adorno saw in the culture industry was one which he could not equate with the freedom and liberation that could transcend what he considers the ‘spurious harmony’ of an ‘affirmative culture’. This stance thus stands as a direct response to Benjamin’s uncritical view that the (then) new media of film could have a therapeutic effect on the audience through slapstick comedy and ridicule.

#### 3.4.2 *Artistic Function and Artistic Autonomy*

Adorno was concerned with dialectical relationships - between myth and history, and between subjectivity and objectivity. Thus, when considering a work of cultural production, he could not consider any work to be purely subjective, but influenced by the culture, society and political structures around it. In his *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno argued how ‘the emancipation of the artwork from the artist is no *l’art pour l’art* delusion of grandeur but the simplest expression of the work’s constitution as the expression of a social relation that bears in itself the law of its own reification’ (Adorno 1997: 220). Adorno thus stressed the importance of the *situatedness* of the individual artist within the collective of society, demystifying the notion of the sole autonomous creator, set apart from societal influences. Like Benjamin, he refuted the validity of *l’art pour l’art*, insisting that the artwork was not just an individual expression, but also existed as a social entity with a civic function. He observed how ‘correspondingly, and this is key to art, even out of so-called individual works it is a We that speaks and not an I - indeed all the more so the less the artworks adapts externally to a We and its idiom’ (ibid.). Thus, artists and artistic works were situated as expressions of the civic, political and cultural dimensions to society in which they are embedded. It also situated artistic function, in that artists act as a mirror to that society, reflecting back the gaps and incompleteness in the ‘We-ness’. Therefore, for Adorno, the less congruity between the artwork and the ‘We’ of

the society in which it is produced, the more the potential of 'We' is expressed through the negative space of that incongruity.

Whilst this may at first seem obtuse and contradictory, Adorno's argument suggests that when there is a 'gap' between the artistic work and the civic and political structures in which it is produced, the artwork becomes a vehicle for exploration of the key features, and even the inadequacies and failings of that civic society. Through that dialectical relationship of autonomous artist and artistic function exists the possibility that civic, political and societal transformation can occur. As he observed in *Prisms*, 'a successful work ... is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure' (Adorno, 1981: 32). Therefore, for Adorno, the function of art was to interrogate the social and moral order, and in doing so, art potentially provided expression to the contradictions and inadequacies of civic society.

I also suggest a deeper implication in term 'spurious harmony'. This loaded term implies that just like the suggestion that *l'art pour l'art* was a delusion of autonomous grandeur, an attempt at *l'harmonie pour l'harmonie* or 'harmony for harmony's sake' is to be thought of, similarly, as delusion. A better approach, according to Adorno, is to reify the contradictions and inadequacies through the ability of the autonomous artist to imply a negative harmony, thus exposing the possibility of a transcendental ideal harmony, and providing a motivation towards it.

Adorno also posited the potential in autonomous art to achieve a conscious expression of freedom, a point he saw as neglected by Benjamin. He suggested that 'precisely the uttermost consistency in the pursuit of the technical laws of autonomous art changes this art and instead of rendering it into a taboo or fetish, brings it close to the state of freedom, of something that can be consciously produced and made' (Bloch 1980: 122). Thus, in the refinement of techniques and modes of expression, the autonomous artist can become increasingly conscious in their expression, thus becoming increasingly capable of bringing about the illumination that Benjamin himself was hoping for. Whereas Benjamin saw the potential of that illumination with the new medium of film, Adorno could also see that potential within autonomous art - a point of renewed



relevance within this survey of digital art, where affordances of new media technologies and artistic autonomy are intertwined.

Thus, the function of art for Adorno was, as for Benjamin, one of interrogation, illumination and transformation on a societal level. However, Adorno linked the function of art with artistic autonomy. Like Benjamin, he critiqued extreme artistic autonomy. Nevertheless he situated the importance of the autonomous but societally-embedded artist in terms of art having the potential to provide a space or a gap in not only the societal, but also the cultural and ethical order. He warned against the smoothing over of societal issues by the 'spurious harmony' of the culture industry, and positions 'autonomous' art as having if not the actualisation, at least the potential to offer a space in which transformation, and insights into deeper reality - for the purposes of improving the lot of society - can occur.

### *3.4.3 Technology mis-applied - the culture industry*

Adorno observed how Benjamin's romanticism about the aura somewhat ironically led to him taking up a politicised position on art that Adorno could not help but bring to his colleague's attention. In a personal letter, he polemically stated to Benjamin that 'I must accuse your essay of ... romanticism. You have swept art out of the corners of its taboos - but it is as though you feared a consequent inrush of barbarism and protected yourself by raising what you fear to a kind of inverse taboo. The laughter of the audience at a cinema ... is anything but good and revolutionary; instead it is full of the worst bourgeois sadism' (Bloch 1980: 123).

The consequence to this for Adorno was that human beings were no longer valued in a model of cultural production where the profit motive became primary to expression, as Adorno witnessed at the hands of what he termed the 'culture industry'. He explained how 'culture, in the true sense, did not simply accommodate itself to human beings; but it always simultaneously raised a protest against the petrified relations under which they lived, thereby honouring them' (Adorno and Bernstein 1991: 100). However, because the culture industry conflates the previously separated domains of art and popular culture, 'products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less

according to plan' (ibid.: 98). The result of this profit-based intent of the culture industry is an undermining of the 'true sense' of culture that Adorno previously explained. According to Adorno, 'in so far as culture becomes wholly assimilated to and integrated in those petrified relations, human beings are once more debased' (ibid.: 100). Thus the potential liberation that was afforded by the 'true sense' of culture is eroded by production of culture where profit is primary.

In his essay *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening* Adorno suggested, contrary to Benjamin, that the culture industry has brought about not a technologically-inspired enhancement, but a regression in listening perception. He observed how the regressed listener's 'primitivism is not that of the undeveloped, but that of the forcibly retarded' (ibid.: 47). The result of this was the 'well-hidden doubt' that the audience vaguely perceived about the culture industry's 'blessings', Adorno continuing that 'whenever they [the regressed listener] have a chance, they display the pinched hatred of those who really sense the other but exclude it in order to live in peace, and who therefore would like best to root out the nagging possibility' (ibid.).

Therefore, for Adorno, the culture industry smoothes over the negative dialectic that exists between society as it stands, and the potential of human society as Adorno and Benjamin both strived for. Rather than seeing the audience as senseless beings happy to play along with the illusion, he saw how they sense the 'other' but that it is so removed from them, such an impossibility to actualise, that they regress and try to wholly deny the possibility of the 'other'. In his essay *Culture Industry Reconsidered*, Adorno paralleled this view, explaining how 'the concepts of order which it [the culture industry] hammers into human beings are always those of the status quo' and that these concepts 'remain unquestioned, unanalysed and undialectically presupposed, even if they no longer have any substance for those who accept them' (ibid.: 104). He believed that the culture industry was not concerned with freedom or choice, rather that it 'impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves' (ibid.: 106), and 'it proclaims: you shall conform, without instruction as to what; conform to that which exists anyway, and to that which everyone thinks anyway as a reflex of its power and omnipresence' (ibid.).

Thus for Adorno, the danger of producing culture for profit was manifest in the cultural artefacts produced. For Adorno, these artefacts would not challenge the existing social

order, as they are designed not to expose a dialectic between what is and what can be, but rather to make a profit for the industry. Therefore, such cultural artefacts are non-innovative, regressive and mimetic in character, hiding and smoothing over the 'gaps' in civic society while they reinforce the capitalist order.

### 3.5 Beyond Frankfurt

Whilst this thesis considers the critical theory of the Frankfurt School to be especially relevant to the survey of cultural production in Ireland at this time, given that they operated at a time of crisis and were attempting to understand the role of art, culture, politics, economics and society at a similar time, nonetheless attention must be drawn to others who similarly, rejected the legitimacy of *l'art pour l'art* and also foregrounded the social and political connectedness of art and society. In the following sections (3.6 and 3.7), I look at both the production of culture perspective and the work of Pierre Bourdieu, both perspectives which stress the interconnectedness of artistic production with other factors of production, distribution and reception channels. However, in this section I briefly draw attention to some other writers who also took this approach, signalling a broad tradition in how the art/society relationship is considered.

For example, John Berger in his work *Ways of Seeing* (Berger, 1972/2008) critiques ideologies of how we view artistic works. In a series of seven essays (four written and three visual), Berger mounts a challenge to, for example, how we may understand artistic production, to images as means for consumption to how women are positioned in the art world. For example, Berger critiques the oil painting, not for the techniques it can employ, but for its role as status symbol for the collector, positing that the 'things' that oil paintings often depict are 'things which in reality are buyable' (Berger, 2008: 83). Thus, for Berger, there is a link between the possession of the real-life object and possession of the art object depicting it. Thus, the tradition of oil painting is loaded with aspirations of wealth and status, or as Berger argues, it 'still forms many of our cultural assumptions' (ibid.: 84). Why this is, Berger suggests is because 'the art of any period tends to serve the ideological interests of the ruling class' (ibid.: 86). Oil painting in part achieved this due to its ability to depict 'real' objects. As Berger observes, 'what distinguishes oil painting from any other form of painting is its special ability to render the tangibility, the texture, the lustre, the solidity of what it depicts' (ibid.: 88). Thus, the oil painting 'defines the real as that which you can put your hands on' and therefore can suggest an exchangeability or commodification of these objects in the real world.

Berger follows this thread to the present day where, in his final essay argues how we are presently surrounded by 'hundreds of publicity images' (Berger, 2008: 129). Whilst we may only see these images fleetingly, nonetheless for Berger, they 'stimulate the

imagination by way of either memory or expectation' (ibid.). He describes the prevalence of the images as a 'total system' (ibid.: 130), and whilst they give the illusion that the beholder can pass by the image by, for example looking away, turning down the sound or making some coffee (ibid.), nonetheless, 'despite this, one has the impression that publicity images are continually passing us, like express trains on their way to some distant terminus' (ibid.). For Berger, the reality of this state is that 'we are static; they are dynamic' (ibid.). Berger then introduces the political-economic dimension to this argument, observing that the competitiveness of these 'public images' is of benefit and service to the public, or the consumer as Berger suggests, as such competitiveness is coupled with notions of efficiency of manufacturing and thus a streamlined, consumer, economy. Thus the mechanism of the public image forms an illusory construct where, 'it proposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, or our lives, by buying something more' (ibid.: 131), and juxtaposes inner wealth for surface wealth as 'it proposes [that it] will make us in some way richer - even though we will be poorer by having spent our money' (ibid.). Thus, Berger engages with the nexus between the image, culture, politics, consumerism and society.

Berger also provides a treatment of how women are depicted in art, and how that differs from depictions of men. He addresses the 'function' as it were, of the female nude in art, arguing that 'the social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man' (Berger, 2008: 45). For Berger, the social presence of a man constitutes 'the promise of power which he embodies', or 'suggests what he is capable of doing to you or for you' (ibid.: 46). However, Berger argues that this is significantly different in representations of women in art, positing that 'by contrast, a woman's presence expresses her own attitude to herself, and defines what can and cannot be done to her' (ibid.). Thus, the woman learns to 'continually watch herself', as she becomes aware that she is an object of surveillance, 'and so she comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity of a woman' (ibid.). Berger suggests that the surveyor in a woman's psyche is itself male, as she imagines herself, or rehearses, being surveyed by males. Thus, 'she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight' (ibid.: 47).

Berger then moves on to analyse the tradition of the nude in European painting, arguing that women have been depicted as objects of blame, punishment, shame and vanity. Thus, in this act of observing the artworks depicting female nudes in this way, an

element of judgment is added (Berger, 2008: 52). There has arisen a situation presently where women are now judged for their beauty. Thus, according to Berger, 'beauty becomes competitive' (ibid.), leading to a condition where 'those who are not judged beautiful are *not beautiful*'. The corollary to this is that 'those who are, are given the prize' (ibid.). Berger asks the consequence to this, which is for him that 'the nude also relates to lived sexuality' (ibid.: 53). However, as the gaze is subjected 'onto' a woman; she is the object 'on display' (ibid.: 54). Thus, 'the principal protagonist is never painted' as 'he is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man' (ibid.). For Berger, this has never changed, concluding that 'the essential way of seeing women' is still the same to the present day (ibid.: 64). Berger argues that 'the "ideal" spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him' (ibid.). Thus, in this essay Berger addresses culture from the political perspective of feminist studies, arguing that the production of the image is politically loaded with ideology of gender.

A year earlier than this work was published, Linda Nochlin posited the question '*Why Have There Been no Great Women Artists?*'<sup>37</sup> in an article of the same name, published for *ArtNews* magazine (Nochlin, 1971<sup>37</sup>). Nochlin in this work seeks to problematise not only the marginalisation of female artists from the canon of art, but also the naive position-taking adopted by feminists, whereby their 'first reaction is to swallow the bait, hook, line and sinker' (ibid.) by attempting to answer the question as-is. This is an attempt to counter the most obvious and 'insidious' answer to Nochlin's question that implies there are no great women artists because women are incapable of greatness. However, the traditional feminist response is to enumerate examples of female artists, to 'rediscover' them or, as Nochlin observes, 'to engage in the normal activity of the specialist scholar who makes a case for the importance of his very own neglected or minor master' (ibid.). Another position according to Nochlin, is to 'shift' the parameters of what constitutes 'greatness', and thus engage in an attempt to find the existence of 'a distinctive and recognisable feminine style, different both in its formal and its expressive qualities and based on the special character of women's situation and experience'.

For Nochlin, these positions obscure the hidden ideologies and assumptions the lie beneath the typical arguments that rail against masculine hegemony. Rather, the arts is

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37 Article reproduced at Baker University and accessible at <http://www.bakeru.edu/faculty/adaugherty/wc/module5/artists.html>

not alone in how it is ‘stultifying, oppressive, and discouraging’ to not only women but all those ‘who did not have the good fortune to be born white, preferably middle class, and above all, male’. Thus, for Nochlin, attention needs to turn not to blaming ‘our empty internal spaces’ and bemoaning the unchangeable fact of having been born a woman, but by turning to a problematisation of ‘our institutions and our education’. Thus, the question would be far better answered by interrogating how these questions are posed in the first place, for example as ‘the woman problem, or the ‘black problem’ or the ‘American ‘problem’, all of which can be turned on their corollary as ‘the man problem’, the ‘white problem’ and the ‘Asian problem’ for example (ibid.). Thus, instead of addressing the ‘problem’ within the institutions as they are currently formulated, Nochlin suggests that it is up to women themselves to ‘conceive of themselves as potentially, if not actually, equal subjects’ rather than adopting a stance of self-pity. Nochlin also suggests that feminist scholars challenge ideas of normativity, of what constitutes ‘natural’ thought. Therefore, Nochlin challenges how art is perceived not just from a feminist standpoint, but by critiquing the institutions, value systems and education systems under which art is produced, and ‘normative’ art is that produced by a white, middle-class male.

Likewise art historian and critic Griselda Pollock has similarly critiqued the institutions under which art is evaluated, assessed and positioned as ‘valid’ or worthy of exhibition and review. As Pollock observed in a publication for New York’s MoMA<sup>38</sup>, collecting and exhibiting art historically existed as ‘social strategies and cultural mechanisms for legitimating the very visible forms of social difference and privilege created by both old and new wealth in the modern industrial era’ (ibid.). This wealth was largely controlled by men, and thus, ‘for a masculine establishment in control of the discourse and evaluation of art, which then shapes the whole discipline and practice in its own image, the artist cannot be a woman and perform this function’ (ibid.). This set the scene for the double exclusion of women institutionally - both from being part of the institution and from being included in the canon of art produced by the institution.

Thus, Pollock suggests that what is required of historical analysis of the canon is ‘not a belated recognition of hitherto-neglected women modernists as a second tier in the great modernist pantheon’. Rather, Pollock argues that ‘different modes of seeing’ and

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38 An online report, available at [http://www.moma.org/explore/publications/ModernWomen\\_Pollock.pdf](http://www.moma.org/explore/publications/ModernWomen_Pollock.pdf)

understanding art are required. For Pollock, modernism was not simply a 'one-sided project' that '(white) men simply did better' (ibid.). However, modernist thought failed to incorporate 'whatever it was that modernist women were introducing into culture through their newly emancipated and active embrace of the modernist revolutions in aesthetics'. Why this was, Pollock posits, is because this active embrace was so new as to appear as 'other' to 'early masculinist curators' (ibid.), thus warranting a neglect.

Therefore, like Nochlin and Berger, Pollock has called for a critique in understanding how we 'read' art, and how at an institutional level, art does not exist purely for art's sake, rather that there are institutional, political and gendered interests involved in the production of art that require consideration.



## 3.6 The Production of Culture Perspective

### 3.6.1 Introduction, or Prolegomenon

I now turn my attention to exploring an alternate model of cultural production, which originated in the US in the 1970s and is known as the ‘production of culture perspective’ (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 37). This school of thought attempted a practical and systematic analysis of the interconnected factors involved in the production of culture, addressing culture within social and economic contexts, whilst focusing on the meso-level rather than the macro (Preston, 2009). Central figures in this approach include Richard Peterson, Narasimhan Anand, Paul Hirsch and Diana Crane.

Whilst the ‘important contributions’ of this school, have been noted by cultural theorist David Hesmondhalgh, suggesting that ‘one of the most useful contributions of the production of culture perspective has been to enrich our notions of symbolic creativity’ (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 37)<sup>39</sup>, and indeed whilst the perspective does schematise the production nexus, this was a topic that the Frankfurt school were also concerned with much earlier in the century. I thus suggest that the production of culture perspective cannot be considered without some deference to their earlier influences<sup>40</sup>.

In his *Prolegomenon* to the production of culture perspective, Richard Peterson outlined his views on what a sociology of culture should consider for the advancement of the subject of cultural production (Peterson 1976). This, along with the more retrospective account in Peterson & Anand’s 2004 review provide an exegesis on the more institutional perspectives pertaining to the production of culture.

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39 Hesmondhalgh also testifies to the context that the perspective provides, stating that ‘instead of understanding culture as the product of supremely talented individuals, writers such as Howard Becker (1982) and Richard Peterson (1976) have helped to make it clear that creative cultural and artistic work is the product of collaboration and a complex division of labour’ (ibid.).

40 In fact, in a retrospective account of cultural production, Paul Hirsch acknowledges that a previous article of his was a ‘depoliticized exploration of what Adorno (1991) had earlier characterized as the industrialization of high culture’ (Hirsch 2000: 356).

For Peterson, no existing sociological perspective has successfully explained the society/culture relationship<sup>41</sup>, not least because they concentrate on debates between materialism and idealism, instead of focusing on shared characteristics. The term *production* is understood in the context of the production of culture perspective was also delineated by Peterson, observing that ‘as used here, the term “production” is meant in its generic sense to refer to the processes of creation, manufacture, marketing, distribution, exhibiting, inculcation, evaluation, and consumption’ (ibid.: 672). Thus, the production of culture perspective focuses on the systematic *processes* involved in cultural production.

Specifically, Peterson suggests that the production of culture perspective ‘chooses the alternate tack of turning attention from the global corpus of habitual culture and focusing instead on the processes by which elements of culture are fabricated in those milieux where symbol-system production is most self-consciously the center of activity’ (ibid.: 672). He acknowledges one shortcoming to the production perspective however, stating that ‘while it is made to order for explicating the common mechanisms for making “normal culture” ... it is ill-equipped to predict or even identify “cultural revolutions” in the making’ (ibid.: 673).

### *3.6.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of a Production Perspective*

One strength of focusing on the production mechanisms, according to Peterson, is a ‘levelling’ effect in the face of a ‘high-low’ divide, in sociological perspectives, that prioritise ‘the elite academic end of a continuum which also includes, near the commercial end, engineering and popular science of diverse sorts which received scant

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<sup>41</sup> The earlier prolegomenon proceeds by identifying perceived gaps in the canon of sociological texts relating to culture. Peterson thus calls for a grouping of those studies into a sociological perspective grouped around that subject of cultural production (Peterson 1976: 670), whilst also justifying the need for such a grouping by suggesting three existing perspectives on the culture/society relationship. The first grouping, which he terms the ‘autonomous culture cycle’, postulates that culture and society are two distinct and separate spheres. The second grouping, which he describes as ‘materialist’, is summed up by stating that ‘social structure creates culture’. The final grouping, described as ‘idealist’, posits that ‘culture creates social structure’. It is in this final grouping, incidentally, that Peterson includes Adorno (ibid.: 671). I believe that while this grouping is useful, it is misguided on Peterson’s part in relation to how he has situated Adorno. Drawing on my analysis of Adorno and Benjamin in the context of cultural production, culture, art and society are situated in a mutually constitutive way by the Frankfurt School. Certainly, both Adorno and Benjamin could testify to the potential of cultural forms to influence society. However, they were also very much aware of how culture could be inhibited by social structures. This is particularly the case for Adorno, whose reticence regarding the culture industry and its profit motives is a case in point.

scholarly attention of the sort advocated here' (ibid.). Thus, in effect, this perspective offers a liberation for all forms of cultural production in terms of scholarly legitimacy. Another strength lies in the nature of cultural production, where 'the scope of research is circumscribed enough in time and subject matter that small research projects can be cumulative' (ibid.: 673). A third strength lies in the easy adaptation of research practices from other sociological perspectives for research on the production of culture. Finally, this perspective can highlight communal practices across varying areas of cultural production.

Along with these strengths, Peterson critiques the production perspective, remarking in a footnote that 'the focus on production should not obscure the fact that there is a difference between producing a refrigerator on the one hand, and a president, a play, a law, a god, or a scientific formula on the other. In common these latter are invested with symbolic meaning well beyond their utility, and their creators are vested, in some degree with "sacred" powers' (ibid.: 679). This acknowledgement of symbolic meaning alludes to gradations of values and meaning in cultural production in comparison to the production of other objects, although Peterson does not go as far as to delineate between 'high' and 'low' culture, rather suggesting that cultural products can have more symbolic meaning than industrial products.

A limitation of the production perspective according to Peterson is that while it provides an exemplary exposition of processes in the making of what he terms 'normal culture', it fails to account for 'cultural revolutions' (ibid.: 673). Peterson argues that 'academic practitioners often elevate their own activity by denigrating commercial culture as brutalizing, inauthentic, or mere entertainment'. For Peterson, 'the impact of commercial forms on their consumers is a vital question, but too often a dehumanizing effect is *assumed*, and the study of popular culture itself is denigrated or dismissed as slumming' (ibid.: 676). Peterson claims that these habits of thinking 'lead to a glorification of the creator and foster the simplistic view that the unique creative genius is always and everywhere threatened by the debasing demands of culture consumers' (ibid.). The result of this, for Peterson, is that this 'systematically blinds the researcher to the complex mediating infrastructure between the two' (ibid.), i.e. the meso-level factors which, incidentally, he largely ignores. For Peterson, however, 'it is perhaps the distinctive characteristic of the production-of-culture perspective that it

focuses attention on this infrastructure’ (ibid.), thereby eliminating the risk of an academic research ideology grounded incorrectly in elitism.

### *3.6.3 Applications and Schemas of Production of Culture Models*

A later work by Peterson and Anand provides a retrospective exegesis of the production of culture perspective, whilst also offering some criticisms. They note how the production nexus can be organised into six facets (Peterson and Anand 2004: 311). The document provides an explication of the six facets of the production nexus and also provides an in-depth case study of the cassette tape in India as a model for how the production of culture perspective can be applied. It contextualises this perspective for organisational research, and also for research on informal relations.

By schematising the production nexus into six facets, the authors suggest that it is possible to see patterns in how the nexus operates. According to Peterson and Anand, the six facets are (a) technology; (b) law and regulation; (c) industry structure; (d) organisational structure; (e) occupational careers; and (f) market<sup>42</sup>. They observe that the facets are significantly linked to the extent that a change in one of the facets can have a knock-on destabilising and reorganising effect on the whole nexus (ibid.). They explain that this approach ‘views both culture and social structure as elements in an ever-changing patchwork’, claiming that it offers more than the traditional approaches which had seen culture and society as mutually constitutive.

In citing several studies, the authors explain that the studies ‘(a) focus on the expressive aspects of culture rather than values; (b) explore the processes of symbol production; (c) use the tools of analysis developed in the study of organizations, occupations, networks, and communities; and (d) make possible comparisons across the diverse sites of culture creation’ (ibid.: 312)<sup>43</sup>.

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42 Please see chapter 3 addenda of appendix A for a thorough outline of the six production facets

43 David Hesmondhalgh also carried out research into the facets of cultural production, considering the role of the culture industries, marketisation of culture, organisational structure, technological advances and the political framework in which the culture industries operate (Hesmondhalgh 2007). Please see the chapter 3 addenda of appendix A for a further elucidation of Hesmondhalgh’s model

### 3.6.4 *Critiquing the Perspective*

Whilst the contribution of the six-facet model provides researchers with an insight into the complex relationships underpinning cultural and creative production, as Peterson and Anand themselves have observed, the production of culture perspective has been critiqued for ignoring ‘what is special about art, what distinguishes it from the production of automobiles or shoes’ (Alexander 2003 in Peterson and Anand 2004: 326). The authors accept this charge without attempting to self-critique it, arguing that ‘in practice, the production perspective denies that there is something essentially unique about fine art ... rather it emphasizes that these high-status fields can be studied like other symbol-producing institutions’ (Peterson and Anand 2004: 327).

Diana Crane also observed a distinction between the culture industry and autonomous art in her study of reward systems (Crane 1976). Her work provides a further insight into the complexities involved in artistic production that casts doubt on the production of culture perspective’s assertion that there was nothing unique about fine art, and that such fields can be homogenised along with mass culture. In her work, Crane posited four broad types of reward systems, which may be considered as incentives to innovation; (a) independent reward systems, (b) semi-independent reward systems, (c) subcultural reward systems and (d) heterocultural reward systems<sup>44</sup>.

Whilst Crane concedes that studies of independent reward systems have not been applied to avant-garde art, she nonetheless acknowledges that avant-garde art operates with an independent and/or semi-independent reward system. She then posits that mass media cultural production falls into the category of the heterocultural reward system, significantly noting that ‘this type of cultural form is parasitic, borrowing from the other types if the gatekeepers think that these innovations will be of interest to a larger audience’ (ibid.). She furthers this point, noting that ‘typical of the heterocultural reward system is the supremacy of economic rewards over symbolic rewards and the

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44 Crane defines the independent reward system as that ‘in which cultural innovations are produced for an audience of fellow innovators’, and posits that it is the innovators themselves who decide upon symbolic and material rewards. A semi-independent reward system differs from the independent one insofar as the innovators set the norms and decide upon the symbolic rewards, but ‘material rewards are allocated by consumers, entrepreneurs or bureaucrats’. The subcultural reward system rewards innovations that are produced for a particular subculture, e.g. ethnic or generational. In this reward system, the innovators set the norms, much like in the first two systems, but the subculture of consumers decide upon both the symbolic and material rewards. Finally, the heterocultural reward system ‘represents a situation in which entrepreneurs or bureaucrats set norms for innovative work, consumers allocate symbolic rewards, and entrepreneurs or bureaucrats allocate material rewards’ (ibid.: 721-722).

fact that the innovator himself becomes relatively unimportant and powerless. He is easily replaceable by other innovators with whom he has little contact or exchange' (ibid.).

In this regard, Crane's work can be considered as one that augments the production of culture perspective. Where the production of culture perspective appears lacking in its critique of the culture industries and their primary profit motives, Crane considers this. Where the perspective fails to strongly distinguish between works in terms of their quality, Crane suggests that the functional meaning of cultural products is distinguishable. Therefore I believe that when considering the production of culture perspective in terms of a six-faceted nexus, Crane's work provides an adjunct, and possibly a seventh facet, that takes into account the concerns of cultural theorists such as Adorno<sup>45</sup>.

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45 Adorno argues that 'the culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above' and 'forces together the spheres of high and low art, separated for thousands of years' (Adorno 1991: 98). The intent with which this industry operates is also explained, Adorno observing that the culture industry 'undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed' (ibid.). Yet, according to Adorno, 'the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation, an appendage of the machinery' (ibid.: 99). This clearly echoes Crane's assertion of the parasitic nature of the heterocultural reward system, its use of innovations for economic gain, and the unimportance of the innovator and the audience.

Adorno also describes a remarkably similar set of processes in the culture industry as Crane does for the heterocultural reward system, observing that autonomous works of art are all but eliminated by the culture industry. His sentiments are similar to Crane's, who posits that the bureaucrats and entrepreneurs allocate the material and symbolic rewards in the heterocultural system. In Adorno's critique, he identifies 'both those who carry out directives (bureaucrats) as well as those who hold the power (entrepreneurs)' (ibid., my observations in parenthesis), blaming those two groups for the demise of the autonomy of art in the culture industry.

As to why this is, again we find congruences between Crane and Adorno. Crane cites the 'parasitic' nature of the reward system, and observes how it favours economic rewards. Adorno's critique is in accord with this, baldly stating that 'they are or were in search of new opportunities for the realization of capital in the most economically developed countries' (ibid.).

### 3.7 The Cultural Theories of Pierre Bourdieu

#### 3.7.1 Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu investigated the role of culture in society, whilst also advocating a broader sociological epistemology that invited a combination of relative objectivity and also reflexivity on the part of the sociologist. Bourdieu termed this epistemology ‘participant objectivation’ (Bourdieu 2003). Thus, he is of importance to a study of cultural production on two counts; first from his specific works on culture, and also his broader epistemological outlook<sup>46</sup>.

Richard Jenkins stressed the importance of Bourdieu’s work for the contemporary intellectual and their engagement with the global zeitgeist, positing that ‘he asserted the right, the duty indeed, of the public intellectual to engage with politics and the issues of the day, whether they be poverty, immigration, or globalisation’ (Jenkins 2002: x). Thus, for Bourdieu, any sociological survey, including a study of cultural or artistic production, was situated in a political and economic domain that was local, national and supra-national<sup>47</sup>. Jenkins posits that ‘Bourdieu’s main contribution was, perhaps, to demonstrate, by example in his own work and by exhortation, the necessary and mutual implication in each other of theory and research’ (ibid.). Jenkins observes that importantly, this standpoint has ‘consistently been framed by and engagement between systematic empirical work’ (ibid.: 10), with Jenkins quoting from Bourdieu that ‘theory without empirical research is empty, empirical research without theory is blind’ (ibid.).

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46 Whilst I aim to focus mainly on his writings on cultural production, it is also relevant to explore Bourdieu’s perspective on the practice of sociological research, which is outlined in the chapter 3 addenda of appendix A in order to situate the specific works on culture within his broader perspective on the discipline of sociological research.

47 This standpoint is similar to that of the Frankfurt School, who stressed that the cultural producer was embedded culturally, technologically, historically and politically. For the Frankfurt School however, their aesthetic theory posited that it was the place of the producer to highlight the potential transformative opportunities for society, whereas for Bourdieu, this role lay with the public intellectual. Another difference between the two standpoints is that while the Frankfurt School are more widely regarded as critical theorists, Bourdieu conducted extensive empirical research to support his theories.

In the following sections I introduce some of Bourdieu's key concepts, those of *habitus*, field, capital and distinction. This provides a complement to the production of culture and Frankfurt School theories, bringing together elements of class-based concerns and a 'framework' of cultural production and reception.

### 3.7.2 *Habitus, Field and Capital*

#### 3.7.2.1 *Habitus*

The habitus is an important concept in Bourdieu's cultural theories, comprising 'a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to the analogical transfer of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 120). It is more easily understood as 'a feel for the game' or a 'practical sense' (Bourdieu 1993: 5), operating with an internal logic, in what Bourdieu terms 'the logic of practice' (ibid.). The habitus is formed in childhood, is appropriated from the parents in an unconscious way, and while it can be altered, it is largely built upon simple logical distinctions in childhood (such as high/low, black/white) which are then subsequently applied in more complex and broad ways. The habitus, although internalised, is not an individual concept, it is rooted in the family, and in a larger class context, and is thus unified at a social level. While the individual performs actions, 'individual practice as regulated by the logic of practice is always a structural variant of group and especially class practice' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 120). Bourdieu suggests that the unified practice of a class group is in part determined by the habitus, positing the formula [(habitus) (capital) ] + field = practice (Bourdieu 1984: 101). Thus, the habitus can direct the actions of a class group based on previous experience, and also based on the trajectory of that group.

The habitus has implications for the field of cultural production and appropriation. Garnham and Williams posit that certain consistencies of taste observed by Bourdieu are indicators of the habitus of a particular social group, or class fraction. As Bourdieu observed, 'the schemes of the habitus ... owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language' (Bourdieu 1984: 466). As



Bourdieu argues, 'taste is a practical mastery of distributions which makes it possible to sense or intuit what is likely (or unlikely) to befall - and therefore to benefit - an individual occupying a given position in social space' (ibid.). For Bourdieu, a system of cultural production or appropriation, is a subset of a larger, unconscious class dynamic which seeks to preserve, reinforce and reproduce the class relations that have been appropriated in the habitus, for example with distinctions such as rare/common and distinguished/vulgar etc (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 122).

### 3.7.2.2 *Field*

The social groups of the habitus are also organised into 'fields' comprising 'a social arena within which struggles of manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them' (Jenkins 2002: 84). This organisation is a hierarchical and relational one 'within which human agents are engaged in specific struggles to maximize their control over the social resources specific to that field, the intellectual field, the educational field, the economic field etc' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 122). Bourdieu posits that the field of class struggle predominates over the other fields, and thus imbues each other field with the same features of class struggle. Therefore, a particular field will struggle within the broader field of class struggle, develop skills to cope or to advance, with the ultimate goal leading to an accumulation of capital.

The concept of the field has implications for cultural production, gatekeeping and taste. Bourdieu is quite precise as to what a field is or is not, positing that an artistic or literary field 'is neither a vague social background nor even a *milieu artistique* like a universe of personal relations between artists and writers. It is a veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted' (Bourdieu 1993: 164). Taste and aesthetic judgement is mitigated by the hierarchical struggles at play within the field of cultural production, but also by the relationship of the field of cultural production to the broader field of power. Therefore, within the hierarchy of a field, there can be a

dominant class and a dominated class, while the field itself can be relatively dominant or dominated when viewed relative to the field of power<sup>48</sup>.

### 3.7.2.3 *Capital*

The concept of capital is central to Bourdieu's work on cultural production. Bourdieu posits the existence of a class struggle for domination over the modes of production, and therefore over capital. According to Bourdieu this is a historical struggle, with pre-industrial societies characterised by a fusion of material and symbolic fields of production (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 122). At the next stage of development there was a growth of an economic field, which began to separate the material from the symbolic fields. It was at this point, Bourdieu argues, that 'a specialized group of symbolic producers' emerged, 'with an interest in securing a monopoly of the objectified instruments of symbolic struggle, especially written language' (ibid.: 123). This interest in dominating the means of expression in the symbolic realm 'pits them against the dominant economic class in a struggle over what Bourdieu describes as "the hierarchization of the principles of hierarchization"' (ibid.). However, this group is somewhat conflicted as it 'shares a mutual interest with the dominant economic class in maintaining the overall set of material class relations'. This is because they have an interest in transforming their symbolic capital in to economic capital, and therefore in a sense must 'collude' to articulate the symbols of the dominant economic class in order to maintain the class structure that supports and facilitates the field of cultural production in the first place.

However, at times of great change this relationship can be subverted as material capital is more overtly prioritised. Bourdieu considers the era since the nineteenth century to

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48 Bourdieu elucidates this by positing that the field of cultural production is itself dominated by the field of power. This is because this field 'is the economic world reversed' insofar as 'cultural production distinguishes itself from the production of the most common objects in that it must produce not only the object in its materiality, but also the value of this object, that is, the recognition of artistic legitimacy' (ibid.). Therefore, the agents within the field of cultural production 'occupy a dominated position in the dominant class, they are owners of a dominated form of power at the interior of the sphere of power' (ibid.). Bourdieu stresses the importance of considering the field of cultural production in this manner, as it helps explain certain strategies employed by artists and other members of the field of cultural production. Bourdieu even posits that members of this field possess a double status as both an orator and a fool (ibid.: 165) because of their position as a dominant agent in a dominated field. Therefore, members of this field can be treated with ambivalence by the dominator field, but the members of the field of cultural production can adopt an ambivalent stance to the dominator field, notably for Bourdieu in the contrasting examples of *l'art pour l'art* and social art movements (ibid.).

be one such period of change. He posits that agents in this late historical time enter fields with their appropriations from the habitus, but also with a set of material goods. Bourdieu divides these assets into two forms of capital - cultural and economic (ibid.). He posits that an agent will enter a field with the intention of reproducing and if possible adding to the capital of that field. This holds true even for so-called 'cultural' capital, because cultural capital functions as a form of symbolic capital that has the potential to be ultimately converted to economic capital. The education system 'as a system of certification, created a market in cultural capital within which certificates acted as money both in terms of a common, abstract socially guaranteed medium of exchange between cultural capitals and, crucially, between cultural capital and the labour market and thus access to economic capital' (ibid.: 124).

The implications of Bourdieu's treatment of capital and interest for cultural production are articulated by Jenkins. He observes that 'in general agreement with his hostility to rational actor theories of any kind, what Bourdieu is offering here is in trenchant opposition to any view of art, whether traditional or radical, which places individual creativity, however conceived, at the heart of the enterprise' (ibid.: xii). Instead, Bourdieu treats cultural production 'as "position taking" in a field of possibilities, a market in which symbolic capital or cultural distinction are product, reward and resource: both means and end' (Jenkins 2002: xii). However, in accepting a stance that artistic cultural production is for recognition, he denies the individual intentionality and consciousness that Jenkins highlighted. Therefore, there appears to be a contradiction in Bourdieu's rationale here - at once he advocates a conscious, considered reflexivity in social science research but somewhat minimises it in the case of artistic production. Once again Jenkins critiques this, noting that 'one does not have either to sign up to the "lone genius" model, or lapse into reductionist subjectivism, to suggest that in art as in all other areas of social practice something of some importance which can usefully be glossed as creativity is sometimes happening. In this sense, Bourdieu's analysis is open to criticism as social reductionism: a baby may perhaps be being thrown out with the bath water' (ibid.: xiv)<sup>49</sup>.

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49 Please see the chapter 3 addenda of appendix A for an annotation of Bourdieu's social space and for an account of how he situates cultural consumption as one aspect of production

### 3.7.3 *Distinction*

For Bourdieu, the primary motive of the dominant class is to use these tropes of habitus and field, and forms of accumulated capital to distance themselves from the other classes in an act of judgement - of 'distinction'. Thus, there exist what Bourdieu terms 'hierarchies of legitimacy' (Bourdieu 1993: 85). According to these hierarchies, 'the more legitimate a given area, the more necessary and "profitable" it is to be competent in it, and the more damaging and "costly" to be incompetent (ibid.).

Garnham and Williams observe that in response to this, 'at the deepest level of the class ethos the dominated class reject the dominant culture in a movement of pure negation' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 126). However, in doing so, they create their own aesthetic of negation, which rejects aesthetic form in favour of function and judges art and other cultural goods not by an aesthetic, but by what they represent 'according to the social and ethical values of the class ethos, that values participation and immediate semi-sensual gratification at the expense of disinterested and distanced contemplation' (ibid.). As Bourdieu explains, 'it must never be forgotten that the working class "aesthetic" is a dominated "aesthetic" which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics' (Bourdieu 1993: 41). Bourdieu posits that the working class therefore experiences a conflicted relationship with aesthetics, positing that 'the members of the working class, who can neither ignore the high-art aesthetic, which denounces their own "aesthetic", nor abandon their socially conditioned inclinations, but still less proclaim them and legitimate them, often experience their relationship to the aesthetic norms in a twofold and contradictory way' (ibid.). This manifests in an aesthetic appreciation of the practical value of the work, Bourdieu observing that 'working-class people, who expect every image to fulfil a function, if only that of a sign, refer, often explicitly, to norms of morality or agreeableness in all their judgements' (ibid.).

The petite bourgeoisie also make distinctions - judgements of taste - based on strategy. Bourdieu explains the reason for this, positing that 'the whole relationship of the petite bourgeoisie to culture can in a sense be deduced from the considerable gap between knowledge and recognition, the source of the cultural goodwill which takes different

forms depending on the degree of familiarity with legitimate culture, that is, on social origin and the associated mode of cultural acquisition' (Bourdieu 1993: 319). Bourdieu suggests that this cultural goodwill manifests in a complex juxtaposition of strategies, including 'cultural docility ... often combined with a sense of unworthiness ... commensurate with the respect that it is accorded' (ibid.: 321).

#### 3.7.4 Critiques

Garnham and Williams (1986) suggest critiques of Bourdieu's work, relevant to a discourse on the cultural industries, with Jenkins also observing that 'as Garnham has pointed out, the institutions of cultural production - the "culture industry" - are more or less completely neglected by Bourdieu' (Jenkins 2002: 147). Garnham and Williams observe a research question not addressed by Bourdieu, namely 'the effect on the operation of symbolic power of the increased intervention of economic capital directly into the field of the production of symbolic goods via the so-called culture industries' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 129). Thus, the field of cultural production, distinguished by its negation of economic capital in order to first exist, is now undergoing an investment of economic capital, thus blurring its very *raison d'être*. This blurring causes a situation where, according to Garnham and Williams 'the economic interests of the dominant fraction directly threaten the cultural interests of the dominated fraction' (ibid.), an insight relevant to today's top-price art 'market' whether in London, New York or Beijing.

Garnham and Williams are also critical of Bourdieu's analysis, deeming it to contain 'a functionalist/determinist residue in [his] concept of reproduction' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 129). Jenkins, while agreeing that the notion of a 'pure' Kantian aesthetic is problematic, also suggests that Bourdieu's approach 'is, in its own way, no less reductionist. Culture and taste are, for Bourdieu, wholly arbitrary; history and social construction are all' (Jenkins 2002: 149), leading Bourdieu 'to place less emphasis on the possibilities of real change and innovation' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 129). Jenkins also observes this, questioning how Bourdieu could explain such upheavals as the rise of modernism, and positing that 'there is little room for innovation of deviance except insofar as they represent limited manoeuvres within an overall framework of stability' (Jenkins 2002: 149).

Garnham and Williams posit that Bourdieu needs to make a further *distinction*, as it were, of his own when considering cultural production - that between replication and reformation. They explain that 'reformation points us towards spaces that are opened up in conjunctural situations in which the dominant class is objectively weakened and which thus offers opportunities for real innovation in the social structure' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 130). However, these spaces are contested and fraught with their own power dynamics that, according to Bourdieu's analysis, make change difficult.

Jenkins also finds this problematic, attributing the issue to Bourdieu's concept of the habitus. Jenkins explains that 'once acquired it underlies and conditions all subsequent learning and social experience. This raises the issue of the possibility of change, both at individual level and the collective (because, although the habitus is embodied in individual agents, it is a social phenomenon)' (Jenkins 2002: 79).

### **3.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have analysed key theories of cultural production, with a view to situating cultural production in the digital age to these frameworks. Both the Frankfurt School and the production of culture perspective have considerably illuminated the complexities and ambivalences involved in cultural and artistic production. Where the two schools of thought complement each other is in the synthesis of meaning and practicality, the Frankfurt School being concerned with meaning, freedom, and artistic autonomy, the production of culture perspective with the practicalities of deconstructing complex processes into a practicable schema for analysis. In the context of this research thesis, the Frankfurt School is of particular relevance as it engages with concepts of artistic production whilst also stressing the situatedness of the producer. Thus, this theoretical perspective is relevant for informing the theoretical framework for a meso and macro-level analysis of cultural production. It also adds a perspective in the two themed areas of (1) socio-cultural situatedness and (2) art, as outlined in chapter 1.

The advantages of a production of culture perspective include a systematic empiricism and practicality. However, a tendency for such systems approaches is that they can underemphasise and even negate the subjective and intersubjective facets of research. As we have seen, despite the general practicalities that the production perspective affords, it has usually overlooked, with Crane and Wolff as exceptions, the complexities involved in analysing high art and popular culture. In contrast to this, the Frankfurt School analysed the subjectivity and intersubjectivity of the artistic innovator, and the interdependent relationship of the individual, culture and society. The advantage to this approach is that tends to be anti-reductionist and does not attempt to reduce immanent experience to an objective system.

The work of Bourdieu has contributed much to the understanding of how scholars approach their research. His practical, empirical work supported by robust theory combines two of the strengths of academic research - reflexivity and (relative) objectivity. In terms of explaining tensions of class dynamics, his concepts of the field and habitus are useful, whilst situating these concepts within a dynamic of cultural, social and economic capital. Again, this is relevant for informing the key themed area of socio-cultural situatedness, with a strong emphasis on both the production and reception

of culture. In terms of cultural production, Bourdieu's key concepts, while very powerful for revealing certain dynamics of power, capital, economics and hierarchy, fall short of explaining radical innovations in the cultural sector. It would seem that in his desire to distance himself from any over-romantic belief in 'innate' taste, Bourdieu nonetheless distances himself from concepts of individual intentionality, consciousness, creativity and innovation.

In the next chapter I pick up these concepts of individuality, creativity and the artistic experience, whilst also situating the aesthetic encounter within periodising hypotheses of modernist, postmodernist, electronic, 'altermodern' and 'postmedia' conditions of artistic production.



# **Chapter 4**

## **Perspectives on Art**

## **Chapter 4: Perspectives on Art**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I analyse perspectives on art and aesthetics, to situate cultural and artistic production of digital media within the context of multiple academic domains. The chapter thus aims to provide an exegesis on the key questions on the subject of art as described in chapter 1, and complement the discussion of art as production of culture in chapter 3. I therefore explore how art is positioned through various theoretical lenses, with perspectives from cultural studies, aesthetic theory and the philosophy of art included. I suggest that this interdisciplinary account of art may ameliorate the contested formulations of what art 'is', by considering facets ranging from debates on a 'universal', Kantian aesthetic to the subjective and immanent response to the work of art. I suggest this approach, as an encounter with art is a contested, debated and problematic experience in terms of description, analysis and categorisation, with further implications for digital art, where new forms of production and distribution often challenge traditional notions of 'art' itself.

## 4.2 Art as an Encounter

Simon O’Sullivan (2006) suggests that the experience of an art object may be examined by comparing an object of artistic *encounter* with an object of *recognition* (O’Sullivan, 2006: 1). This distinction is significant. O’Sullivan posits that in meeting with an object of recognition, ‘our knowledges, beliefs and values are reconfirmed’ (ibid.). On the other hand, O’Sullivan posits that to have the experience of an *encounter* however, is to have an antithetical experience. According to O’Sullivan, an encounter ‘produces a cut, a crack’ (ibid.), and in such an encounter, ‘our typical ways of being in the world are challenged, our systems of knowledge disrupted’ (ibid.), and ‘we are forced to thought’ (ibid.). Thus, in an experience of recognition, the observer is confronted with a familiar scene or event which reinforces that scene, reaffirms it and strengthens prior perceptions of it. However, in an experience of encounter, a rupture to the familiar occurs, where new knowledge and experience can seed itself. For O’Sullivan, ‘the rupturing encounter also contains a moment of affirmation, the affirmation of a new world, in fact a way of seeing and thinking this world differently’ (ibid.)<sup>50</sup>. Thus, in that rupture between the known and the unknown, a transformational space is possible.

However, to uncritically consider this trope of ‘art-as-encounter’ from this one author - however in tune with the ‘negative dialectics’ of critical theory - would amount to a mere article of faith. Thus, whilst it is beyond the scope of this section to fully expound on the historical trajectory ‘art-as-encounter’ trope in art theory, I nonetheless wish to draw the reader’s attention to other influences on this trope. One such influence is the of Henri Bergson, who in his major work *Matter and Memory* (1896/1988) problematises perception, leading on to discussions of recognition and attention (Bergson, 1988: 99). Bergson suggests that in the act of attention, the mind ‘gives up the pursuit of the useful effect of a present perception’ (ibid.: 101) and relinquishes that pursuit in favour of allowing for ‘the projection, outside ourselves, of an actively created image’. Thus, when the suspension of a *recognised* perceived object occurs, there is a moment of

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<sup>50</sup> I compare this process to the Vedic concept of *mantra* and *brahmana*. To elucidate, *mantra* consists of sound vibrations (chants, for example), and *brahmana* consists of the gaps between the sounds. On the surface value, the *mantra* is supremely important, as it is the manifest, repeatable, knowable substance of the chant. However, it is only through the *brahmana* – those gaps and pauses that allow space for the sound to enter, while also giving it a syntax and meaning – that contextualisation, understanding and ultimately transformation of the chant can occur. Likewise, in the rupture that a genuine encounter with art can provide, there is a space created for a new understanding of the matter at hand.

relinquishing that recognition in favour of allowing the mind to imagine, or construct a 'projection' of a newly created image. Thus in the relinquishment of the familiar, or 'present perception', a space or 'gap' allowing for the construction of a new formulation is possible. Bergsen's work has been influential on theorists of art and aesthetics such as Emmanuel Levinas and Bracha Ettinger.

For Levinas, the artwork allows for this transformation between the present perception and the projection, or possibility of an other image. Thus Levinas argues that 'the most elementary procedure of art consists in substituting for the object its image. Its image, and not its concept' (Levinas, 1987: 3). Levinas expands on this, considering a 'concept' as an 'object grasped' or 'the intelligible object'. Thus, in such an intelligible object, that which makes sense, 'we maintain a living relationship with a real object; we grasp it, we conceive it' (ibid.).

However, in terms of art then, an image disrupts this procedure, or 'neutralises this real relationship, this primary conceiving through action' (Levinas, 1987: 3). This disruptive or 'monstrous' property of art, for Levinas is the function of art, rhetorically asking 'does not the function of art lie in not understanding?' (ibid.). In what I suggest is another parallel to the concept of the 'gap' in which the artistic 'encounter' may occur, Levinas describes how art can open this 'gap'. 'Art' according to Levinas, 'brings about this duration in the interval, in that sphere which a being is able to traverse, but in which its shadow is immobilised'. Again, clarifying between the concept and image of an object, Levinas continues by noting how 'the eternal duration of the interval in which a statue is immobilised differs radically from the eternity of a concept; it is the meanwhile, never finished, still enduring - something inhuman and monstrous' (ibid.: 11). Thus the 'gap' in which the artistic experience or *encounter* may occur is not necessarily a positively transcendental moment, but can be more akin to Burke's formulation of the *sublime*, where an event - a terrible one - beyond our grasp precipitates a sense of 'astonishment' that causes a suspension of movement, thought and action.

Bracha Ettinger similarly discusses the artistic encounter in terms of 'trauma'. For Ettinger, 'the place of art is for me the transport-station of trauma: a transport-station that more than a place is rather a space, that allows for certain occasions of occurrence and of encounter' (Ettinger, 2000: 91). This 'transport-station' works thus: 'the transport is expected in this station, and it is possible, but the transport-station does not

promise that passage of remnants of trauma will actually take place in it; it only supplies the space for this occasion' (ibid.). Thus, in Ettinger's formulation art can be conceptualised as a potential space, a holding space in which transported information may or may not appear. However, the information that does arrive through an experience of the artistic encounter may be traumatic, or it may not arrive at all. As Ettinger, continues 'the passage is expected but uncertain, the transport does not happen in each encounter and for every gazing subject' (ibid.). Thus, the trope of 'art-as-encounter' is not prescriptive. Not every art object will evoke this encounter, and even if it does, it will not do so for every person that observes the art object. Thus the trope of 'art-as-encounter' is a contested and problematic concept, with conflicting theories of art either bolstering the case for an 'encounter', or denying the possibility for such experience to exist.

One such criticism comes from postmodern thought, which is often seen as 'a break with the aesthetic field of modernism' (Foster, 1998: ix). Problematising postmodernism and its relationship to modernism Jurgen Habermas (1998) posited that the aesthetic of modernity was in part, characterised by the separation of 'the substantive reason expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous spheres' of science, morality and art (ibid.: 8). This separation led to the various subjects being handled by 'experts' in their fields, for example, taste, art criticism, and 'aesthetic-expressive rationality', which could then be institutionalised and formalised further (ibid.). However, Habermas posits that the project of modernity had a lofty and overly-ambitious 'extravagant expectation that the arts and sciences would promote not only the control of natural forces but also understanding of the world and self, moral progress, the justice of institutions and even the happiness of human beings'. (ibid.). Habermas observes how 'the 20<sup>th</sup> century has shattered this optimism', leading to 'efforts to "negate" the culture of expertise' in a postmodern gesture.

This is evident in postmodern art practices such as primitivism and conceptualism, where technical expertise, skill and refinement of expression is not only deprioritised but relinquished in a deliberate anti-expertise gesture that is more well-known in postmodernist thought as a turn to 'populism'. In particular, the Turner Prize has been regarded as an exponent of postmodern art and culture, with one commentator noting how 'recent Turner prize winners testify to the degree to which the post-modern movement has extended notions of art' (Harold: 2005, Beaumont: 2005, Boston: 2000).

However, the prize has also attracted much criticism for what it considers as ‘art’, revealing the postmodern anti-expertise gesture to turn art practice into a trajectory where theoretical validation appears necessary to bolster poorly executed work. Once commentator revealed how this criticism has been mooted by several daily newspapers, observing that ‘the Independent yearned for something that wasn’t “about wearing your theory-stuffed brain on your sleeve”’. The Telegraph wrote off the entire 2008 show as “technically competent, bland, and ultimately empty” (Higgins, 2008).

For Habermas (1998), the postmodern efforts of artistic and cultural negation are a mistake. He suggests that ‘the problem won’t go away’ by making a regressive, anti-modern gesture (Foster, 1998: 9). For Habermas, the postmodern gestures that remove ‘the distinction between artefact and object of use’, its efforts to ‘declare everything to be art and everyone to be an artist’ (ibid.: 10) and a practice that serves to ‘retract all criteria and to equate aesthetic judgement with the expression of subjective experiences’ have failed, showing themselves ‘to be sort of nonsense experiments’. Thus, rather than the negation of expert art, the postmodern gesture has ‘ended up ironically by giving due exactly to these categories through which Enlightenment aesthetics had circumscribed its object domain’. A second flaw in the postmodern gesture for Habermas is in the ‘abstraction’ of meaning. For Habermas, ‘in everyday communication, cognitive meanings, moral expectations, subjective expressions and evaluations must relate to each other’. The abstraction of these meanings, through a ‘cultural impoverishment’ could not help ‘save’ a ‘rationalised everyday life’ (ibid.: 11). For Habermas, the aesthetic experience, whether by a ‘layman’ or a ‘professional critic’ is a significant and meaningful one which ‘not only renews the interpretation of our needs in whose light we perceive the world’, in what is a comparable process to the *recognition* of O’Sullivan. Rather, the aesthetic experience also ‘permeates as well our cognitive significations and our normative expectations and changes the manner in which all these moments refer to one another’, in a process compatible with O’Sullivan’s formulation of the transformative *encounter* with an art object.

Thus, the postmodern ‘pure immanence of art’ which ‘disputes that it has a utopian content’ negates the potential of the artistic encounter for Habermas. However, this trope of ‘utopian’ potential of art is also somewhat simplistic and problematic, bringing a prescriptive ontology of ‘sameness’ to the potential of art. As noted above, Levinas described this potential as ‘inhuman and monstrous’ in its ability to be limitless,

suggesting that the 'gap' in which the artistic encounter may occur is not necessarily in line with the modern ideal of a 'utopian' experience of art. Likewise, Ettinger discussed the artistic encounter as a 'transport-station of trauma'. Notwithstanding this problematic dimension to Habermas, I suggest that a practical stance is to treat an art object as a *potential* site of *encounter*. Whilst an extreme postmodern position negates this potential, I also point out that the *encounter* must also only be considered in its potential. It is by no means a given that every art object will bring about an *encounter*, let alone a utopian one, nor can that potential be negated in a conceptual frame that does not allow for its possibility.

### 4.3 Cultural Studies and Art

#### 4.3.1 Artists or 'Symbol Creators'?

In this section, I argue that the neglect of O'Sullivan's 'encounter' is evident in the field of cultural studies. Enlightenment thinking posits art as a pinnacle of human achievement, or as David Hesmondhalgh observes, 'since the Renaissance – and especially since the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century – there has been a widespread tendency to think of "art" as being one of the highest forms of human creativity' (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 4). Artists were thought of as special, gifted or different, with Hesmondhalgh suggesting that this mystery around 'high' art caused cultural studies scholars to question just what 'high' art comprised. He thus posits that this creativity involves 'the manipulation of symbols' in a largely materialist stance, the symbols mostly created 'for the purposes of entertainment, information', albeit with an aside that they can be created for 'perhaps even enlightenment'. He also undermines the role of 'creator' or 'artist', preferring to use the terminology 'symbol creators' to describe such roles (ibid.: 5). Also significantly, Hesmondhalgh defines these 'symbol creators' as people who 'make up, *interpret* or *rework* stories, songs images and so on' (ibid. emphasis added).

Considering the suggestion that art potentially exists as a site of encounter, the position that Hesmondhalgh adopts is problematic, equating the creative processes and the skills involved in executing an original work with the skills involved in the interpretation or the reworking of a text, thus conflating O'Sullivan's *recognition* with *encounter*. This conflation is further confirmed in the discussion of cultural texts, (in the form of informational texts but also films, TV series and video games), Hesmondhalgh suggesting that those forms 'provide us with recurring representations of the world and thus act as a kind of reporting', and how they 'help to constitute our inner, private lives and our public selves' (Hesmondhalgh, 2007: 3). Here, Hesmondhalgh draws equivalence between creation and interpretation, as abstract 'symbols' or as the 'recurring representations' that they provide, without making distinction between representation of existing work and newly created, original work. Where this stance is problematic is that, according to Hesmondhalgh, there is no place, nor is there any necessity to even discuss the concept of rupture or *encounter*. The function of 'symbol creators' is merely to provide objects of



recognition that help 'us' constitute ourselves in a process of reassurance and repetition.

#### 4.3.2 *Cultural Studies and Art*

Hesmondhalgh is not alone in how his interpretation of art and creative works as cultural text and 'symbol'. Chris Barker provides a summary of debates within cultural studies around the nature of 'high' and 'low' culture, analysing how scholars such as Arnold and Leavis delineated between high and low culture by a quality of aesthetics. According to Barker, this has been problematic for cultural studies in that 'the policing of the boundaries of a canon of "good" works led to the exclusion of popular culture' (Barker, 2008: 63). For Barker, this policing was through a hierarchy whereby distinctions were made about the quality of works from the cultural vantage point of the elite and privileged, which did not take into account the tastes of the masses, but of the select number of individuals who belonged to that privileged class. This 'class-based hierarchy', as Barker terms it, had been 'employed by apologists as representative of a universal set of aesthetic criteria', criteria that cultural studies scholars deemed to be no longer valid means by which to judge the cultural texts (ibid)<sup>51</sup>. Thus, a reactionary stance positions artistic production as just another form of production, in 'a human transformation of the material environment through labour' (ibid.: 64). Barker sums up this debate within the cultural studies domain by observing that 'there is little justification for excluding the soap opera from the artistic domain on the grounds that art, i.e. aesthetic quality, is a different kind of activity' (ibid).

Seen through the lens of of postmodernist thought, where hierarchical value judgements are discarded in favour of an 'inner logic of a cultural domain' (Foster, 1998: 12), this argument is difficult to counter. However, Barker critiques this position, arguing that the issue of value judgement has shown itself to be problematic within cultural studies, as it proves contradictory in its application. According to Barker, the conflict lies thus; the discipline aims to foreground popular culture as a valid area of study, accepted into the academy in the context of the existing tradition of 'high'

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<sup>51</sup> Using the example of the soap opera, Barker analyses how the traditional means employed to judge quality became no longer valid in later discussions of cultural studies. He observes how Allen (1985: 11) argued how the crux of the issue surrounding discussion of the soap opera was related to its *form*. By judging the value or quality of the soap opera based on the traditional aesthetic forms, the soap opera was bound to be seen as 'superficial and unsatisfying' Barker, 2008: 63).

culture. This process therefore requires a moratorium on the existing value judgements, or a suspension of disbelief, that has traditionally ostracised the study of popular culture in the academy, so that popular culture is accepted in the academic context for analysis, critique and, ironically enough, value judgements. Barker himself does not find this situation satisfying. As he notes, ‘there is a reluctance to sanction a position in which we are disbarred from making judgements’ (Barker, 2008: 65). For Barker, rather than attempting to legitimise the content or the aesthetics of cultural texts, the critique can be shifted to the power dynamics, for example, by examining the culture industries and the nexus of power, production and distribution therein, while also noting that so-called high culture can be as much an industry as popular culture (ibid.: 64). While this is what I would term a ‘workaround’ to the problematic issue of value judgements, such a model of culture provides a limited analysis of the formation and production of cultural texts. It suggests that all cultural texts are forms of labour that can be evaluated in terms of industry and profit, reducing art, creativity and innovative endeavour to the political and economic spheres. While this debate has had influence in popular culture - and Barker himself alludes to this in terms of domestic drama and its portrayal of the family, patriarchy and social issues (ibid.: 65) - I suggest that in the light of the work of the Frankfurt School, and particularly Theodor Adorno’s work on the culture industry, it is reductionist to categorise all cultural artefacts in that manner, confining the analysis to a material one. Or to return to O’Sullivan’s model, the analysis is reduced to that which can describe and annotate recognition, but not encounter<sup>52</sup>.

#### *4.3.3 The Creative Consumer - John Fiske*

For Barker, the cultural studies critique suggests that the Frankfurt school ‘make the assumption that the meanings so identified are taken up by audiences in an unproblematic fashion’ (Barker, 2008: 67), whereas in contrast, ‘consumption-oriented cultural studies argues that meanings are produced, altered and managed at the level of use by people who are active producers of meaning’ (ibid.). A well-known proponent of this ‘creative consumer’ or ‘active audience’ position within cultural studies is John Fiske.

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<sup>52</sup> Whilst the scrutiny of the Frankfurt school is seen as ‘pessimistic’ in certain cultural studies domains (Barker, 2008: 67), it is difficult to conclude that the culture industry values the expression of the audience it purports to represent, when profit-making has become the primary reason for the existence of the industry in the first place. Barker critiques the Frankfurt school in a number of ways, noting that the school has over-relied on textual analysis, and has over-emphasised the inherent or immanent meaning of the texts (ibid.).

Barker summarises Fiske's position thus: 'Fiske argues that popular culture is constituted by the meanings that people make with it rather than those identifiable within texts' (ibid.: 68), referring to works where Fiske discusses ways in which the capitalist forces 'are coped with, are evaded or are resisted' (Fiske, 1989a: 8, in Barker: 68). For Fiske, 'popular vitality and creativity' testifies to the ability of popular to effect social change (ibid.), and 'consumers are not passive dopes but discriminating active producers of meaning' (ibid.).

While raising important debates surrounding the subject, identity and the site of meaning, Fiske himself has come under criticism. Morley observes Fiske's tendency towards 'romanticism' (Morley, 2006: 31), an observation also noted by Simon During suggesting that in Fiske's framework, the audience 'will choose only those texts that offer opportunities to resist, evade or scandalise hegemony' (During, 1999: 91). According to Gray (1998) 'the critical literature on cultural studies is characterized by a repetitive figuration of "active audience theory" as the source of all evil, in so far as it has supposedly led cultural studies into a trajectory of work which is banal, naively celebratory and politically irresponsible' (Morley, 2006: 31). Whilst Morley lays responsibility for this on Fiske (ibid.), he nonetheless argues that the study of popular culture in the cultural studies discipline should not be foregrounded to the detriment of the study of 'high' art, Morley asserting that 'it's actually very important that the field of cultural studies also pays proper and full attention to what is understood as high culture' (ibid.: 54). Whilst Morley observes how the foregrounding of popular culture has been historically necessary, due to its neglect in traditional academic studies, he warns of the dangers of a reactionary position where only popular culture is considered as 'valid' culture. He advises the discipline not to stay 'stuck in that moment' of that reactionary position, stressing the importance that 'one doesn't imagine that only popular culture is important' (ibid.).

Chris Barker summarises McGuigan's examination of Fiske's position by observing that, according to McGuigan, 'the celebration of the productive and resistive capacities of audiences has gone too far' (Barker, 2008: 418). Barker also posits a significant issue with the 'postmodernization' of culture by observing that the discipline of cultural studies 'is unable to critique the products of consumer culture because it has lost sight of any profound conception of cultural value from which to critique texts' (ibid.). This adoption of a postmodern perspective 'over-endows audiences with the cultural

competencies to deconstruct ideology' (ibid.), where that endowment may not be justified.

The result of this, according to McGuigan, is that cultural studies has in effect, vitiated itself and made itself impotent to put forward 'at the level of either analysis or policy, any transformative alternative to the market as it stands' (ibid.) due to its refusal to treat 'high' culture as in any way qualitatively different from popular culture. This stance has thus led to the discipline becoming in effect, if not intent, an apologist for the market, with its uncritical stance on popular culture and its mode of production serving to support the machines of the capitalist ideologies - the very position that Adorno was concerned with. Just as cultural studies contested the Frankfurt School's supposition that the audience adopted cultural texts uncritically, Adorno's work challenges cultural studies discourse that sees the consumer as critical thinker, instead providing a thought-provoking reminder of the need to be conscious of the complex nature of the industry and its motives of 'symbol' creation<sup>53</sup>.

Other writers such as Fred Inglis and Janet Wolff also critique the popular culture stance in cultural studies literature. Inglis suggests in what he describes as a 'guerrilla attack', works within the discipline of cultural studies 'denounce the category of art as an instrument of class assertiveness, refuse the sacred status of art, and treat all symbolic expression as equally worthy of serious interpretation' (Inglis, 1993: 18). Janet Wolff also situates the problem of art, aesthetics and their reconciliation in popular culture studies, observing how aesthetic theories are 'forcing us to recognise the impossibility of counter-posing "great art" to popular culture or mass culture in any simplistic manner' (Wolff, 1983: 11).

The cultural studies perspective on art, while valuable because it required the consideration of an expanded conceptualisation of 'culture', nevertheless is problematic. In suggesting that artistic endeavour is just another form of labour or 'symbol creation', and thereby attempting a pseudo-liberation of art to include popular opinions and world views, it has homogenised high art and popular culture in an oversimplified way. We have seen how the discipline of cultural studies, through scholars such as Fiske (although he is only one example) adopted this belief, but there are other philosophical

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53 Please see the chapter 4 addenda in appendix A for comments on the continued relevance of Frankfurt School theories

positions that suggest that this uniformity can no longer hold true. In the context of O'Sullivan's distinctions between recognition and encounter, the foregrounding of the audience as creators of meaning is overstated, given that the modes of reception of popular culture tend to revolve around acts of recognition<sup>54</sup>.

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54 Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980) also suggested a process of transformation, occurring through the medium of photography and its ability to preserve meaning and a sense of 'timelessness'. He posited the concept of the *punctum* which is described as 'an effect of being moved and rendered speechless by the photographic image' (Kul-Want, 2007: 147). Thus, the *punctum* describes an *encounter* with the photographic image, equivalent of the rupture in experience and providing that gap in which a new experience can take place. Barthes ruminated on a specific photographic image of his mother, and explored ways in which looking at the photograph allowed him to transcend time and space, and connect with some of the qualities his deceased mother possessed (ibid.). The experience was therefore not just of recognition of his mother, but of transformation of his prior opinions of his mother.

Nietzsche also commented on the rupture that occurs in art. In *The Will to Power as Art*, Nietzsche explored the concepts of beauty and truth in art, concluding that 'beauty is not just passive but transformative' (Kul-Want, 2007: 171). For Nietzsche, beauty, even what was traditionally seen as 'negative' beauty in the form of destruction or failure, could be seen as 'intrinsic to art, creativity and life-affirming values' (ibid.). Just as the *experience* of beauty was transformative for Nietzsche, so could be the *production* of an artistic work. For Nietzsche, 'the "will to power" was the ability to embrace change - and what is new or different - and convert it into creative energy' (ibid.: 60).

I suggest that these examples reveal how the safe environs of representation, reaffirmation and repetition do not give full compliment to the range of human aesthetic experience. Promoting a discourse that calls for cultural artefacts to be uniformly categorised does not do justice to the rupture that an artefact can provide. It does not allow for a discourse of real transformation.

## 4.4 Art, Postmodernism and the Cultural Turn

### 4.4.1 Introduction: *The Cultural Turn*

I suggest that the account of the cultural studies' perspectives on art in the previous section signals a rise in the attention paid to 'culture' not only within the cultural studies discipline, but also within broader social thought and critical theory since the 1980s, a turn which implies new or different ways of conceptualising 'art'. This 'cultural turn' is evident across a wide spectrum of academic disciplines, and argues that economic processes are not autonomous, but embedded in cultural and social terms<sup>55</sup>. The turns to culture may be viewed as a counter to 'hard' disciplines such as economics and its increased influence connected to the rise of neo-liberalist thought. In an 'ironic' mode favoured by contemporary cultural studies, this turn to culture is read as a subversive response to Thatcher's declaration that there is no such thing as society, or likewise that there is no such thing as 'social science' other than economics (Morgan and Preston, 2010).

This postmodernist thought which is intertwined with the cultural turn discourse, is, as discussed in section 4.4.4, marked by an inattentiveness to historical considerations, and

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55 There are a number of dimensions of recent socio-cultural change which underpin this recent cultural turn. First, it is claimed that the economy is now largely constituted through informational and symbolic processes. Such advocates of the cultural turn point to a fusion of the economic and the cultural spheres, suggesting that any clear distinction between the two is no longer meaningful. The most extreme version of this argument can be found in the work of postmodernist theorists such as Jean Baudrillard who emphasises the 'simulation' effects of the explosion of media images and the increasingly symbolic character of all types of commodities.

Second, the cultural turn has been closely linked to the emergence of globalisation as a theme in current critical and social discourses. Third, such cultural discourses also tend to emphasise the role of new ICTs in furthering the trends towards the globalisation and the fusion of economic and cultural processes.

Fourth, the cultural turn is marked by increasing attention to - and celebration of - consumption processes and leisure activities. In the contemporary economy, there is an increasing reliance on market-based commodities to deliver material, social and cultural requirements. This is seen to require a major focus on consumption processes and a consequent marginalisation of productive activities.

Fifth, the cultural turn presumes that, in today's materially affluent and multicultural societies, economic or material inequality matters less than in the past. This theme is evident in discourses which highlight 'the politics of representation' rather than the politics of distribution.

Finally, one major theme associated with the cultural turn centres around an emphasis on increasing individualisation and a consequent diminution of relatively fixed, socially-framed identities, which characterised earlier stages of capitalist modernity. One implication of this position is that both the production and consumption of culture have now become increasingly individualised and broken free of their moorings in social, cultural or political collectivities (Morgan and Preston, 2010).

a reductionist understanding of the early modern period and of the subsequent evolution of ‘the unfinished project of modernity’ such as that discussed by Habermas. However, the rise of modern concepts of culture, including aspects of our relationship with art and culture, comprises aspects of the umbrella concept of ‘modernity’<sup>56</sup>. Thus, the ahistoricity with which the cultural turn treats the development of culture is an inadequate model which ignores the significant historical context in which issues surrounding contemporary culture are embedded. Therefore, any ‘cultural turn’ can only be conceptualised as intrinsic to the rise of the capitalist system, rather than an adjunct feature peculiar to a ‘late’ or ‘post-modern’ capitalism (Preston: 2001, Jameson: 1984).

#### *4.4.2 The Neo-Liberal Turn*

The rise of capitalism has also implied new relationships between the artistic producer and their audience, as noted by one of the key pioneers of what now passes as the cultural studies field, Raymond Williams. However, as capitalist market society expanded and the market-based ‘public’ became the patron, artists themselves became more critical of this relationship, seeing how their works can often become commodified. Thus, for Preston, ‘ever since the industrial revolution, and long before the emergence of modern social and cultural theory - not to mention contemporary notions of an emerging new kind of ‘information society’ - many literary and artistic voices as well as critics and intellectuals have pointed to diverse tensions and antagonisms between the expanding hegemony of ‘the market’ and the idea of distinctive forms of ‘culture’” (Preston 2001: 238).

Looking to recent trends, we see cultural policy over the last twenty years or so turn to a neo-liberal framework that promises to usher in a new ‘information society’. Such frameworks privilege ICTs as drivers of this new age, and firmly situate culture as just one aspect of this grand project. For Preston (2001), the convergence of this neo-liberal turn with the cultural or postmodern turn has implications for critical discourse around

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<sup>56</sup> Please see the chapter 4 addenda in appendix A for further analysis on concepts of modernity and how they relate to artistic/cultural production

culture and art<sup>57</sup>.

#### *4.4.3 The Changing Role of Culture in the 'Cultural Turn'*

The contemporary cultural production system links together cultural producers and their audiences. To an increasing extent, art is produced, distributed, and consumed via a complex technological, social, and economic infrastructure, by a growing number and range of actors, and their gatekeepers, using diverse networks. This is made possible by deepening social divisions of labour and technological infrastructures. These divisions in turn frame the lived experience, the expressive opportunities, and the material incentives confronting individual artists, and even serve to channel important aspects of their conscious and imaginative sensibilities.

However, far from cultural processes or institutions asserting control over economic or bureaucratic rationality, as cultural turn discourses might have us believe, we are merely confronting a shift in the division of labour. Adam Smith suggested that in a commercial-based society the production of knowledge would become just like any other form of labour. Smith was both describing and prescribing that the function of the artist, no less than that of the intellectual, is to 'prepare for the market' his or her own particular 'species of goods', which will then be 'purchased, in the same manner as shoes or stockings'<sup>58</sup>.

This utilitarian view of the function of cultural production has persisted to more contemporary discourses that mark the 'cultural turn', such as the 'production of culture perspective' which I analysed in chapter 3. As also seen in this chapter, while such an approach to schematising culture has its benefits, it is also critiqued for this utilitarian stance to the production of culture, suggesting that it is in no way more 'special' than Smith's shoes or stockings.

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57 In the chapter 4 addenda in appendix A, I look at these implications in terms of three of the major subjects in the area of cultural production - ownership, the role of the state, and advertising, based on Preston (2001).

58 However, Smith partly explains the high income of opera singers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century by reference to the 'shame' associated with attempts to sell their talents for money



#### 4.4.4 *Against the Cultural Turn: Fredric Jameson*

Fredric Jameson is a cultural critic, noted for his account of postmodernism, and the implications for culture of the postmodern turn. He was influenced by Marxist critique of society and aesthetics. His 1984 essay *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, later expanded into his 1991 book of the same name, outlines a critique of postmodern culture through several themes. A full analysis of all six themes can be found in the chapter 4 addenda of appendix A, but here I briefly outline parts of this essay with particular relevance to art, aesthetics, culture and the nexus with capitalism.

Jameson argues that postmodernism began as the certainties of modernist thought came to an end in a ‘radical break’ with modernist thought, coinciding with movements such as abstract expressionism or existentialist philosophy in ‘the final, extraordinary flowering of a high modernist impulse which is spent and exhausted with them’ (Jameson, 1984: 54). For Jameson, this sense of finality foregrounds postmodern thought. Jameson posits that the reaction to modernism first came about, and is most easily visible in the area of architecture, explaining that movements such as the International Style became perceived as authoritarian and elitist through a postmodern lens. For Jameson, ‘high modernism is thus credited with the destruction of the fabric of the traditional city and of its older neighbourhood culture (by way of the radical disjunction of the new Utopian high modernist building from its surrounding context)’ (ibid.). This perception of elitism in high modernist art and architecture thus brought about a reaction, characterised by the postmodern expression of ‘aesthetic populism’. As Jameson notes, this populist discourse, has had the effect of ‘drawing our attention to one fundamental feature of all the postmodernisms [...] namely, the effacement in them of the older (essentially high-modernist) frontier between high culture and so-called mass or commercial culture’, also noting the seeming fascination that ‘postmodernisms’ have with commercial culture.

Jameson suggests a ‘periodizing hypothesis’ through which to contextualise postmodernism, noting that he is attempting this ‘at a moment in which the very conception of historical periodization has come to seem most problematical indeed due to perceptions that a periodising hypothesis tends to ‘obliterate difference’ and that such hypotheses ‘project an idea of the historical period as massive homogeneity’ (ibid.: 56). It is in this context that Jameson posits the importance of not just considering

postmodernism as a cultural style, but as a 'cultural dominant', which although allows for different stances, nonetheless positions them as subordinate in face of the dominant a-historicism (ibid.). This cultural dominant has however become institutionalised. For Jameson, the 'offensive features' of postmodernism that include 'obscurity and sexually explicit material to psychological squalor and overt expressions of social and political defiance' have become normative, and are now met with not only 'the greatest complacency but have themselves become institutionalized and are at one with the official culture of Western society' (ibid.).

Jameson argues that contemporary aesthetic production has fallen foul of this culture, observing that 'aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing waves of ever more novel-seeming goods' (Jameson, 1984: 56). He explains this mechanism by focusing on architecture, positing that of all the arts, architecture is closest to the economic, property and finance nexus, with a 'postmodern architecture grounded in the patronage of multinational business'. For Jameson 'this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is bloody, torture, death and horror' (ibid.: 57). Thus, for Jameson, postmodern ideology and its accompanying commodity culture is inherently bound to multinational capitalism. This relationship is also clearly problematic for Jameson, who considers the nexus between postmodern culture and capitalism to be more than unwholesome - it is a nexus of aberrations.

Thus, Jameson posits six characteristics that define postmodernism. His first, *the deconstruction of expression* deals with the perceived loss of context in postmodern cultural objects. He illustrates this by comparing Van Gogh's work *Peasant Shoes* which contains the context of hard physical labour, with Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes*, which for Jameson is so visually processed as to become devoid of meaning and context, in what amounts to 'the inversion of Van Gogh's Utopian gesture' (Jameson, 1984: 60). This leads to what Jameson terms 'the waning of affect', where, removed of context and narrative the work becomes devoid of meaning. Jameson uses Edward Munch's *The Scream* to elucidate this point, arguing that *The Scream* epitomised the modernist themes of alienation, disconnection and isolation of the embodied subject. For Jameson then, this 'depth model' or mode has been replaced by a superficial multiplicity of 'surfaces' in

postmodernist thought.

Jameson's second characteristic, termed *postmodernism and the past* compares the devices of modernist parody with postmodernist pastiche. Whereas for Jameson, parody had a sense of design or deliberation towards the object of the parody, pastiche becomes mere mimesis, and due to the 'waning of affect', it is a kind of castrated mimesis, without a caustic, intentional wit. This leads the cultural producers of postmodern times to hark back nostalgically to the past, to find examples of pastiche that they can co-opt in the present. This appears to conflict with Jameson's convictions earlier in the essay where he suggests a tendency in postmodern thought to ahistoricism. However, this apparent contradiction is resolved by Jameson's hint at the unconsciousness of this nostalgia in the use of the word 'libidinal', suggesting a latent, repressed desire. Thus, in the annihilation of history there is a loss, albeit a 'forbidden' loss, which must be expressed libidinally. For Jameson, this libidinal historicism can be seen in the aesthetic styles employed in postmodern film. He cites the film *Body Heat* which is a 'remake' of the film *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. The purpose of the 'remake' is to situate the original work of fiction into the contemporary. However, although set in contemporary times, Jameson notes that the aesthetic 'eschews most of the signals that normally convey the contemporaneity of the United States in its multinational era' including skyscrapers, cars and appliances (ibid.: 68). Thus, the viewer reads the film as if it were set in the thirties, in a libidinal nostalgic gesture on the part of the cultural producers.

Jameson's third characteristic, *the breakdown of the signifying chain*, reprises the theme of ahistoricity, suggesting that subjectivity becomes fragmented when it is not temporally grounded, either regarding the past, present or future. Again, referring to the production of culture in such circumstances, randomness and 'heaps of fragments' become features of cultural artefacts. This 'breakdown of the signifying chain' is akin to a schizophrenia, where the subject loses a sense of meaning, or even temporality in the face of an onslaught of an excess of information flooding their consciousness during an episode. Thus, the postmodern subject is immanently present, disallowing any space for past, for context, and instead imbuing the present with an intensity that replaces the previous modernist themes of anxiety, alienation and isolation. Thus the postmodern 'moment' is always intense.

The fourth characteristic of postmodernism, *the hysterical sublime*, is related to the

postmodern intensity described above. The postmodern subject is not just temporally in a state of intensity, but spatially also. This ‘immediacy’ of time and space has therefore led to an ‘incompatibility’ with embodiment itself. Thus, the body is abstracted, leading to its fetishisation. The very state of embodiment becomes the ‘hysterical sublime’, as embodiment in the postmodern era is too intense, too great to linguistically or aesthetically structure or represent. Whilst in Kantian philosophy, the sublime referred to the enormity of nature, in postmodern times the enormity of nature has required domination, by capitalism.

Jameson next moves to his fifth feature of postmodernism, *post-modernism and the city*. Here, Jameson argues that the turn to postmodernism was a reaction against the formalist structures of modernism, and this was most vehemently represented in the architectural break with modernism, as characterised by the Bonaventura Hotel in Los Angeles. Whilst one of postmodernism’s ideologies has been a populist one, this hotel is incongruous in terms of its navigation. The exits and entrances are hidden, leading Jameson to argue that whilst the hotel is ‘popular’ it also acts more like a self-contained city, neither inviting entrance nor exit, but instead suggesting that one is either inside the ‘skin’ of the hotel, or outside it. Likewise, the interior of the hotel is prescriptive in its navigation structures, with the positioning of the elevators and escalators leaving no choice for the resident to move about the space of their own will. Thus the inhabitant is subjected to that fragmentation of their embodied experience as described earlier, in what Jameson terms a ‘postmodern hyperspace’, where the inability of the subject to orientate themselves within this built environment is analogous to the lack of ability to negotiate late capitalism.

Jameson’s final characteristic of the postmodern turn is *the abolition of critical distance*. This is an ethical malaise, in which the ‘hyperaesthetic’ of postmodernism, with its fetishistic and nostalgic evoking of the past results in a lack of coherent vision for the present or future. Jameson observes how ‘the logic of the simulacrum’ does not only repeat the logic of late capitalism, but ‘reinforces and intensifies it’ (Jameson, 1984: 85). Thus, along with the affordances of the late capitalist mode, there is an ethical imperative to also critique it in a dialectical exercise that questions the normativity of the postmodern turn to pastiche, fetishisation, deconstruction of meaning and waning of affect. However, the postmodern characteristics that abstract temporality and spatiality disallow this ‘critical distance’ to emerge. In the overwhelming of the body,

postmodernism does not allow a 'space' for an encounter with another possibility outside itself. The nature of multinational capitalism has also caused commodification to penetrate into areas of our life that had been previously untouched - for Jameson this is Nature and the Unconscious (ibid.: 86), further eliminating a possibility of critical distance.

## 4.5 A Digital Aesthetic

### 4.5.1 Introduction

In this section, I investigate the impact of the so-called *knowledge society* on art, where technology and cultural and creative knowledge have become increasingly intertwined. For Aylish Wood, the contributions of digital media to the gallery space are significant in how they add a temporal experience to an art installation, thus challenging the traditionally understood modes of visual representation (Wood, 2007: 134). For Wood, the addition of new media forms such as sound or moving image means that the purely spatial components of traditional gallery installations are transformed into spatio-temporal sites of interaction<sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup>. For Margot Lovejoy, there exists ‘a need to explore the impact of electronic media on representation and on our culture as a whole, and, in the process, to extend the theories of Benjamin’ (Lovejoy, 2004: 4). For Lovejoy, this need to explore is precipitated by the development that ‘computers represent a challenge to conventional notions of visual representation’ (ibid.: 152).

Thus, theories of art now require a consideration to these digital media that have become so commonplace and ‘everyday’, that for one cultural critic, ‘the art of tomorrow is the art of the media’ (Stocker: 2006). For Stocker however, consideration to the technology alone provides an inadequate overview of digital media art, arguing that ‘it is no longer the technological possibilities’ but rather the socio-cultural structures of the neo-liberal information society that ‘are decisive in the context of an art of tomorrow’ (ibid.). Even the terminology describing this art - digital art, electronic art, media art, new media art, net art etc - is interchangeable, but as Stocker observes, these ‘ambiguous labels’ reveal ‘the ways artists deal with the constituent elements of the Information Society and its technological as well as social dimensions’ (ibid.). Bringing

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59 Of course, temporal elements in gallery installations can be traced back at least as far as Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. However, digital media technologies can be employed in a sophisticated manner to distribute and demand the viewers attention.

60 An international example of this is Tony Oursler’s 2007 installation on the theme of war, entitled *Dum-Dum, Metalbreath, Wadcutter*. It contains competing spatial and temporal elements, some traditional, such as furniture, but other elements made possible by digital technology, such as figures on the floor that are in the form of projections on to spherical sculptures. In this installation, figures can be seen lying as if crushed beneath the furniture. However, the digital technologies facilitate the complex projection techniques that enable the artist to create projections from the sculpted spheres that speak accusingly at the viewer (Oursler, 2008).

forth yet another concern of the digital art aesthetic, Stocker also argues that digital artists not only use technology as a tool, but as a subject, which involves the artist ‘taking leave of familiar domains’ to ‘delve into the technological and sociocultural contexts of the process of reordering our society into a global information economy’. For these artists, their ‘highest priority’ is not in the description of contemporary society, but in an ‘analytical investigation’ that illuminates ‘the mechanisms and functional principles of that society’s systemic foundations’ (ibid.). Thus, for Stocker, in an echo of a technological determinist perspective, such an art practice in a society ‘in which the configurations of software and hardware act much more powerfully than laws as determinants of the freedom of movement within the new public domain of global networks’ is ‘endowed with an immediate political relevance’ (ibid.).

Thus, the topic of the digital in art, or the digital aesthetic requires a consideration that takes account not only of aesthetics as understood by contemporary art theories<sup>61</sup>, but moves beyond traditional aesthetic theory towards one which can incorporate technology and the implications of technology use in artistic practice. Such a theory requires consideration of the sociocultural ramifications of the digital age, where the mediatisation of society, culture and art, is becoming more pronounced. In the following sections I thus examine some of the key debates on art in the digital age, including Quaranta’s *postmedia* and Bourriaud’s *altermodernity*, along with calls from new media critics to reject a-historical ‘vapor-theorising’ about the potentials of new technologies (Lunenfeld, 2001), and look to the continuities from ‘old’ media that can inform the present. First however, I proceed by means of an overview of ‘new’ media - positing some characteristics through which we can understand the ‘new’ digital means available to artists.

#### 4.5.2 *The ‘New’ Media in Historical Context*

In considering a ‘digital’ aesthetic for the purposes of a survey of digital media art, I suggest that a turn to the more generalised discourses of new media can yield insights into the key debates surrounding new media generally, debates that flow into or dovetail with artistic debates on new media art. Lister et al. suggest that the term ‘new’ with

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61 Or the ‘isms of the artistic discourse’ as Stocker refers to the contemporary art world

respect to media emerged to designate a seminal shift in the production, reception and distribution of communications media (Lister et al., 2009: 10). Whilst such shifts were also associated with cultural changes that emerged with the postmodern turn in the 1960s, the emergence of the personal computer in the mid 1980s is seen as particularly relevant. Thus, for Lister et al., the defining characteristics of new media are that they are digital, interactive, hypertextual, virtual, networked and simulated (ibid.: 13). However, the authors warn against an essentialism regarding these characteristics, arguing that for example, when the quality of ‘digital’ is extended beyond ‘a source of possibilities, to be used, directed, and exploited’, it can be essentialised into ‘a totalising or overarching concept which wholly subsumes the medium in question’. Thus, all of the outlined characteristics of new media may or may not be present in a new media object. Also for Lister et al. is a need to consider the ‘physical and material constitution of a technology’, as the materiality of the technology both ‘encourages and constrains its uses and operation’ (ibid.: 14) without resorting to a technological essentialism, where technology is reduced to its physical and material attributes.

Lister et al. also ask the reader to critique what is new about new media, suggesting that ‘apparently innocent enthusiasm for the “latest thing” is rarely if ever ideologically neutral’ (Lister et al., 2009: 11). The authors argue that the celebration of new media ‘cannot be dissociated from the globalising neo-liberal forms of production and distribution which have been characteristic of the past twenty years’ (ibid.). Nonetheless, despite such neoliberal underpinnings which could be thought of as characteristic of the current wave of ‘newness’ about new media, the authors also stress that ‘taking these changes into account does not mean abolishing all history because it (history) is full of similar moments of newness’ (ibid.: 3). Situating these concerns to digital media art then, it becomes evident that a consideration must be given to (1) the media forms and material technologies themselves, whilst also giving thought to (2) the social, cultural and *historical* precedents in which ‘newness’ or a radical break with an old paradigm occurred.

Likewise, Margot Lovejoy calls for a history-friendly consideration of ‘new’ or electronic art. For Lovejoy, the ‘cultural crisis’ of the current times are significant and materially distinctive, but are also ‘parallel to the wrenching cultural, aesthetic and social crisis brought about by the Industrial Revolution’ (Lovejoy, 2004: 1). Thus, for Lovejoy, in a position similar to that of Lister et al, the ‘newness’ of the current, electronic age has



had precedents, Lovejoy arguing that regardless of which age we discuss, ‘artists’ vision and artists’ responses to the world are dominated by the conditions and consciousness of a particular period’. In the ‘electronic’ or digital age, it is important to study the zeitgeist and the art of that age, whilst also keeping an eye to the genesis of these media forms. For Lovejoy, these current trends have their lineage in the ‘machine age’ of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (ibid.: 36 - 52), specifically in two ‘strains’ in avant-garde aesthetics, those of (1) the Dadaists and Surrealists who ‘developed strategies to use machine parts and photomontage as a means of commenting on the alienating influence of rampant industrialisation and the commercialisation of mainstream art’ and (2) the Constructivists and Futurists who ‘extolled the aesthetics of photographic reproduction, seeing hope in the Machine Age for a new kind of culture’ (ibid.: 6). Through the consideration of these historical dimensions to our current ‘moment’ in digital or electronic art, we can arrive at an understanding that engages the ‘newness’ of digital media and its specificities, whilst also avoiding a neologising account of digital media. For Lovejoy then, expanding the theories of Benjamin to the digital age is an appropriate and fruitful endeavour, as the issues brought forward by Benjamin, such as the aura, the author, where the artwork resides, the notion of an original artwork in a world of reproduction, and autonomy, are still pertinent considerations in the analysis of a work of digital art.

Lev Manovich, whilst positing five principles or characteristics of new media (numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability and transcoding), also analyses ‘the language of new media’ through a historical lens, that involves ‘placing it within the history of modern visual and media cultures’ (Manovich, 2001: 8). In this work Manovich seeks to answer ‘what are the ways in which new media relies on older cultural forms and languages and what are the ways in which it breaks with them?’, whilst also considering ‘what is unique about how new media objects create the illusion of reality, address the viewer, and represent space and time’ (ibid.). Thus, Manovich argues that whilst there is some ‘newness’ about the new digital media, to thoroughly understand them involves approaching them with a view to their cultural precedents, or for Manovich, ‘we should approach new media in relation to other visual cultural forms and put it in historical perspective’.

### 4.5.3 Digital Aesthetics

Based on the accounts of the authors above, I now provide a theoretical underpinning to draw from, one that defines three salient characteristics of digital media art. These characteristics are again picked up in chapters 7 and 8, where I argue that through the empirical research conducted for this project, the defining characteristics can be seen. I suggest that whilst characteristics such as ‘digital’ or ‘numerical’ in Manovich’s formulation are pertinent for digital media art, this account seeks to outline characteristics that may help to elucidate qualitative and material differences between digital art and the ‘traditional’ art forms on which much contemporary art theory is based, and often mapped to digital art in a way that does not take account of its specific characteristics. Briefly then, these three features lie under the banners of (1) object characteristics, (2) where the artwork ‘resides’, and (3) technical complexity.

Starting with the object characteristics of digital media art, Lovejoy suggests that the advent of computers into the art world precipitate a distinctive split with ‘the paradigm of representation we have followed since the Renaissance’ (Lovejoy, 2004: 8). The perception of such a digital artwork has changed from an ‘analogue’ process of viewing an art object, to requiring that an image be ‘called up for display’ as such an image is ‘an information structure which has no physical presence in the real world’ (ibid.) in most cases. I therefore suggest that the object characteristics of a digital artwork are in contrast to their ‘analogue’ counterparts. This is confirmed by Lovejoy who argues that ‘electronic image-production is immaterial, existing only as an image structure or accumulation of data, without physical substance’ (ibid.: 159). There is a significant ramification for such a structure, Lovejoy positing that such a configuration ‘does not lead necessarily to the production of a *material object* unless the artist makes a conscious decision to translate it into one that can maintain a physical presence with a particular dimensional level within a perceptual field’ (ibid., emphasis added).

If we accept that the material or object characteristics of digital media objects are different to traditional art objects of paintings and sculptures, it is also likely, if not a given, that how we interact with such objects will show some specificities to the digital format. I suggest that a digital art object can therefore be characterised by its interactivity which *requires* a response from the viewer, whereas a traditional art object may *invoke* a response but not require it. This of course is a matter of degree rather

than a major break from the art of high modernism which also explored interactivity. Again, Lovejoy has influenced this assertion, as for her, 'the viewer must choose between the options to receive a single message from the many' (Lovejoy, 2004: 165). This material change in the artwork has ramifications for the aesthetic qualities of a digital artwork, which are now 'information aesthetics' (ibid.). Thus, a digital artwork must be aesthetically designed not only to convey a narrative, but to engage the audience significantly enough to elicit interaction. The artwork 'must be designed to engage the interest of others sufficiently to make them want to participate in the experience of finding connections in the elements of narrative that are provided' (ibid.), thus moving the aesthetic considerations from contemplation to action.

This shift from 'traditional' aesthetics to information aesthetics brings us to the second posited characteristic of digital artworks, that concerning where the artwork 'resides'. Interactivity has implications for both the artist and the viewer of the artwork, in that interactivity allows the viewer, or user, a choice in navigating and experiencing the artwork. This loosens the authorial grip of the artist, and 'deeply entwines the functions of viewer and artist' (Lovejoy, 2004: 167), placing some interpretative control into the hands (or eyes and ears) of the viewer. Thus, 'what interactive art now solicits from the viewer is not simply reception but an independent construction of meaning', moving the site of the artistic experience, or encounter, firmly towards that of the viewer (ibid.). I thus suggest that in this mutual construction of meaning between the artist, the artwork and the viewer, the 'site' of the art itself, the Benjaminian 'auratic' component is in flux and moves from its home in the 'mythical' unique art object towards a more indeterminate place.

I posit that this indeterminacy around where the artwork 'resides' also refers to its broader place in the world, materially, applying also in a museum setting. Thus, in an art world where the 'auratic' qualities of the artwork are traded, commodified and capitalised upon, a digital artwork with its indeterminate 'aura' is problematic within that art world. As Lovejoy observes, 'up to now, the major museums have tended to acquire works which incorporate computer influence rather than computer graphics as part of their photography, video and sculpture collections' (Lovejoy, 2004: 181), thus steering towards artworks in which the computer component is as a 'tool' but away from such works in which the computer is a medium in its own right. A pertinent example for this is net art. Whereas traditional art forms exist in the context of a museum, or

‘locations chosen by artists or art institutions from indoor to outdoor spaces’, a piece of net art does not require the presence of a museum or institution. It thus ‘resides’ outside of the museum space, again a problematic characteristic for institutions that thrive on the physical, mythical ‘aura’.

Moving on to the third characteristic of technical complexity, I suggest that this feature is pertinent to digital artworks as the complexity of these works can bring about issues of co-operative production, along with acquisition, collection and archival of the art object. A technical complexity exists in the non-linear, databased attributes of digital art (Manovich, 2001). For Manovich, the traditional narratives of the novel and cinema have been replaced by a ‘hypernarrative’ with its ‘trajectories through a database of collections of items with no hierarchies’ (Lovejoy, 2004: 163). Technical complexity is also manifest in the creation of the digital artwork, this feature having social and cultural implications within the art world. As Lovejoy observes, ‘programming is essential to any pioneering new use of equipment’, requiring digital artists to often ‘collaborate with engineers or scientists or to study computer sciences for themselves’ (ibid.: 174). This characteristic stands at odds with the notion of the ‘lone genius’ to which I suggest the art world often inscribes as much of an ‘aura’ upon as it does the artworks themselves. Thus, in a world where this trope of the individual is heightened, digital art, with its technical complexity that requires collaboration, stands at odds to the traditional art world. Again, for Lovejoy, ‘crafting work where there are pathways, nodes, links, networks, and connecting loops between visual, sonic, textual, and graphic elements calls for enormous skill. Multifaceted procedures and coding require collaboration, a difficult aspect in a culture which promotes heightened individualism’ (ibid.: 194).

#### *4.5.4 Hyperaesthetics, Altermodernity and Postmedia*

In this section I analyse alternate paradigms of digital media from theorists within the artistic and cultural sector. Whilst I will return later to Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Altermodern Manifesto* from which the polemic title above is drawn, I start by outlining a discussion by Peter Lunenfeld on the relationship between culture and technology. For Lunenfeld, there exists a need to examine ‘how to talk about them [new technologies], how to move beyond reviewing contemporary technologies’. For Lunenfeld, the answer is ‘a discussion of some technocultural communities and their artifacts’, or a ‘future

archaeology' (Lunenfeld, 2001: 3). Thus, he posits three ways in which to discuss what he describes as these 'technocultures', (1) commodity camaraderie, (2) technovolkgeist and (3) post '89 theory<sup>62</sup>.

Lunenfeld has also analysed the human-machine relationship, contextualising it for the digital artist. He observes how 'the demonstration, or "demo", has become the defining moment of the digital artist's practice at the turn of the millennium' (Lunenfeld, 2001: 13). He posits a 'demo or die' ideology in which 'artists and their machines are on display' (ibid.) in what is not merely a futuristic prediction of 'the artist as cyborg', but that a development that 'augurs the transformation of digital presentation into live performance' (ibid.: 13), leading to a 'techno-anxiety', where the artist is expected to 'put work out to the world using inherently unstable platforms'.

This 'demo-or-die' aesthetic is for Lunenfeld a post '89 development, and thus has its own political dimension. For Lunenfeld, 'it is no wonder that the demo or die aesthetic is caught up in a presumption of artistic labor with definitive use value' (ibid.: 15) as, for

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62 For Lunenfeld, previous notions of subjectivity were challenged with the 'death' of the author, which, while he is skeptical about, nonetheless forced a reimagining for the artist of his or her role in society. As he observes, 'in the absence of such venerated concepts as genius and transcendence, digital artists find themselves stripped of the ethos around which most previous artistic communities were founded' (Lunenfeld, 2001: 4). He posits that digital artists can no longer see themselves as having a shared purpose, rather that they have in common the 'use of similar tools' (ibid.). This commonality centred around the technology is what Lunenfeld terms 'commodity camaraderie' (ibid.), referring as much to the software commodities of the digital age as to the collaborative potential of such developments.

For Lunenfeld, this 'camaraderie' becomes a 'neo-community', or what Lunenfeld terms a 'TechnoVolkgeist' - a latter-day 'proto-social' equivalent of a Bohemian zeitgeist, not limited by geographical borders (ibid.: 8). This TechnoVolkgeist serves the need of providing a sense of commonality and understanding in a technoculture, just as a Volkgeist provided the sense of commonality in a localised culture. In situating the TechnoVolkgeist, he observes that 'commodity camaraderie encourages inclusion not by blood, but rather by chip' (ibid.: 9).

Lunenfeld posits that 'it would be absurd not to situate commodity camaraderie in a political context' (ibid.: 9), which is where his post'89 theory is considered. Lunenfeld argues that while 1968 is eulogised as marking a turning point in avant-garde art, this warrants a challenge with respect to digital art. Lunenfeld thus posits that digital media theorists are better served by considering the year 1989 as a significant political moment for techno-cultural production. This was the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reunification of Germany, the Czech revolution, the beginning of the collapse of the USSR along with market-related events in China that foregrounded 'the notion that capitalism is in yet another of its periods of ascendancy' (ibid.: 10). At this juncture, 'post-industrial capitalism would seem at this point as inevitable and all-powerful to the artists of the West as the Christian church must have been to artisans of 11th century France' (ibid.: 11). Thus, for Lunenfeld, a cultural producer embarking on their career post '89 was embedded aesthetically in a capitalist zeitgeist and 'begin with the centrality of the market and its forces', in contrast with the post '68 aesthetic theories where the use-value of art was in its opposition to capitalist expansion, and its value was in rebellion and resistance. Lunenfeld also argues that due to the rise of cultural studies as an academic discipline, critics began 'mining all forms of cultural production for "sites of resistance" to capitalist alienation'. For Lunenfeld, this culminates in the cultural studies discipline of the 1990s where 'Anglo-American scholars were [...] writing as though any smidgeon of cultural bricolage was a revolutionary act and every fan club a conspirators' cell' (ibid.: 10).

the demo not to die, it has to function, or moreso, 'it must work within the constraints of the ideology generated in the wake of digital technologies' (ibid.). Lunenfeld posits that therefore the demo-or-die aesthetic is perfectly suited to what Jameson termed 'the cultural logic of late-capitalism', because technologically enhanced artistic projects require investment, making digital art 'the product of transnational corporate capitalism' (ibid.).

Moving again towards an attempt at theorising the contemporary moment, Lunenfeld suggests that our contemporary technoculture is not just 'present', but that it is a 'future/present' which he describes as 'a phenomenological equivalent to the future perfect tense' (Lunenfeld, 2001: 28) in which 'digital post-production techniques will have become obsolete by the time you learn them'. Thus, the future is implicit in the technological present, Lunenfeld positing that a discourse that moves beyond contemporary critical theory discourses needs to be opened. He suggests that contemporary critical theory 'has proven itself only partially competent to account for these new digital objects and electronic systems' (ibid.: 29). For Lunenfeld, this future/present tension can be examined in three ways. The first 'invokes the past to battle the present, reinvigorating the machine-breaking ideology of the Luddites' (ibid.). The second attempts to keep up with the transformations in present technoculture, which for Lunenfeld ends up being 'an almost hysterical neologizing'. The third is a type of futurology, or 'vapor-theorizing', where science-fiction-like discourses hold sway in a hypothetical world of possibilities. Lunenfeld then posits a fourth way of negotiating contemporary technoculture, as an alternative to the first three discourses; 'a hyperaesthetic that encourages a hybrid temporality, a real-time approach that cycles through the past, present, and future to think with and through the technocultures' (ibid.). This 'hyperaesthetics in real-time' (ibid.: 37) takes account of the destabilisation of traditional aesthetic theory's 'study of stable forms' (ibid.). He posits that as an alternative, 'a dynamic system, however, requires constant recalibrations in focus, a shifting between three temporalities', deducing that 'hyperaesthetics requires theorization in real-time' (ibid.). Lunenfeld posits that real-time theory can both be found and encouraged through the internet, suggesting that news forums, listservs - 'the best hope for theory in real time' - and bulletin boards can provide the real-time critique necessary for real-time theory to flourish, providing a much shorter lead-time than a print journal for valid peer-critique.

For Nicolas Bourriaud, the contemporary artistic setting is also problematic, in that ‘the historical period defined by postmodernism is coming to an end’, leaving with it a gap in understanding the art forms created in this movement of ‘creolisation’ (Bourriaud: 2009) which, for Bourriaud is replacing ‘multiculturalism and the discourse of identity’ (ibid.). Yet, the ideals of modernity, those of ‘the higher value placed on the present, the sense of adventure and critical relativism’ (Vitorelli: 2007) still have relevance for Bourriaud. Thus, he posits an *altermodernity*, a paradigm that ‘refers to a totality of cultural and artistic practices that connect the modern spirit with the world in which we live’ (ibid.). It is ‘an attempt to reexamine our present, by replacing one periodizing tool with another’ (Ryan: 2009), which takes account of globalisation and the cultural, social and political ramifications thereof. The *altermodern* paradigm takes account of ‘the local struggles against standardisation’ that postmodern cultural theories and globalisation have resulted in. For Bourriaud, the postmodern project of multiculturalism has resulted in a ‘global state of culture’ for artists, where the same ‘toolboxes’ are available to artists across the globe. In defence of this position against a critique of issues of access, Bourriaud argues that ‘saying that it is the privilege of the artistic jet set is a pure denial of the worldwide violence of the capitalist system, or an extreme naiveness’ (ibid.). Bourriaud, rather would like to offer an alternate paradigm to the ‘multiculturalist dogma’ that ‘jails the individuals into their so-called “origins” and their “identities”’. Thus, the altermodern paradigm takes account of the beneficial critical offerings of modernism and maps them onto the contemporary, globalised, networked world, in which nomadism and migration of identity and culture are characteristic.

I suggest that this position has relevance for a survey of digital art, as it takes account of the cultural cross-fertilisation that is facilitated by network technologies. To engage in a *reductio ad absurdum* and suggest that all art produced in the digital age is also postmodern art is naive. Therefore, Bourriaud’s position allows for works of art to exist with temporal and spatial ambiguities, without having to categorise them within a postmodern paradigm. Thus, ‘the artist becomes “homo viator”, the prototype of the contemporary traveller whose passage through signs and formats refers to a contemporary experience of mobility, travel and transposing’ (Bourriaud: 2009). As for the artistic work, it ‘expresses a course, a wandering, rather than a fixed space-time’ (ibid.).

Domenico Quaranta likewise grapples with notions of ‘post’ conditions, but with respect

to artistic 'media'. His argument is pertinent to the study of digital media art as it grapples with tensions specific to the genre. Quaranta posits two distinct tracks that chart contemporary art developments, and the growth of 'new media' art, suggesting that since the mid-nineties 'technology-based art grew exponentially, and the New Media Art world grew accordingly, but without adapting to these new developments' (Quaranta: 2011). For Quaranta, the response of the new media art genre was 'inadequate to an art practice that was increasingly sharing the idea of art and the system of values of the contemporary art world'. However, the technology-based art was no more at home in the contemporary art world either, with 'any attempt to import on the contemporary art platform the idea of art and the system of values on which the New Media Art world is grounded (that is, New Media Art as a category based on the use - and, often, the celebration - of technology) has failed miserably, garnering criticism both about the suitability of basing an artistic category on the use of a medium, and on the cultural value of celebrating technologies' (ibid.). This incompatibility between the ideologies of the new media and the contemporary art world thus lead Quaranta to question 'how, then, can we underline New Media Art's "specific form of contemporaneity" [...] without violating these taboos?'. For Quaranta, the concept of *postmedia* is an appropriate one to adopt in this context. From Guattari's first conceptualisation of the post-media condition, which signalled the end of 'the consensual era of mass-media' and an evolution of media tools into political 'tools of dissent', to Krauss's formulation of *post-medium* to mean a move away from discourses to medium specificity in art, Peter Weibel's description of postmedia art is that which 'comes after the affirmation of the media' (ibid.). To this end, all contemporary art is postmedia art, as the media, or media, have penetrated all forms of contemporary life, or as Quaranta observes, 'given that the impact of the media is universal and computers can now simulate all other media, all contemporary art is postmedia'.

Quaranta's analysis of art in a 'postmedia' art world is forward-thinking, especially if it 'rehabilitates' digital art to a space within the art world where discussion, critique and examination of the implications of technology in art can take place. If all art is 'postmedia' art, nonetheless when the art world is dominated by theories of contemporary art, the voice of 'new media' is still relatively unheard. Thus, whilst Quaranta's work is a welcome framework through which to discuss digital media art, I suggest that the specificities of this medium require further acceptance within the contemporary art world before we can say that art criticism is beyond 'media' when a



subset of those works are engaging critically with media. Such works are thus still ‘specifically’ media art, digital art, or electronic art, and require analysis, discourse and critique as such more so than ‘postmedia sculpture’ or ‘postmedia painting’ etc, by virtue alone of such works as created in ‘postmedia’ conditions.

#### 4.5.5 *Social Media and Art*

Whilst this thesis focuses on ‘digital’ media and art, I wish to also draw attention to a subset of what can be considered ‘digital media’ that has been gaining attention in recent years. That subset is what we know as ‘social media’. Whilst web applications such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr are, as examples, frequently foregrounded as online ‘social media’ platforms (Boyd & Ellison 2008), I suggest that what we understand by the term can be expanded to include mobile devices such as smartphones that allow for ‘ubiquitous’ computing, along with a turn to the ‘blog’ that allows for a bi-directional communication to occur between the producer of the online text and their audience. Whilst ‘social media’ can be thought of as non-specific to art insofar as they are utilised in the wider ‘popular’ society and culture, this thesis aims to stress the interconnectedness of art with society. Therefore this section is included to recognise how the practices and affordances of social media platforms can also apply in an artistic context.

At the very least, social media in an artistic context is being foregrounded through the application of the technologies to arts participation. For example, the National Endowment for the Arts in the US issued a report in 2010 entitled *Audience 2.0: How Technology Influences Arts Participation*<sup>63</sup>. The report argued the importance of social media, highlighting how arts audiences are indeed driven by social media applications. A summary of the report reveals how ‘when compared with non-media participants, Americans who participate in the arts through technology and electronic media – using the Internet, television, radio, computers, and handheld devices – are nearly three times more likely to attend live arts events; attend twice as many live arts events; and attend a greater variety of genres of live arts events’(ibid.). Of course, the National Endowment for the Arts has also foregrounded how its offerings are available on YouTube and

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<sup>63</sup> see <http://www.nea.gov/news/news10/new-media-report.html>

Facebook, thus linking the arts institution itself with its ‘audience 2.0’ through social media websites. Likewise, similar accounts of ventures between the arts and social media occur closer to home, with one recent headline from the Guardian UK revealing how a startup website called *Artfinder* ‘brings social media to art’. The report reveals how the website ‘offers identification and recommendation tools, as well as easy-to-build apps for galleries’<sup>64</sup>. Likewise, the Light Space & Time online gallery has published a guide to ‘social media “netiquette” for artists’, aimed at encouraging artists to use social media as marketing and branding tools for their works<sup>65</sup>. Another stateside example is from the Brooklyn Museum in New York which in 2009 set up its ‘1stfans’ project<sup>66</sup> as the world’s first ‘socially networked museum membership’. A corresponding Twitter account (@1stfans) was also set up as a feed for recommended artists. The social and participatory nature of blogging and online communities is cited by artists in this primary research as a reason to get involved in open-source programming hardware and software such as *Arduino* and *Processing* (see section 8.5).

However, does the nexus between social media and art extend beyond social media as tool, either for participation or marketing, but for use by artists as a production medium? Again, looking to Brooklyn, the artist Lauren McCarthy revealed her project *Showertweet* in 2009, whereby every day she would send a ‘tweet’ to Twitter from the intimate space of her shower. For McCarthy, this project centres around exploring the eroding boundaries between public and private spheres afforded by technology, questioning the role of the physical body in intimacy, and how intimacy is shared online through social media.

The primary research in chapters 8-10 of this thesis also suggests that in Ireland, social media is becoming part of what artists include in their ‘arsenal’ of tools. For example, in section 8.4.2 I describe a case study of a collaborative Irish work entitled *Hard Drivin’* that combines physical installation of remote controlled toy cars with connectivity to Twitter. This project enables participants to send messages to the installation and thus control the cars through a social media process. In section 8.4.3 I describe locative media project, *NAMALand*, that ‘resides’ on users smartphones, again extending the

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62 See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/pda/2011/may/06/artfinder-social-media-art>

63 See <http://www.lightspacetime.com/newsletter/social-media-etiquette-for-successful-artists/>

64 See <http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/support/1stfans>

notion of 'social' media to incorporate media that resides on devices that allow for ubiquitous computing. *NAMALand* is the latest in a series of locative media works by the artist, with other works such as *Walkspace* allowing users to overlay suggested routes through a city. This participatory work then allows the user of the *Walkspace* app to navigate their city in ways suggested by other users.

Thus I suggest that we may think about 'social media' as potentially encompassing ways in which artists, arts institutions and the arts audience can communicate and dialogue, as in the case of the NEA report and *Artfinder*. However, social media in an artistic context can also be thought of as a production 'tool' or even a 'medium' for the artist.

Along with the potentials of social media in the art world however, are issues of production becoming an imperative. Whilst blogs are a way for artists to connect, share and peer review their work, there is evidence from the primary research to suggest that this can put pressure on artists to maintain constant connectivity online and be seen to be producing and writing about produced work constantly. For one of my participants, Ivan Twohig, this situation was 'another symptom to this networked society - that you need to keep up that online persona, or you fall off the radar or people will think you've just stopped making things or your work's not good enough any more'. Thus, whilst the peer review and peer acceptance of social media had many benefits, nonetheless they created 'all these kind of built in pressures to being constantly viewed'.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed some debates pertaining to art, from that of an *encounter* to postmodern perspectives on art, towards newer theories that extend artistic discourse beyond that of postmodernism and into a realm where digitality, electronics and ‘new media’ are considered both for their medium specificity and for their place in the broader art world. The chapter explored how the concept of ‘art’ has been a problematic one, especially within the cultural studies discipline, where the concept of ‘artist’ is relegated in favour of the concept of a ‘symbol creator’. It was also argued that the ‘postmodern turn’, and its associated ‘cultural turn’, was marked by an ahistoricity where previous tropes of modernist thought were deconstructed. The nexus between this postmodern and/or cultural turn with that of late capitalism was also explored, and it was argued that this turn, and its associated neo-liberal cultural policies has implications for culture and art. This informs the theoretical framework in the themed area of art, as it allows for an expansive model of the ‘potential’ of art as an *encounter* whilst situating concepts of art and artistic production within the discipline of cultural studies. Discussion of the postmodern turn and its nexus with artistic production engages with the 5<sup>th</sup> themed area as outlined in chapter 1, that of the political-economic dimension to cultural production.

As a counter to this postmodern/cultural turn, theories of new media art were analysed, with attention paid to the ‘continuities’ visible in theories of new media. Whilst allowing for distinct aesthetic, material and object differences that digital technologies afford, the chapter argued that excessive ‘neologising’ around ICTs leads to an impoverished understanding of their role in digital art. This chapter thus informs the research with respect to the subject of ‘art’, digital art, digital aesthetics and both the specificities and universalities thereof, and thus engages with the key themed areas of (1) art, (2) technology and (3) innovation in the artistic context.

**Chapter 5**  
**Ireland, Cultural Situatedness and**  
**Identity**

## **Chapter 5: Ireland: Art, Cultural Situatedness and Identity**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I explore Irish cultural identity through a survey of visual art through the last century. This is for several reasons that pertain to the context of a study of digital media technologies and artistic production. First, the era of high modernism was an age of social, political, cultural and technological upheaval across Europe. This era provides a rich area for comparison with the current era of similar crisis and transformation. Second, Ireland became a 'postcolonial' nation during this period of upheaval, in 1922. The significance of this is that while the whole of Europe, including Ireland, was undergoing profound transformation, Ireland was also negotiating the first stages of postcoloniality. This in itself brought challenges and opportunities aside from, but pertaining to the challenges of modernism, including tensions pertaining to cultural expression. Third, a revisiting of a previous, comparable time of change and transformation can provide a grounded historical context for study of the current changing cultural landscape. This chapter therefore addresses the concerns of the first theme outlined in the key questions of chapter one, threading through both a historical look at Ireland's postcolonial identity through to contemporary debates in art criticism which I argue, have not extended beyond postcolonial discourse as much as the rhetoric of 'globalisation' in the Celtic Tiger era would have suggested.

This chapter starts with a discussion of postcolonial theory to provide a theoretical backdrop to situate the complexities of Irish visual culture from the early 20th century to current times. I then proceed to explore the social and cultural contexts of cultural expression within Ireland, with respect to issues of identity in a newly postcolonial state. As Terence Brown notes, to not consider the social context in which the culture is being discussed 'would be to suggest that high culture - intellectual endeavour and debate, the arts - has a life completely independent of the social reality in which it occurs' (Brown, 2004: preface). Therefore, Brown, echoing the sentiments of the 'social shaping of technology' framework, posits that culture and high art do not exist outside the social contexts in which they embedded, but rather that society impacts on cultural production

and reception. It is therefore suggested that in line with the framework set out in chapter one, a ‘social shaping of *culture*’ approach is important when exploring Irish visual culture from this historical viewpoint<sup>67</sup>.

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67 Luke Gibbons has also researched extensively on Irish cultural expression, with his 1996 work *Transformations in Irish Culture* suggesting that culture should not be considered either outside society or inconsequential to societal matters. Brown and Gibbons provide contrasting views on popular culture and high art, with Gibbons undertaking analyses of popular culture, and Brown paying significant attention to ‘high’ art. Nonetheless, both authors situate culture in a context that is friendly to a ‘social shaping of culture’ framework. Therefore, in this investigation into Irish visual culture, the contributions of both are explored, compared, and contextualised within the framework of postcolonial theory.

## 5.2 Irish Visual Art in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries

### 5.2.1 *The RHA gallery - symbolic of the struggle in the visual arts?*

According to Bruce Arnold's survey of Irish art, there is a misconception of a poor tradition of visual arts in Ireland. Arnold observes that this 'fallacy' suggests that 'Ireland's contribution to the art of the world has been almost exclusively in the realm of the written word' (Arnold, 1977: 6). Through this misconception, Jack B Yeats has been singled out as 'a unique and uncharacteristic phenomenon in a country which has little or no tradition of visual art, and no artists in the past of comparable stature' (ibid.). Certainly, commentators have noted a lack of investment in the visual arts which may have led to the misconception that there was not a tradition of visual arts in Ireland. However, as we will see, Jack B Yeats, whilst being possibly one of the best known Irish visual artists, is not alone in his significant contribution to the canon of Irish visual art.

The 19th century saw many tensions in Ireland, which impacted on the landscape of cultural production. The act of Union which came into effect in 1809 had, according to Arnold, brought about a loss of 'social lustre' to how Dublin was perceived culturally (ibid.: 93). In parallel with this, the growth of London as an urban centre began to attract artists away from Ireland towards a richer cultural hub. Notwithstanding this, some artists who stayed in Ireland sought to promote and support the visual arts. This involved the setting up of various academies and societies, leading to the establishment of the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) in 1823. However, the RHA struggled for support with even artists such as John Comerford (1770 - 1832) against the idea of academies being put in place for artists, and polemically (and perhaps hypocritically) stating that 'those who encourage young men to become artists were doing a real and substantial injury to society, they were destroying very excellent carpenters, smiths and housepainters and creating a class of unfortunates who never would be capable of doing any good for either themselves or others' (Comerford in Arnold 1977: 105).

Commentaries from the early 20th century point to the ongoing zeitgeist in Ireland remaining that of one that looked towards London for cultural expression. A 1913 source notes that the struggles in the RHA were ongoing, and had been due 'partly from



the neglect and apathy of the public and partly from the difficulty which was found in filling the ranks of the Academicians with artists who could paint' (WG Strickland, in Arnold 1977: 94). The commentator explained these difficulties, noting that any talented artist in Ireland would not wish to stay where their work had no outlet for expression and thus, they moved to London.

Therefore, 19th century Ireland is perceived in the canon as culturally poor, with the cultural norm of the time apparently being one of exodus to London or beyond. The 'demotion' of Dublin as a cultural centre following the Act of Union seems to be a key factor in this. However, was this the case across the board amongst cultural critics? Thomas Davis, whilst critical of an apathy towards the visual arts, nonetheless encouraged a discourse of the potential of art, as we shall see now.

### 5.2.2 *Thomas Davis and a National art*

Thomas Davis voiced his encouragement of the visual arts, calling for the exploration of a 'distinctly Irish national art' (Cullen, 1999: 65). In his 1843 essay 'National Art', Davis explores the function of art, the societal potential of art, while critiquing Irish society and calling on the public to support the arts.

Davis begins his essay with a romantic tableau of what art can do in terms of its ability to accurately describe people, events and situations more vividly than the written word. He defines the function of art as 'a register of facts', explaining that 'so far as it can express facts, it is superior to writing' (ibid.: 66)<sup>68</sup>. Thus, Davis' conviction about the visual arts being a high form of cultural expression is not in doubt - he is convinced of the power of the visual art. However, once again we can see a critique of the zeitgeist at the time of the essay, with Davis observing, in a critique similar to Strickland's that 'nothing but the scarcity of *faithful* artists, or the stupidity of the public, prevents us from having our pictorial libraries of men and places' (ibid. emphasis in original). Thus, Davis is alluding to tensions existing in the cultural sphere of the time, between a desire

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68 This challenges a much earlier work from Edmund Burke, who eulogised poetry for its ability to raise complex images in the reader's imagination, in contrast to painting, whose images were mostly imitative and therefore less complex (Burke 1759 in Cullen 1999: 41)

to acknowledge the potential of art, and an admission of the practical difficulties that existed in Ireland.

Davis proceeds to speak up for the craft that is involved in painting - the process of accurate depiction that results from years of study of still forms as well as human anatomy. He acknowledges the craft involved in drawing, use of light and shade and overall composition. But he also goes further to posit that 'Art in its highest stage is more than this. It is a creator' (ibid.: 67). This is because, according to Davis, 'the ideal has resources beyond the actual' (ibid.). In effect, what Davis posits is the transcendental potential of art - it provides more than an imitative view of reality. Through the skill of the artist, mythical and legendary scenes are brought to life because of the *imagination* of the painter to cognise how those scenes looked and played out.

In a critique of the zeitgeist of apathy to the visual arts, Davis follows up his point about the potential of art by positing that the creation of artistic works is an 'ennoblement' to society. For Davis, the next highest potential is for a society to 'inherit such works and achievements'. He then, once again draws attention to the spirit of cultural indifference at the time, observing that 'the lowest stage of all is neither to possess nor to create them' (ibid.). Davis however, posits a remedy for this situation - he makes a call to invest and educate in the arts, stating that 'to collect into, and make known, and publish in Ireland the best works of our living and dead Artists is one of the steps towards procuring for Ireland a recognised National Art' (ibid.). He cites the reward for this investment in the arts as contributing towards a national identity, or as he articulates it, 'to facilitate the creation of some great spirit' (ibid.).

Davis is not frivolous about the difficulties involved in evoking or invoking a type of 'national' art however. His critique of the Irish zeitgeist continues in his essay, noting how much is yet to be done in Ireland to facilitate a culture sympathetic to artistic expression. He acknowledges that there have been great Irish artists, but regrets the fact that they have moved away from Ireland towards areas of greater cultural richness, noting that 'they live on the Tiber and the Thames' (ibid.: 69).

Davis then ends his essay by calling upon and hoping for the establishment of a national gallery to house Irish art. He expresses his happiness at steps being taken to ensure that this was becoming more of a reality, but stressed that public support was also necessary

in making the goal a reality. He ends with a message of hope and assurance in the public, stating that 'we trust the public - for the sake of their own pleasure, their children's profit, and Ireland's honour - will give it their instant and full support'.

## 5.3 Postcolonial theory

### 5.3.1 Introduction

As a former colony of Britain, the lens of postcolonial studies is an appropriate way to contextualise Ireland's social and cultural context. The roots of this research approach include the work of Fanon, Said and that of the *Subaltern Studies* group of scholars that emerged from studies of Indian colonial history. Their work set about giving underrepresented peoples a space to voice their experiences, separate and autonomous from the dominant discourse of colonialism.

The field of postcolonial studies was also influenced by Franz Fanon, who presented a psychoanalytical analysis of the effects of colonisation on the colonised people. In his work *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon investigates identity in relation to colonised people, and the effects of being 'other' to the nation that colonises, and the corresponding confusion of being 'other' in one's own land. As McLeod reveals, 'the "Negro" is deemed to epitomise everything that the colonising French are not. The colonisers are civilised, rational, intelligent: the "Negro" remains "other" to all these qualities against which colonising peoples derive their sense of superiority and normality' (McLeod, 2000: 21). Fanon posits that often, the reaction against this 'othering' is to try and appropriate the values of the colonising power. However, this is often unsuccessful as the colonising power does not accept the colonised as being equal in status, no matter how much they try and acquiesce to the culture of the colonising power. Fanon was a psychologist, and this informed his pioneering efforts to define the collective, socio-cultural features and ramifications of postcolonial inferiority and identity. He therefore suggests that only when the sense of psychological inferiority in terms of identity can be healed, can the dominant colonial discourse be transcended (ibid.).

Edward Said was also an influential presence in the field of postcolonialism. His work, *Orientalism* (1978), looked at colonialism from the standpoint of the colonising power in a framework of Marxist and Foucauldian theories of power structures. Said also analysed how the colonising power gathered information about the area they were colonising, and how this knowledge was based on assumptions about the area, rather than through engagement with the people of the colony. These assumptions were then presented as

facts in the colonising country. This presentation of 'facts' often justified the reasons for the colonial power enforcing their culture on the colonised area, because of the 'superiority' or 'sophistication' of the power in relation to the 'primitive' or 'degenerate' colonised (Said, 1978: 52, 207).

From the work of Fanon and Said emerges a suggestion that colonisation occurs on both a psychological and a cultural level. As McLeod suggests of the contributions, 'Fanon shows how this works at a psychological level for the oppressed, while Said demonstrates the legitimisation of Empire for the oppressor' (McLeod, 2000: 21). Therefore, to emerge from having been colonised requires a rethinking, not only of the dominant colonial discourses but of identity itself. When the identity issues are healed, it is *then* that a rewriting of the dominant discourses can be attempted. Thus, the place of culture - as not outside society, but situated and embedded - is important when considering the postcoloniality of Ireland. Likewise, the postcoloniality of the Irish state is also of considerable importance when discussing cultural production in Ireland.

### 5.3.2 *Subaltern Studies*

The issue of representing the colonised peoples was investigated by a number of scholars in the Subaltern Studies group, including Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The term 'subaltern' refers to the opinions and viewpoints of peoples who are outside the colonial elite and their power structure. According to the Subaltern Studies group, since these peoples are outside that dominant, elite sphere, their opinions are ignored, leaving no channel through which they can articulate their viewpoints. Consequently, even if they do voice their viewpoint, there is no way for that viewpoint to be received by the dominant sphere.

Homi Bhabha was influenced by the writings of both Franz Fanon and Edward Said. Said had posited that 'colonial discourse imposed a firm distinction between European and native identities' (Hubbard, Kitchin, and Valentine, 2004: 53). Bhabha challenged this by suggesting that not only do the colonial texts distinguish the identity of the colonised place in this way, but the texts also blur the distinction. He explained the notion of *ambivalence* in dealing with how the colonising country stereotypes the colonised people. Bhabha explains that stereotypes are 'a form of knowledge and

identification that vacillates between what is always “in place”, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated’ (Bhabha, 1994b: 66, in Hubbard et al., 2004: 53). Bhabha also noted the dialectic that results from colonial interpretations and stereotypes, insofar as a stereotype can be authoritative and yet be reductionist. Bhabha also posited that beyond this dialectic is a *third space* where essentialist reductions of ‘oppressor’ and ‘the oppressed’ no longer hold as binary oppositions (Hubbard et al.: 2004)<sup>69</sup>.

Giyatri Chakravorty Spivak extended subaltern studies to include issues of patriarchy and gender. One of her best known works, entitled *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), posits that colonised women are doubly colonised and in effect, rendered mute. In the first instance this muting happens through colonisation. Then, in the second instance - the double colonisation - the colonised woman is further muted by men, most obviously by the male colonisers, but also amongst her fellow colonised men. Spivak notes that even the less insidious colonisers who sought to save women from certain practices (she cites the example of Hindu women who performed ‘widow sacrifice’ by volunteering themselves to the cremation pyre of their husbands) engaged in the practice of silencing the subaltern. Thus, Spivak concludes that the subaltern can speak, but there are no channels through which their voices will be heard (ibid.).

However, Spivak does not advocate categorising the subaltern as a quantifiable, separate group. She was influenced by Foucault and Deleuze and their work on constructions of selfhood and identity. With her understanding of the power dynamics drawn from their works, she points out that in giving a voice to the subaltern through the conduit of an intellectual, there is a danger of confusing the *representation* of the subaltern with subaltern consciousness itself. She warns of the danger of giving the subaltern a voice when by their very status as subaltern, no voice is afforded to them. As McLeod notes, Spivak advises against the ‘perceiving of the subaltern as a “sovereign subject” in control of his or her own consciousness, and assuming that the intellectual is a transparent medium through which subaltern consciousness can be made

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69 In relation to displaced peoples, Bhabha noted that in this *third space* is a hybridisation of cultures. For example, in his analysis of the Salman Rushdie affair, Bhabha considered that the concept of the third space ‘described the hybrid cultural practices of British Muslims and other displaced populations who negotiate often irreconcilable fragments of different traditions and make their temporary home at their limits’ (Hubbard et al., 2004: 55). He posits that what results from an engagement like this is a group identity that ‘cannot be authentically Muslim or authentically British, but are both and neither at the same time’ (ibid.). Bhabha also contributed to the studies of the so-called ‘third world’, noting that there was a tendency to group cultures of the ‘third world’ together, thus essentialising and homogenising them.

present' (McLeod, 2000: 192). Thus, Spivak suggests that instead of hoping to give the subaltern a voice, it is more valuable to clear the space and allow them to speak.

In her discussion of so-called 'third-world' women, Spivak notes that even representations of subaltern insurgency usually allow the male subaltern more of a space through which to communicate, thus rendering such women more subaltern than the males of their group - the 'double colonisation' mentioned earlier. Although using the example of women as being doubly colonised, Spivak raises important concerns for any group considered 'subaltern' (Hubbard et al., 2004.).

## 5.4 Ireland in a Postcolonial Frame

### 5.4.1 Introduction

In relation to Ireland and its emerging cultural identity at the beginning of the 20th century, a postcolonial analysis can mitigate against a reading of cultural production of the time through the dominant discourse of colonialism. Gibbons is sympathetic to the postcolonial framework, noting that due to having been colonised, 'Ireland is a First World country, but with a Third World memory' (Gibbons, 1996: 3). In the context of the work of both Bhabha and Spivak, equating Ireland with the third world suggests that Ireland's postcolonial cultural landscape has been informed by a historical status as a colonised and subaltern group.

### 5.4.2 The Cultural *Zeitgeist* at the Turn of the 20th Century

Luke Gibbons provides a summary of the cultural, political and social zeitgeist at the time of Ireland's accession as a postcolonial state, noting that historical dichotomies of 'the dislocations between periphery and centre, the country and the city, tradition and modernity' were played out in Ireland (Gibbons, 1996: 3), with the example of the 1916 rising elucidating these dichotomies, where the proclamation of independence called upon the ancestral generations, but with the rising itself taking place in a hub of modernity and communications technology of its time - the General Post Office in Dublin.

For Gibbons, Irish progress towards modernity was hindered in a further dichotomy, by the emergent nation's tendency to activate conservative forces. Ireland, whilst engaging with its past as Fanon suggests as a phase of postcolonial identity-building, did not engage *critically* with it. Gibbons observes how 'modernization is not solely an external force, but also requires the active transformation of a culture from within, a capacity to engage critically with its own past' (Gibbons, 1996: 3). However, in the case of Ireland's relationship with modernity and transformation he remarks on how 'it is often the integration of Ireland into the new international order which activates some of the most conservative forces in Irish society' (ibid.). In Ireland's case then, the engagement with



the past occurred in a way which reinforced old traditional ideologies, as opposed to critiquing and transforming them. For Gibbons, ‘transformations induced by contact with the new may activate a transgressive potential already latent in the old, in the cast-offs and rejects of history’ (Gibbons, 1996: 5), in a practice of strategic essentialism, where often disparate groups band together in order to express solidarity for a common cause. Such groups, in effect, put aside their disparate voices to combine in a unified way for a strategic purpose, oftentimes in a postcolonial context (Barker, 2008: 244)<sup>70</sup>.

Notwithstanding a certain turn to traditionalism, Gibbons suggests that due to Ireland’s fragmented colonial history, Irish culture ‘often evinced a “proto-modernist” outlook’, especially in the literature of the nineteenth century (Gibbons, 1996: 6). Predating the behemoths of Joyce and Beckett, the European success of such literature came from the historical context the writers brought forth their work, or as Gibbons phrases it, ‘they were carrying with them the nightmare of Irish history’ (ibid.: 6) such as that revealed in Edmund Burke’s ‘aesthetics of terror’ situated in Burke’s experience of an Irish person in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For Gibbons, in colonised cultures natives could feel like strangers in their own land, therefore evincing a particular cultural nationalism that differs significantly to the ‘xenophobic’ nationalism of colonial powers (ibid.: 6). He observes that emergent countries can tend to mimic the nationalism of the colonial power, in order to gain respect and recognition, which can also involve a reproduction of their own identities that self-validates their past, hence a turn to traditionalism and a corresponding tension with processes of modernity. I suggest that this tension was particularly heightened in Ireland’s case, as this process of identity reconfiguration occurred at the zenith of European high modernism.

#### *5.4.3 The Politics of Culture in Ireland*

Gibbons posits a ‘frontier myth’ that was imposed on Irish culture during its time of colonisation. This colonial myth implied that ‘beyond a border lies another culture or nation: beyond a frontier lies simply waste land, a wilderness awaiting the progress of civilization and “God’s frontiersmen”’ (Gibbons, 1996: 8). This myth precipitated a

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<sup>70</sup> One such Irish example was the case of James Gralton, who was deported for allegedly espousing radical communist views. The spectre of communism in Ireland precipitated an alliance of the Catholic church, the state and the Irish Republican Army, who all for their own ideological reasons, wished to have Gralton removed from the country (Gibbons, 1996: 5), but who separately would not share ideologies.

reactionary, assertive culture, as ‘to engage in cultural activity in circumstances where one’s culture was being effaced or obliterated, or even to assert the existence of a civilization prior to conquest, was to make a political statement, if only by depriving the frontier myth of its power to act as an alibi for colonisation’ (ibid.). In the context of postcolonial studies, this type of political culture stands as an attempt by the colonised entity to give itself a separate and valid cultural voice; to assert their identity ‘people with history’, as cultured, not wild.

Thus cultural production in Ireland was politicised. For Gibbons this was significant, as it acknowledged ‘the transformative capacity of culture in society, its power to give rise to what was not there before’ (ibid.). Thus, the politicisation of culture did not only serve to provide a ‘voice’, as traditional postcolonial readings suggest, but also to transform<sup>71</sup>, situating culture as an actor in change - not just a retrospective voice that is a representation of change. In a postcolonial setting, this voice becomes more complex, as I now analyse through the work of Terence Brown.

#### *5.4.4 Ireland’s Cultural Complexity*

Terence Brown posits an alternate interpretation of Ireland’s relationship with culture, acknowledging Ireland’s postcoloniality as seminally influential in forming the cultural zeitgeist at the beginning of the 20th century, having freed itself from the colonial power that had been a feature of its identity for 800 years (Brown, 2004). At this time, the canonical texts of the new emergent Ireland propounded the view that ‘a free Ireland would embark upon a radically adventurous programme to restore the ancient language,

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71 Gibbons acknowledges that his viewpoint is contradictory to the deterministic positioning of art as outside politics and society. His viewpoint is also contradictory to some sociological framings of culture, whereby according to Gibbons, there is a relegation of ‘questions of culture entirely to the margins of the social process’ (Gibbons, 1996: 9). He critiques both standpoints as ‘reductionist’, observing that with both of those viewpoints, ‘cultural representations are at one remove from society, and hence are in no position to act as agents of historical change, or to help us understand social processes’ (ibid.).

He argues that this reductionism only serves to reflect its own idealistic viewpoint, because it still places ideology and cultural identity into vague contexts that are not easily defined. He notes Raymond Williams’ call to ‘de-etherialize’ culture and instead to view culture as ‘a material force in its own right in negotiating the structures of experience’ (ibid.). Williams, according to Gibbons was an exponent of cultural materialism, which called for the promotion of the study of culture to within the remit of sociology. Gibbons, in supporting this, claims that ‘cultural identity ... does not pre-exist its representations or material expressions, but is in fact generated and transformed by them’ (ibid.: 10). He explains that ‘culture *transforms* what it works on: it does not produce it *ex nihilo*. Representations draw their “raw materials” from extra-cultural spheres of activity (such as politics, economics, kinship systems), but then subject them to symbolic transformations of their own making’ (ibid.: 11).

to discover the vitality residual in a nation devastated by a colonial power, and would flower with new social and cultural forms, testaments to the as yet unrecognised genius of the Gael' (ibid.: 3), in an echoing of Gibbons' account of the latent transgressive elements being activated at a time of transformation. Brown thus attributes the conservatism associated with traditional values as responsible for holding back the cultural and social progress envisaged by these canonical texts, particularly in the early years after independence (ibid.).

For Brown, the culture and society of the Irish state became much more homogenous than before Ireland was partitioned, negatively affecting the social and cultural landscape in the new state. Whereas previous to partition there was a sizeable minority of Presbyterian and Protestant citizens, once Ireland was partitioned, 'Episcopalian Anglo-Ireland' remained as a strong aspect of Irish identity only in the six counties of the partitioned North, with its citizens in the south rendered effectively mute, culturally. This left the Catholic majority in the South with an unchallenged remit to 'express its social and cultural will unimpeded by significant opposition from powerful minorities' (ibid: 8). The removal of this sizeable cultural minority also removed a clash between nationalist and Anglo-Irish ideologies; a dynamic that Brown considers important for a rich cultural and intellectual sphere. For Brown, this affected the

imaginative potential of the new state to creatively solve issues of cultural diversity, postcoloniality and modernity<sup>72</sup>.

Brown is thus pessimistic about Irish society after independence as in any way forward-thinking, creative or innovative in its cultural expressions. He notes that ‘those Irish writers, painters, and polemicists therefore who chose to identify and celebrate an ancient rural national tradition in Ireland were required to ignore much of contemporary Irish social reality’ (Brown, 2004: 80). With the advent of the Gaelic revival and the Gaelic league, supported by Eamonn De Valera<sup>73</sup>, a traditional, rural and conservative image of nationhood was encouraged. Brown observes that approval went to writers who maintained the status quo and ‘dwelt in a conservative and nationalistic fashion on rural aspects of the country’s life’. In conjunction with this, the establishment of a censorship board served to ‘repress writings which might disturb conventional moral sensitivities’ (ibid.: 85), thus cementing the place of traditional-looking works and diminishing the cultural zeitgeist for radical or exploratory texts pertaining to nationhood and Irish identity.

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72 The picture that Brown subsequently paints of the homogenous twenty six counties is one that is in stark contrast to the romanticism of nationalist bombast about revolution. He points out that the 1926 census recorded 61% of Irish people as living outside towns or villages. Therefore the country was hugely rural at a time that it was beginning to identify with its own postcolonial cultural voice. What this meant for Ireland was that a significant number of its people were concerned with land rights more so than political or cultural transformation. As to why there would be a preoccupation with land rights, Brown also elucidates; notably a post-famine farmer was likely to not own the land he worked, and was also probably required to divide it amongst his family so that they could earn a subsistence living (Brown, 2004: 11). Therefore, to achieve ownership of ones own land was hugely important for individual wealth and as a symbol of inclusion in a new nation and triumph over an unjust colonial regime - more important than looking outside that sphere, towards large-scale political, societal or cultural transformation.

The religious homogeneity that resulted from partition also embedded Catholic ideologies into society that, in Brown’s opinion, may have been challenged more robustly had the sizeable Protestant minority still been present. This again raises the question of critique in Irish society at the time of its emergent postcoloniality. There was an existing loyalty to the church after the famine, when mass was regularised and other devotional celebrations such as the novena and the procession were introduced. However, when Ireland was struggling for its independence, the church became more symbiotic with identity through aligning itself with land rights issues; Brown noting that ‘Irish Catholicism increasingly became a badge of national identity at a time when the church also felt able to propound doctrines that enshrined the rights of private property’ (ibid.: 19).

In relation to traditions and their intertwining with identity, Brown notes that due to the economic conditions, the rural population *had* to rely on traditional technologies, because economically, adopting new ones was not a viable option. He notes that when Irish writers looked to this aspect of ‘Irishness’, they were likely to emphasise ‘those aspects of that life which suggested an undying continuity, an imperviousness to change, an almost hermetic stasis’ (ibid.: 76). However, Brown notes that far from being static and impervious to change, he believes that the Irish people were quite open to modernisation, citing the bicycle and the paraffin oil lamp as examples of new technologies that the Irish people adopted. He also notes how the Irish countryman was ‘ready to use horse-driven threshing machines, prepared to experiment with steam, and in the 1930s he began to welcome the tractor’ (ibid.).

73 a participant in the rising and subsequent prime minister and president of Ireland

It is therefore evident that in terms of cultural traditions, the conservatism encouraged in the early years of the state was not transformative, but regressive. The homogeneity created by partition created, according to Brown, an intellectual and cultural poverty for the new state. This is especially evident when Brown proceeds to catalogue the contributions made to Irish cultural identity by the ‘Anglo-Irish’, who were subsequently removed from further contributions after partition<sup>74</sup>.

#### 5.4.5 *The Anglo-Irish Contribution to Culture*

According to Brown, the artist George Russell (*Æ*) labelled the traditionalists and the conservatism of the new state as ‘prevailing national narcissism’ (ibid.: 110). *Æ* felt there was far more to gain from infusing Irish cultural identity with international knowledge. As Brown points out, the strength of *Æ*’s point lies in the contribution that the Anglo-Irish made to the culture, due to the openness of the Anglo-Irish to international ideas. In the words of *Æ*:

‘[Ireland] has given birth, if it accepts all its children, to many men who have influenced European culture and science, Berkeley, Swift, Goldsmith, Burke, Sheridan, Moore, Hamilton, Kelvin, Tyndall, Shaw, Yeats, Synge and many others of international repute. If we repudiate the Anglo-Irish tradition, if we say these are aliens, how poor does our life become’ (*Æ: The Irish Statesman*, 3 Jan 1925: 522 in Brown, 2004: 111).

It was not long before WB Yeats himself rode in to defend the Anglo-Irish. In a famous speech to the Seanad in 1927 that railed against the oppression of the Catholic church, Yeats pointed out the contribution of the Anglo-Irish to the culture and political wealth of the country. He argued that the Anglo-Irish ‘have created most of the modern literature of this country’ and ‘have created the best of its political intelligence’ (Brown, T. A. (Terence A.), 2004: 119).

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<sup>74</sup> Please see the chapter 5 addenda in appendix A for an overview of the Irish visual landscape in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, that also provides a case study of the Anglo-Irish contribution to culture, including that of Mainie Jellett, who contributed much to the understanding of the modernist art movement in Ireland

In an earlier, 1913 article, Yeats critiqued the orthodoxy of the arts in Ireland, stating that ‘the arts are very conservative’ (Cullen, 1999: 80), and that ‘they [artists] are not radicals’ (ibid.). He is also observant of the arts being somewhat against the abstraction of modernist artistic practices, noticing ‘contradictions among my friends who are still convinced that art should not be “complicated by ideas”’, and stating that ‘if they have grown rebellious it can only be against something that is modern, something that is not simple’ (ibid.).

Thus, in the early stage of the 20th century, the zeitgeist of cultural poverty and conservatism in the arts was still prevalent in Ireland. The views of *Æ* and Yeats show that at the era of high modernism, where Europe was embracing new and radical thought and cultural expression, there was a tendency in Ireland towards conservatism and looking inward to old traditions. Yeats and *Æ* voiced a significant opposition to this conservatism, but their status as Anglo-Irish meant that their views were in a minority against the powerful forces of church ideology and its alignment with state policy. Nonetheless, the arguments of Yeats and *Æ* represent a voice in early 20th century Ireland that advocated progress, innovation, multiculturalism and diversity over tradition and conservatism.

Therefore, in discussing the genesis of Irish culture in the last century, it is evident that the subject is complex. Ireland’s postcolonial identity in the decades after independence was formed from disparate upheavals; tensions between tradition and modernity; the loss of the sizeable Protestant minority due to partition; and reduction in status of those of the minority who were left in the new state in a position of having to struggle to be heard. I have fallen short of describing the Protestant minority as ‘subaltern’, although in this context it is tempting to label them as such, but their loss of status was certainly significant not only for themselves as a minority group, but for Irish cultural identity as a whole. Brown presents a view of cultural traditions as backward, particularly in the early years of the free state. However, there is a fluidity to identity over time - that what may hold dear for a group to identify with may change and progress when different cultural influences enter.

#### 5.4.6 *Mainie Jellett - a Modernist Innovator*

One artist who practiced in the early years after the Irish state was formed, and who embraced modernist ideas in her practice was Mainie Jellett (1897-1944). She was one of the 'Anglo-Irish', a daughter of a protestant Dublin family. She became known as 'the main instigator of abstract painting in Ireland' (Cullen, 1999: 86), and along with Evie Hone (1894-1955) has also been termed 'the great innovators in modern Irish painting' (Arnold, 1977: 146). Significantly for a postcolonial context, having done her primary artistic training she started studying cubism with André Lhote and Albert Gleizes in Paris in 1921 - the year before the founding of the Irish state, and the peak of the modernist era. Thus, she was temporally, culturally and socially situated in such a way as to have influenced the artistic movement of the new state through her decisions to work abroad and subsequently to bring what she learned back to Ireland. Jellett, as well as becoming a competent artist employing abstract and Cubist techniques, also instigated the Irish Exhibition of Living Art as a reaction to the then conservatism of the RHA. Arnold stresses the importance of Jellett's contribution as both an artist and patron of the arts through her teaching, noting that 'more than any other painter she made known in Ireland all the challenges and opportunities which are associated with the twentieth century's greatest art movement - Cubism' (ibid.).

In her own writings she provided her audience with an insight into her ideology around her art. In an essay from 1943 entitled 'My Voyage of Discovery', she details her artistic process and her thoughts on national art. Amongst her beliefs was a belief in the necessity for the artist to possess skill and craft. She states 'I believe in the necessity of a highly developed sense of craftsmanship; every artist should be capable of executing adequately whatever job he is entrusted with' (Cullen, 1999: 88). She also posits a modernist critique of the elitist rhetoric surrounding the artist, stating that 'the idea of an artist being a special person, an exotic flower set apart from other people, is one of the errors resulting from the industrial revolution, and the cause of artists being pushed out of their lawful position in the life and society of the present day' (ibid.). This point is significant, as at once it alludes to the artist potentially occupying a somewhat privileged position in society, yet it suggests that the artist is also ordinary and everyday, also as much socially, politically and culturally situated as the rest of the populace. Jellett elaborates on this point, stating that 'artists as a whole are people with certain gifts more highly developed than the majority, but for this very reason their gifts are vitally

important to the spiritual life of that majority' (ibid.: 89). Thus, the artist is in a position whereby the combination of their expressive abilities and their situatedness allows them to potentially be able to interrogate society from within.

Applying this to a national context, she states that 'the art of a nation is one of the ultimate facts by which its spiritual health is judged and appraised by posterity' (ibid.). Jellett attributes the 'chaos' of the time to an isolation of the artist from the people. Again, this point is significant, as it echoes the sentiments of other modernist authors on aesthetics, culture and society such as Adorno, Benjamin and Marcuse, who all suggested that the artist is also a citizen, is not apart from society, yet had a privileged position in society in which to critique the inadequacies of the time and provide an alternative space for discourse. Jellett's stance alludes to the potential of the artist to hold not just a politically privileged space for discourse - of societal and ethical matters - but also a spiritually privileged space. Perhaps Jellett, as a protestant citizen felt the need for an alternate space away from the overwhelming Catholic majority that was created at the founding of the state.

Jellett is not obtuse in her modernist stance. Openly she states that 'I believe in the truth of the ideals which inspire what is commonly called "the Modern Movement" in art', but she also observes that there has been a dearth of opportunity for the artistic fruits of this movement to be seen in Ireland (ibid.: 89). As commentators previous to her, she hopes that some of the great modernist artworks may make their way into a national collection for art. Ironically however, she retreats from the idea of the modernist era producing 'great' art, noting that 'I do not consider the present period is capable of producing a great art' (ibid.). She considered that the time she was writing in was a time 'when one civilisation is in its death throes and a new civilisation is struggling for birth' (ibid.). For Jellett, this was true in both an Irish context as well as a European one. The new Irish state was struggling to find its identity after gaining its independence, and Europe was in the grip of the second war of the century. For Jellett, the modern movement in art was nonetheless valuable for its potential to lay down new foundations for when times stabilised.

Jellett, therefore, is an example of a modernist innovator emerging from a postcolonial Ireland. How she was situated - a protestant migrant who subsequently returned -



provides an interesting case study of the issues of identity, nationhood and cultural production in a postcolonial state.

## 5.5 After Post-Colonialism

### 5.5.1 *Nationhood, Identity and Culture*

In the case of Irish cultural production, it is important to consider what is meant by the *nation-state* of Ireland. A nation-state is a political entity that has dominion over a particular territory. It is not a natural classification of humankind; the concept of nationhood has been alien to humankind for most of its existence. It is therefore a construct, both socially and culturally, and represents a means through which classification and identification can occur (Barker, 2008: 252). This identification contributes to a sense of national identity, or ‘a form of imaginative identification with the symbols and discourses of the nation-state’ (ibid.). These symbols and discourses contribute to the formation of a cultural identity, and thus have an influence on cultural expression. In the case of Ireland, the reaches of Irish cultural identity extend beyond the borders of the nation-state, i.e. the republic, because of partition. Thus, there is a sizeable minority of people who consider themselves to be culturally Irish, but because they are outside the republic of Ireland and in the six counties of northern Ireland, politically they are part of the United Kingdom. It is therefore evident that there are complex, postcolonial issues surrounding Irish cultural expression, dating from the time the state was formed.

However, it is also important to look beyond postcolonialism and to consider other frameworks of cultural production, in order to evaluate not only the historical but *contemporary* cultural identity in the context of Ireland. Stuart Hall, for example, has contributed significantly to studies of cultural identity, Barker noting that ‘Stuart Hall’s anti-essentialist position about cultural identity takes into account that as well as points of cultural similarity, cultural identity is organised around points of difference, so cultural identity isn’t fixed, it’s a process of becoming - cultural identity is continually being produced within the vectors of similarity and difference’ (Barker, 2008: 229).

Hall’s observation shows that issues of cultural identity can in fact swing between semblances of strategic essentialism (his vector of similarity; albeit for a given purpose) and rejection of essentialism in order to distinguish oneself/group from another in an assertion of identity (his vector of difference). This lends itself to the consideration of a

‘social shaping of culture’ framework as posited in the introduction of this chapter. As Barker observes, ‘any given national culture is understood and acted upon differently by diverse social groups’ (ibid.: 252). This is *simpatico* with the observation of Terence Brown, referred to in the introduction of this paper, that to ignore the social context in which the culture is being discussed would be akin to suggesting that high culture and the arts are independent of the social reality they are embedded in. My research framework (chapter 1) suggests that this is not the case, and that society and culture are mutually constitutive.

The implication of this for any form of cultural expression is made clear in Barker’s assertion that the cultural symbols and discourses help comprise a sense of a national identity. Therefore, it can be noted that national identity is not just a socially constructed phenomenon, but also a *culturally* constructed one. This places cultural production and expression into an integral part of the overall cultural and societal zeitgeist at any time in a state’s history. Linking this with Hall’s observation that cultural identity is fluid and continually being redefined, it is possible to see how changes to social and cultural identity can inform a sense of national identity. This also points to the importance of not ignoring aspects of that culture in contemporary times of crisis and change, such as digital media and ‘high’ digital media art production.

### *5.5.2 Issues of Emergence*

Whilst considering Ireland’s case in a postcolonial frame has yielded benefits in terms of revealing complexities in cultural production, it is argued that Ireland is not a ‘typical’ postcolonial state. Thomas McEvilley, for example, has argued that whilst the four phases of postcolonial identity-building are evident in India and West Africa, Ireland does not fit in with these four phases. For McEvilley, ‘the situation in Ireland is more complicated, in at least two ways, than the Indian and African models which are often treated as the post-colonial norms’ (REF 13).

To review these four stages of identity-building briefly, McEvilley posits that they are as follows. The first stage is the pre-colonial, or ‘Edenic’ pre-modern period. In this period, ‘cultural identity was simply a given, unquestioned and unrelativized by intrusive contact with other cultural realities’ (ibid.: 12). Thus, according to McEvilley, every

culture ‘felt itself the centre of its world’ (ibid.). The second stage is then the colonial period<sup>75</sup> where ‘the cultural identity of the colonised became deeply alienated’ with the result of ‘self and other in effect exchanging places’ (ibid.). This stage is significant according to McEvelley, as cultural identity became politicised, acting as ‘a weapon that was used to simultaneously buttress their [the colonisers] own hegemony and undermine or damage the will and self-confidence of the colonised’ (ibid.: 13). The reaction of the colonised peoples becomes then one of a certain complicity with this framing of culture. Thus, the colonised ‘overwhelmed by mental colonisation’ ends up ‘lured into a deliberate imitation of Western canons in an attempt to take on a Western, supposedly universal, identity’ (ibid.: 13). For McEvelley, it is in this third phase that independence from the coloniser is achieved, and a reactive ‘rage and resentment’ against the coloniser takes place, involving the ‘denigration’ of the coloniser culture and a ‘recovery and reconstitution of his own once-scorned and perhaps abandoned identity’ (ibid.). Finally, the fourth phase begins when a generation is born and raised after the colonisers have been removed. According to McEvelley, this generation ‘tend to experience late colonial and immediate post-colonial rage as ancient history’ and are likely to ‘accept their heritage as they find it’ (ibid.).

Back to Ireland then, and its status as a ‘special case’. McEvelley posits that partition in the North has interrupted these four phases of postcoloniality, explaining how ‘in Northern Ireland the colonial oppressors have not withdrawn’ (ibid.: 13). Thus, Ireland is ‘stuck’ in phase three, ‘impossible to move into the fourth phase, of accepting hybrid identity without inner conflict, while the occupiers are still within (ibid.: 14). Another issue for the Irish case is that ‘the Irish are neither non-white nor non-Western’ and are therefore not distinguishable either through race or culture. I suggest that McEvelley’s arguments point to an ongoing ‘moment’ of being caught in the third phase, where Ireland is, indeed, a number of generations ‘post’ colonisation, but yet due to partition this third phase is yet currently still enlivened.

In terms of cultural production in these circumstances, I suggest that an article by Desmond Bell can shed light on issues of production in a state that achieved its ‘phase three’ postcoloniality at a time of high modernism. Bell considers that Ireland was ‘largely untouched by the high tide of European modernism and cultural

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75 Which McEvelley conflates with the ‘Modernist’ period

internationalism' (REF 228), suggesting that as a state, Ireland has 'passed effortlessly into a post-modern malaise (ibid.). Again, remembering when Ireland achieved its independence, in 1922, is key to understanding why and how this occurred. As Bell observes, 'cultural nationalism was able to present itself unchallenged in the context of the struggle for national independence', making it *'the socially radical aesthetic'* over the modernist flourishes of the Cubists, Constructivists, Surrealists and Dadaists (ibid.). Thus, rather than Ireland passing through a period of 'socially engaged modernism', the 'modernism' that Ireland experienced was rather 'a consequence of the economic *MODERNISATION* of the sixties rather than of the social ferment of twentieth-century Europe' (ibid.). By this time, according to Bell, the modernist artistic movement had 'by then already run out of steam globally' and had also 'eschewed its politically radical origins' (ibid.), leaving Ireland with what Bell describes as a 'pseudo international style and sensibility' that was not encouraged by a 'radical avant grade' but by 'the purveyors of consumer capitalism' (ibid.: 229).

Thus, Ireland, suggests Bell has 'prematurely entered the post-modern era' whereby we are experiencing a number of malaises, notably 'in the sphere of economic ideology, "monetarism" without a prior social democracy'. Similar naiveties occur in politics where there exists a 'new right' without what Bell terms an 'old left', and where the 'national question' remains 'materially unresolved' (ibid.). In the social sphere, Bell considers that a return to 'family values' has occurred 'without the advanced of feminism', and that we are ultimately 'entering the future [...] walking backwards' as 'modernism remains an untried project' (ibid.).

## 5.6 The Contemporary Cultural Setting

### 5.6.1 Introduction

In political economic terms, neo-liberal globalisation is central to understanding how the economy in contemporary Ireland has been transformed since the 1970s due to membership of the EU and the country's subsequent new status as a favoured site for inward direct investment by USA-based multinationals, especially ICT corporations. From a primarily rural and agricultural economy, Ireland has become one of the most highly internationalised economies in the world by most relevant metrics. The prevailing neo-liberal forms of globalisation also help to account for the easy and massive flows of finance and credit which fuelled the property speculation bubble culminating in the current crisis, even if some of the prior socio-cultural factors also help understand some of the extreme forms of 'irrational exuberance' that animated Irish property developers and speculators.

In considering the nexus of Irish identity and cultural production in this context, globalisation is one change that has affected Ireland's modern social and cultural identity, along with its economic one. Globalisation has facilitated new and varied sites of interaction, and is thus an important concept to consider for any study of contemporary cultural production in Ireland. As Barker observes, much more now than for example in the 18th century, the modern person has more sites in which to interact. People still interact on a local scale in work, with family and with friends, but also on a much more global scale through the advent of television, e-mail, the internet and through travel (Barker, 2008: 231). This has led to a diversification of identity, Barker noting that 'discourses, identities and social practice in time-space form a mutually constituting set implicated in the cultural politics of identity and the constitution of humanity as a form of life' (ibid.). With these growing sites for interaction, there are implications for cultural production - how the producer is situated, how he or she interacts with the new sites for expression, and how, reciprocally, audiences of culture receive and interpret cultural productions.

Malcolm Waters, in a phrase reminiscent of Manuel Castels' adulation of the network society, speaks of a change in time and space relationships due to globalisation. Waters

describes how central features of globalisation are ‘compression of time and its elimination of space’ (Waters, 2001: 182). While obviously problematic in its generalisation, Waters’ point does have resonances with Barker’s observations about new and divergent sites of identity, and how globalisation facilitates those divergent sites. Again, these divergent sites include sites of cultural production and reception.

However, where the determinism of Waters is problematic is in his prediction of an increasing consciousness in the form of ‘an emerging reflexivity or self-conscious intentionality with respect to the globalization process’; also calling it an ‘emergent holistic consciousness’ (ibid.). The general mechanism of how this potential is possible is clear enough; with national identity being a socially constructed phenomenon, the increase in globalisation may elicit a deconstruction and transcendence of that national identity, as access to diverse social groups begin to form cultural identity through various channels of cultural communication and expression. However, this potential is contingent on many facets of political, social and cultural norms, and never in the history of humankind has one ideology been able to transcend the entirety of diversity of the race to become ubiquitous.

Notwithstanding the difficulties posed by the determinism of Waters, validity to the claim that globalisation does have an effect on culture stands; through the globalisation of communication systems, there are more sites where cultural identity can be constituted differently. As Waters points out, the advent of globalisation can have the result of individual opinions and tastes having a more global reach. In terms of the validity of the meaning of these opinions and tastes however, it is easy to find arguments that are less than optimistic about globalisation. If globalisation provides increasing sites for diversifying identity, this occurs alongside a possibility that globalisation facilitates the loss of meaning<sup>76</sup>.

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76 Certainly, Jean Baudrillard did not share the optimistic views of Waters in relation to globalisation. Citing Pavlovian experiments in which the stimulus bore no relevance to elicited responses, Baudrillard posits the concept of the *hyperreal* where not only has reality become surreal - something that Baudrillard admits was ‘still in solidarity with the real it contested’, but that the hyperreal goes beyond the real into the *irreal*. He notes that ‘irreality no longer belongs to the dream or the phantasm, to a beyond or a hidden interiority, but to the *hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself*’ (Cahoone, 2003: 430) (italics in original). Baudrillard claims that there is a denegation of the real down to representations and copies of the real in the form of simulations of real artefacts. With Baudrillard’s painting of modernity and globalisation in this way, he is causing us to question the meaning contained within these simulations.

### 5.6.2 *Culturally Globalised, or Stuck in a Postcolonial Moment?*

More recent commentaries on artistic production in Ireland help to illuminate the contemporary globalised cultural context of Ireland from the 1970s through the 1980s, 1990s into contemporary debates. Through a chronological analysis of these commentaries, I build up a picture of the artistic zeitgeist during more recent decades. These more recent accounts can therefore help to form a cultural, societal and temporal context when considering developments in digital tools and their place in artistic production. Surprisingly, in the context of the above discourse on the potential of a globalised world to enable a transcendence of national identity, the commentators below still allude to a strong ongoing historical narrative.

The first of these commentaries from 1975 is by Cyril Barrett, an art historian and curator, who in his article, explores the *absence* of a nationalism in art. The second piece is a contribution to *Circa* magazine from Tom Duddy, a lecturer at NUI Galway. In this article from 1987, Duddy critiques the ‘provincialism of the right’ and calls for a ‘provincialism of the left’ in which historical, economic and social factors are considered. The third commentator, Declan McGonagle, is an art curator, former director of the Irish Museum of Modern art, and current director of the National College of Art and Design. In this offering, which is based on an address from 1990, McGonagle critiques regionalism in favour of an exploration of locality/localism. He also explores issues of postcoloniality and explains the discourses around postcoloniality that still existed into the 1990s. A short essay by journalist and arts correspondent Ian Kilroy written in 2007 elucidates some contemporary discourses from the ‘Celtic Tiger’ era of economic growth in Ireland. Finally, a 2010 article by Luke Gibbons weaves together issues of modernist artistic expression, the famine and the representation of the real in Irish visual culture.

#### 5.6.2.1 *Cyril Barrett and the lack of ‘nationalist’ art in Ireland*

In his article *Irish Nationalism and Art*, Cyril Barrett (1975) suggests that whilst in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a heightened sense of *political* nationalist sentiment, this nationalism was not evident in artistic works. The artist Jack B Yeats, is held up for critique, Barrett claiming how ‘some people may be inclined to regard



[Yeats] as a nationalistic artist' (Cullen, 1999: 276), but he himself is not of the opinion that Yeats' work made an impact on nationalist sentiment. Of this, Barrett notes that 'it is arguable that these were the finest things that nationalistic art has produced in Ireland, but they might not have been very effective in arousing national sentiments; they were too subtle for that' (ibid.) as Yeats mainly portrayed scenes of the ordinary, everyday life of Irish people who are 'never suffering' in those scenes. He observes that there are 'no unemployed loafers, no down-and-outs, no struggling small farmers, no women and children in urban or rural hovels suffering from malnutrition or prematurely aged' (ibid.: 277), and thus do not betray a political or nationalist sentiment to the works.

As to why this lack of nationalist sentiment in art exists, Barrett posits that prior to Irish independence, there was not a demand for nationalistic art amongst gallery audiences, suggesting that had there been a public demand for that kind of art, it would be evidenced the canon. Whilst Barrett acknowledges that the 'ascendency' would not have taken kindly to representations of Irish nationalism, he surprisingly does not consider this to be an adequate explanation for the lack of nationalistic art, noting that the wider gallery-visiting public would have comprised a larger majority than that of the ascendency<sup>77</sup>, concluding that 'the apathy towards a nationalistic art was not confined either to the administration or to those who implacably considered themselves British' (ibid.). Also, access to the gallery was not an issue for the public due to the facilitation of penny admission rates to encourage public participation. For Barrett, the canon suggests that the concerns of the Irish public, and the artists alike were in landscapes and seascapes. Of one well known work<sup>78</sup> he observes that while set in Ireland, it 'could have been painted elsewhere' (ibid.: 280), also claiming that other works are generic, giving 'no hint of the national passions which were eating out the hearts of some of their fellow-countrymen' (ibid.).

In the light of postcolonial theory, these assumptions are problematic. Regarding gallery attendance, Barrett fails to consider how such a 'Royal' institution was *symbolically* loaded for the general public. The work of Pierre Bourdieu on public attendance at art galleries and museums enforces this, with Bourdieu positing a 'hierarchy of legitimacies' with respect to cultural tastes (Jenkins, 2002: 132). In the Irish context, mere freedom of

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77 For example, he observes that 128,650 people visited the National gallery in 1865, noting that those visitors could not all have been comprised of the ascendency (ibid.: 279)

78 Nathaniel Hone's *Cattle at Malahide*

access would not have been enough to counter the socially and culturally loaded symbolism of the gallery. Thus the apathy of the public towards the artistic spaces and institutions is better analysed in terms of their assumptions that those institutions would not express subjects and works within their hierarchy of legitimacies.

#### 5.6.2.2 *Tom Duddy and Provincialism*

Tom Duddy observes the tendency for art critics to cite geography as a distinctive feature of Irish art in his article from *Circa* art magazine (Duddy, 1987: 14). Citing critics such as Brian Fallon and Dorothy Walker, Duddy notes the tendency for critics to somewhat downplay formal aesthetic influences in favour of highlighting the artist's having been influenced by the Irish landscape. Duddy notes of several modernist and contemporary artists such as Barrie Cooke and Camille Souter, that according to art critics, their work 'may appear expressionistic or abstract in varying degrees, as if all these artists were under the influence of modernist values, but in fact the sources of their inspiration lie elsewhere' (ibid.).

Duddy explores and critiques this tendency as being a need to categorise, and a 'need to identify a strong native impulse' or creative genius. According to Duddy, this need to categorise results in powerful concepts emerging in art criticism in Ireland - concepts such as 'nature, native genius, locality, place, and physical distance - distance from urbanity, complication, and influence' (ibid.). For Duddy, these concepts aggregate together to form 'a romantic vision of the sources of ethnic artistic identity' (ibid.) which leads to a conservatism in art criticism and a 'protectionism' that 'will not allow for completely new things, for timely development and change, for constructive influence from abroad' (ibid.)<sup>79</sup>.

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79 Duddy critiques the dominant visual ideologies that exist in Irish art criticism, noting that the romanticised subjects discussed 'are given priority over such "dirty" materialistic concepts as economy, market, commodity, visual ideology, conspicuous consumption, and the sorts of useful explanatory terms used by historians like Hadjinicolaou and sociologists like Bourdieu' (ibid.).

This critique leads me to raise the issue of postcolonial thinking and the tendency even into the late 1980s towards a discourse in Irish art criticism that was informed by the postcolonial status of the Irish state. For example, Duddy himself makes oblique references to postcoloniality, noting that 'the idealists, nativists, transcendental regionalists, and informal formalists seem to have decided that Ireland can stand alone culturally' (ibid.). Thus, in an assertion of Irish 'uniqueness' and difference, a highly loaded, postcolonial discourse is still playing out whereby Irish artists are critically lauded for their apparent use of this 'uniqueness' pertaining to being Irish.

In an attempt to provide alternative discourses, Duddy suggests how critics could engage with more practical, materialistic subjects pertaining to globalisation, commodification, capitalism, the art market and such ‘dirty’ concepts that foreground ‘the poignant and often telling relationship between art, money, and life’ (ibid.: 98). Such an approach thus situates the artist socially as a human being who needs to function in capitalist art markets. He concludes by suggesting that a progressive discourse in Irish art criticism ‘acknowledges the distinctive position of Ireland and Irish culture’ but set out ‘to give more than a geographical or quasi-racialistic account of that distinctiveness’ (ibid.: 99).

#### *5.6.2.3 Declan McGonagle - a Critique of Regionalism*

Declan McGonagle’s critique of regionalism discusses geographical factors in art criticism, whilst also exploring issues of postcoloniality in the Irish setting. McGonagle explores the concept of regionalism as implicitly containing ideologies of hierarchy, with the perceived ‘centre’ at the top of the hierarchy, and regions being subordinate to that centre, in deference and acceptance of that power relationship. For McGonagle, acceptance of this model replicates and perpetuates those power dynamics, leading to a significant ‘depoliticisation of art and culture and the removal of social meaning lest the hierarchy is actually challenged’ (Cullen, 1999: 101). His remedy is to critique the ideology of regionalism in favour of locality/localism.

This critique involves challenging the colonial discourses, McGonagle noting that ‘art deserves a future only in as much as it addresses and goes beyond the dominant set of colonial relationships that still apply in terms of class, gender, race in these islands and elsewhere’ (ibid.). For McGonagle, colonisation is only complete when ‘the colonised colonise themselves’ in deference to the colonising entity, thus negating and distorting their own culture. McGonagle cites the Irish leprechaun and Scottish tartan as examples of this self-colonisation that makes the culture somehow ‘safe’ for the coloniser, and local elites. This is the culture of regionalism, whereas for McGonagle, the culture of localism is a more complex process, involving genuine expression through situatedness of the cultural producer. Again, linking this process to colonialism, McGonagle notes that the axis of centre/region has connotations of a sphere being either within or outside the colonised boundaries. For colonisation to work, the

colonising entity needs to devalue that culture which is outside the boundaries, and to 'render it invisible because it is not defined as culture' (ibid.: 103)<sup>80</sup>.

McGonagle thus posits that the agenda of 'localism' to be prioritised in discourses of Irish art, in opposition to the 'regionalism' associated for him with a colonial framing. Whilst this work raises important issues of postcoloniality and how that status is negotiated, I suggest that it nonetheless reveals a preoccupation with region, geography and land in Irish art criticism. The issues around a 'local' Irish identity, a specialness, and authenticity of Irish culture still dominates for this prominent cultural gatekeeper and critic. I suggest that despite discussions of globalisation and debordering, this is inherently a postcolonial issue where Irish cultural gatekeepers are yet concerned with the need to assert 'Irishness' as separate, unique and distinctive.

#### 5.6.2.4 *The Feel-Good Gulag*

I now consider an essay commissioned by the Arts Council, following their 2006 survey into the attitudes of the Irish public regarding art and culture<sup>81</sup>. Following the publication of this report, the Arts Council asked critics and commentators to contribute essays on the theme of the value of the arts. Here I will focus on one key essay where Ian Kilroy traces the function of art in Ireland, its role in society and how art is used in the political sphere.

Kilroy posits that in previous centuries in Irish cultural history, art helped to construct a type of national unity. For Kilroy, this dream of unity emerged in the 20th century with WB Yeats, brother of Jack, the artist, arguing that 'there is no nationality without literature' and that through this ideology, 'Ireland would be dreamed into being' and at the centre of this birth would be the nationally lauded artist (Kilroy, 2007). In contrast to this, nation-building has been replaced in current times by monetary issues. Kilroy notes how the (then) minister for arts and culture, John O'Donoghue proclaimed that

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80 In the case of MOMA in New York, it has colonised the 'universal' and not the 'marginal'. For McGonagle institutions such as MOMA 'empowers the metropolitan and disenfranchises the local' (ibid.).

81 *The Public and the Arts*, Arts Council of Ireland, 2007

‘the importance of cultural identity was never more relevant than now in times of increased globalisation’ (ibid.). Thus, whilst at government level there is a value attached to the arts in terms of our national cultural identity, the value is not placed on the cultural value, but in market value, Kilroy observing that ‘the sub-text here, of course, is that the benefits accrued lie outside the artistic sphere. They are prizes won in the global marketplace. In other words, they further the aim spelt out on the Department of Arts website: that the arts stimulate and help maximise “economic returns and employment”. There is no idea here of intrinsic worth, everything is utilitarian’ (ibid.).

For Kilroy, such state intervention has created an illusion for the artist where they are ‘firmly in bonded service to the grandeur of the state’ (ibid.). This ‘incarceration’ into bonded service, for Kilroy is the feel-good gulag - a cultural and social zeitgeist where ‘its receding colonial history frees it from the first-world guilt that its privileged, pro-American status should otherwise provoke’ (ibid.). Kilroy posits that in this feel-good gulag, ‘criticism and comic caricature are not encouraged’ because as artists ‘we have never had it better’ (ibid.).

Ultimately, for Kilroy, the relationship between art and the state is problematic. He suggests that art can be employed politically to maintain the status-quo<sup>82</sup>, and thus, artists can be courted by politicians in order to ‘be absorbed into the arsenal of power, and simply ignored when it is of no use’. In this respect, state attention in the sphere of art can bring about a devaluation of art due to how the state uses art for its own ends. For Kilroy, the challenge for the 21st century Irish artist is to become a ‘bad citizen - one that speaks his mind lyrically and on his own terms, offering an individual testament in the service of nothing other than the truth of the artistic act itself; and often, ultimately, although ironically, contributing to the health of the democracy in the process’ (ibid.).

Thus, whilst Kilroy’s essay points to tensions regarding culture in the ‘Celtic Tiger’ era of globalisation, it also problematises the issues of being a cultural producer in an era of

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82 For Kilroy, the increase in wealth brought about by Ireland’s economic boom of the 1990s did not lead to a valuing of art for its aesthetic and transformational abilities. For Kilroy, if the boom had encouraged true artistic production, Ireland would be experiencing a ‘Medici-like renaissance’ where the increased wealth would be improving institutions such as our national theatre, and providing a cultural presence in the sprawling suburbs. Kilroy asks where such works of art are, answering that ‘the latter day Medici developing all the new property in the state seem not to be embracing the role’.

late-capitalism, an issue echoed in the previous chapter's problematisation of art within postmodern constructs which, as Jameson argues are bound up with capitalism itself.

#### 5.6.2.5 *Realism and the Unrepresentable*

In this 2010 essay *Words Upon the Windowpane: Image, Text, and Irish Culture*, Luke Gibbons queries why there were no realist artists of the stature of Millet or Courbet in Ireland in the 19th and 20th centuries. For Gibbons, this did not have to do with a creative or technical ability, but that 'the difficulty at the aesthetic level would rather appear to be with the discourse of *realism* itself, with the demand that art hold the mirror faithfully up to nature' (Elkins, 2010: 43). Gibbons explains that French realism had its origins in a dignifying of the poor, whereas the poor in Ireland 'were staring into the abyss, in the midst of the Great Famine<sup>83</sup>, which removed almost half the population' (ibid.).

With this 'unrepresentable' past shadowing artistic production, Gibbons posits that the devastation of the famine was not depicted in any artistic *content*, rather that it expressed itself in artistic *form* which resisted realist depiction. For Gibbons, 'it is only through *disfiguration*, rather than the ordering illusions of mimetic art, that these disturbing areas of experience are rendered intelligible - that is insofar as they make sense at all' (ibid.: 44). This referred to the particularly brutal Cromwellian period of colonisation which for Gibbons, had an 'overt ideology of genocide and expropriation' (ibid.: 45). This ideology caused 'successive shocks and convulsions' in the Irish psyche<sup>84</sup>, which in an artistic context meant that 'the available styles and protocols of painting would have been unable to render the extremes of Irish life' (ibid.). Gibbons draws on the work of Lyotard and his exploration of the Kantian *sublime* to further this point. In Gibbons' words, Lyotard posited that the sublime is 'a liminal form of experience that addresses itself to the "inexpressible" and the "unrepresentable"' (ibid.: 46).

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83 For Gibbons, the Irish famine was too terrible to represent, even 100 years after its occurrence, when no commemoration took place.

84 through the 'Cromwellian atrocities', the 'Williamite Wars', the 'horrific famine of 1740/1741', the 1798 rebellion, the Great famine, land wars, the war of independence and the more recent northern troubles (ibid.)

Thus, by considering Ireland's colonial past, Gibbons asserts not that the Irish *did* not represent their stories visually, but *could* not represent them with the visual tools of the day. This context provides a counter to the work of Barrett, whose suggestion that the preoccupations of Irish artists in the canon were of seascapes and landscapes. Yet, almost a century now since Ireland acquired its postcolonial status, I suggest that issues of postcoloniality and coloniality itself foreground art criticism in Ireland.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

To conclude, this chapter has been intended to situate cultural production through an exploration of cultural identity in the Irish context. It is evident through the study of both Irish and international contemporary scholars that Irish cultural identity is notable by some characteristic dialectics. Both Brown and Gibbons have posited sometimes contrasting and sometimes parallel views on the nature of culture and tradition - both acknowledging the transformative power of culture - but Brown precipitating a questioning of what kind of tradition is transformative. Internationally, postcolonial theory and subaltern studies have contributed to an understanding of Irish cultural identity, the psyche of a colonised state, and the complexities of cultural production in such a context. The complex issues raised include those of representation, selfhood, validity and inferiority amongst colonised peoples, revealing complexities pertaining to the theme within the key questions of 'situatedness' as introduced in chapter 1, whilst also contextualising that situatedness with concepts of a situated, postcolonial culture in which artistic production is undertaken. Thus secondarily, the chapter informs the key themed area of art.

With respect to art criticism in Ireland, the chapter argued through the analysis of selected works of art criticism, that despite its recent move towards a globalised society, Irish art criticism has relied heavily on tropes of postcolonialism. This longitudinal study of selected articles reveals that these tropes are still in existence, and thus foreground art criticism in Ireland. This argument is pertinent to a study of digital art in Ireland, where not only are there tensions between tropes of 'contemporary' and 'new media' art, but where issues of a 'special' postcolonial art are at odds with the aesthetics of digital art.



# **Chapter 6**

## **Methodology**

## **Chapter 6: Methodology**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I outline the methodological approaches undertaken for this research project, including decisions made between qualitative and quantitative research methods, and a justification for applying the chosen methods. As outlined in chapters 1 and 2, significant research has been carried out on innovation in the commercial production of digital media, both in Ireland and abroad. The decision to complement the extant research with a survey of art, including non-commercial cultural production has required a thorough introspection on the most appropriate methods to utilise in this research project. Thus, an initial step was to analyse the use of largely qualitative methods and compare them to a quantitative or mixed approach. The result of this yielded qualitative methods as the most appropriate to use. This was based on an analysis of the methodological issues in cultural studies research, and a problematisation of the limits of quantitative research in the discipline of art.

Keeping awareness always on the key questions as outlined in chapter 1, the next step was to devise the most appropriate qualitative methods to use for this project, which would yield the most fruitful outcomes to an investigation of those questions. I thus devised an approach which would enable an in-depth survey of the attitudes of individual artists and art workers, whilst also offering a breadth of attendant knowledge about the digital art sector, through an ongoing ethnography of the area at both meso and macro levels. This combination of a depth and breadth model is in keeping with the theoretical framework which aspired to a tripartite survey of micro, meso and macro levels of enquiry.

## 6.2 Research Issues

### 6.2.1 *The Limits of Quantitative Research in Art*

The positivist framework associated with quantitative research has many benefits – it helps the researcher make sense of their research output, assists with quantifying frequencies of occurrences, and provides empirical evidence to support their data. As Bertrand and Hughes note, ‘[positivism] has faith in the scientific method, which it sees as leading to the growth of objective and verifiable knowledge (rather than mere superstition and guesswork)’ (Bertrand & Hughes 2005: 9). This framework is thus valuable for delineating texts containing intellectual and academic rigour from poorly researched, speculative work.

Applied to the context of art however, this positivist framework, whilst having benefits also has limitations, especially when it comes to the research agenda noted in chapter 1. As we saw in chapter 4, the discipline of cultural studies has struggled with the notion of the artist as being ‘special’ or different from others, and indeed in certain Marxist and other economic interpretations, art is seen as just another form of labour (Barker 2008: 64). These frameworks are essentially positivist, as they attempt to reduce art or the artist to measurable, quantifiable definitions and entities. This is problematic with a subject matter such as ‘art’, which has defied empirical measurements since the time of Plato<sup>85</sup> as it excludes valuable qualitative information about art, artists and artistic process. Therefore in chapter 4, I posited a hypothesis that the meaning of art can be explored by the value of a qualitative *encounter* between the artistic text and the observer. Such a hypothesis has implications for this research, as it interrogates key questions surrounding how we may understand art and artistic practice in digital media.

As Bertrand and Hughes observe, post-positivism consists of ‘an ontology of critical realism, an epistemology that still seeks knowledge (but admits that verification is not achievable and judges success on Popper’s principles the search for a relative objectivity through the critical community of scholars), and a methodology open to qualitative

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85 In fact, Plato considered artists to be so problematic that ‘on account of their dangerous influence, Plato in *The Republic* (c.375 BC) banned artists and poets from his ideal state’(Kul-Want and Piero 2007: 9)

methods and the grounded theory arising from these' (Bertrand & Hughes 2005: 10). Thus, a post-positivist framework allows for objectivity of the academic discipline, respect for considered intellectual grounding in a subject, whilst also allowing for a *relative* objectivity in keeping with the insights gained from an ongoing ethnography of the sector.

### 6.2.2 Methodological Issues in Cultural Studies

David Morley has critiqued the methodological issues 'which have been of concern within academic media and cultural studies in recent years' (Morley 2006: 88). He suggests that 'it may be that we should look far more attentively than is usual in academic circles to what *literary and artistic practices* can offer us as methodologies for understanding the social and cultural worlds in which we live' (ibid. emphasis added). As a means of affording us some examples of a valuable methodology, he provides the examples of artists Susan Hiller and Krzysztof Wodiczko. He explains that the artists 'both mobilise the devices of fiction and rhetoric as interrogative tools for the understanding of the institutional power structures of the contemporary world' (ibid.). Thus, Morley suggests that the *subjectivity* of the creative practice of both artists, and their artistic devices of fiction and rhetoric are valid processes through which to interrogate complex power dynamics. However, just as a subjective process can contribute to a debate, Morley also suggests that artists can contribute to a *relative objectivity* as providers of intellectual debate around institutional power structures that they investigate and question.

Morley also observes that the value of Susan Hiller's art is in the intellectually challenging nature of her works (ibid.: 89), explaining that her work *After the Freud Museum* helps 'to resituate Freud's work in a broader comparative perspective' (ibid.). This, as Morley points out is a case of 'a conceptual artist using imaginative means to dislodge some of the accumulated "certainties" surrounding one of the central figures of European intellectual history' (ibid.: 90). He further explains that those strategies can be used in a more day-to-day way 'as rhetorical devices for the interrogation of our taken-for-granted assumptions about the social problems of the contemporary world' (ibid.: 91), citing Krzysztof Wodiczko as an example. Wodiczko's work, *Homeless Vehicle*, is an art object consisting of an adapted supermarket trolley with multifunctions for its user

that ‘demands that we acknowledge the existence of the crisis of homelessness, “reflect upon its causes and respond to the question it provokes: if not this, then what do you suggest?”’ (ibid.).

Therefore, an exploration of both the intellectual and the subjective value of art can provide an enhanced methodology for cultural studies researchers, with Morley supplementing this position by analysing how some visual artists have used ethnographic techniques in their work. He observes that in doing this, the artists raise issues ‘of identity and autobiography, the real and the fake, the factual and the fictional and the status of documentary evidence’ (ibid.: 100). Thus, the methodological combination of objectivity and subjectivity that a creative, yet academically grounded artist can provide, can voice broader societal concerns in a non-traditional format which yet allows for peer review and critique.

## 6.3 Techniques for Qualitative Fieldwork Research

### 6.3.1 *Qualitative Methods - Justification For a 'depth' Model*

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) observe a perception within the natural sciences that qualitative research methods are in some way 'unscientific' or lacking in methodological rigour (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994: ix), mainly due to a historical grounding in philosophical paradigms that were largely positivist (ibid.: 3) and which encouraged statistical models aligned with what we know as quantitative research. The authors suggest how qualitative research can hold a somewhat subaltern position, positing that 'as qualitative research is still a minority voice, it needs strong defenders' (ibid.: 2). It is on this basis that they outline their reasons for encouraging researchers to consider qualitative research techniques.

They compare the philosophical positions of qualitative and quantitative research, with the former based on a phenomenological perspective and the latter on a positivist one, arguing that throughout scientific history, the positivist paradigm 'has come to mean objective inquiry based on measurable variables and provable propositions' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994: 3). Thus, 'it is the insistence on explanation, prediction, and proof that are the hallmarks of positivism' (ibid.). For the authors, the human sciences such as psychology and sociology have often looked to the natural sciences such as physics and chemistry for their research methodology. This connection, based on 'a belief in objective observation, quantifiable data and verifiable truths', has held sway in the human sciences as a way of 'doing science' to the exclusion of any 'non-experimental, non-objective ways of doing science' (ibid.: 7).

In contrast, phenomenological research entails 'a focus on understanding the meaning events have for persons being studied' (Patton: 1991). Scholars such as Lincoln and Guba (1995) have argued that 'qualitative research is based on a fundamentally different set of axioms or postulates than is the dominant approach to research, that is, the positivists' position on research' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994: 10). Therefore, qualitative research provides an alternate paradigm to the dominant positivist one.

Lincoln and Guba posit the various postulates of the positivist paradigm and compare

them to the postulates of the alternate phenomenological paradigm. In the positivist paradigm, the world is one entity which can be known by studying its component parts. This contrasts with the phenomenological paradigm, in which multiple socio-psychological realities exist. In the positivist paradigm, there exists the notion of the value-free observer, whereas in the phenomenological paradigm, the researcher and the subject of research are connected and interdependent. Causality is also treated differently amongst the two paradigms. In the positivist one, events are procedural, with one event causing another. In the phenomenological one however, events are seen as mutually constitutive, so instead of a unidirectional chain of events, multidimensional events are possible. The results of research in the positivist paradigm abstract outcomes to generalised rules which can hold for different times and places, whereas in phenomenological research, the results are seen as tentative and specific. The goal of the research is also different between approaches, with the positivist approach seeking the proof of a hypothesis by experimental verification, and, in contrast, the phenomenological approach seeking to discover new postulates<sup>86</sup>.

In the context of this research project then, I suggest that the qualitative approach is more aligned to the ‘depth model’ of analysis as proposed for the research framework described in chapter 1, thus making it a suitable methodological approach for a survey of cultural production. For example, David Silverman suggests that ‘what counts as “detail” tends to vary between qualitative and quantitative researchers’, with qualitative researchers finding ‘detail’ in ‘the precise particulars of such matters as people’s understandings and interactions’ (Silverman, 2005: 9). For this project, where the core agenda concerns an understanding of the sites of innovation, the ‘role’ of art and cultural production and the extent to which digital artistic practices are enabled, the ‘non-positivist’ approach to enquiry is more suited (ibid.). This ‘fit’ of methods have been further happily validated by a note from Steiner Kvale who attested to the mixed qualitative methodologies applied by Theodor Adorno in his study of authoritarian personalities, Adorno using ‘a sophisticated interplay of open qualitative interviews and highly structured questionnaires for producing and validating data’ (Kvale 2007: 46). Thus, this research project, in aligning itself *theoretically* with the Frankfurt School of critical theory, also aligns itself *methodologically* with the approaches of one of its seminal

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86 This, however, has been changing somewhat, and the turn to qualitative research is being partly driven from the scientific community as it is from the human sciences community. To explain further, I briefly divert the reader to the chapter 5 addenda of appendix A, where I interrogate approaches to quantum physics and the theory of relativity, whilst keeping the complicated science to a minimum.

members, Theodor Adorno.

### *6.3.2 Techniques Applied*

Having examined the range of qualitative techniques available for this research project, it was deemed that a combination of qualitative methods was appropriate for the project. These methods consisted of (1) in-depth interviews with digital artists, (2) case studies of selected digital art works and (3) an ethnography of the digital art sector which included gallery visits, workshops and talks.

#### *6.3.2.1 Interviews*

Steinar Kvale (2007) has posited a 7-stage interview process, consisting of thematising, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying and reporting. This framework places the ‘act’ of interviewing within a holistic undertaking where the pre-design of the interview is considered, along with the ‘postproduction’ aspects of transcription and the communication of the interview findings. For this project, this model was adopted for the interview process and is fully outlined in its 7 stages in the appendix.

#### *6.3.2.2 Ethnography*

Ethnographic work involves a contextual observation of a sub-culture or sub-group, or for Silverman, ‘ethnographies are based on observational work in particular settings’ (Silverman, 2005: 49). Based on an anthropological precedent, ‘if one is really to understand a group of people, one must engage in an extended period of observation’ (ibid.). In the context of this research project, ethnographies of selected organisations and institutions were carried out, along with ethnographic participation in the digital art sector through attendance at exhibitions, talks and workshops. Whilst ethnography and ethnomethodological research is not without its complications (Berger, 2000: 145), it provides a ‘real world’ view of the participants in their own everyday life and also concerns itself with ‘actions people undertake in the company of others like



themselves' (ibid.). Thus, in this research project where intersubjectivity at three levels of enquiry is of concern, I suggest that this dimension to the research adds to the understanding of the digital art sector through the 'on the ground' interactions with that sector. For Berger, 'the researcher does not try to interpret the meaning of everyday activities but, rather, to find the rules or codes by which people interpret statements made to them by others, through which they make sense of the world'. Applied to digital media then, the ethnography performed for this research project has not attempted to ascribe meaning to artistic practices or techniques, rather to find the rules and codes at play in the subculture of digital art, including the complex interplay between individuals and institutions, through which digital artists make sense of their *art* world.

This ethnography was practiced by becoming actively involved with a digital art group, DATA, in Dublin. This group mounted regular talks and workshops, those of which I started attending in 2008. My attendance continues up until this time of writing. As an attendee of these talks, my ethnographic practice was to take notes on the content of the talks whilst listening to and observing the interactions and debates that ensued. I refrained from offering my opinions on the material, nor did I critique the subject matter at any time, as I did not wish to be identified as a researcher in digital media, lest the research become a point of distraction for these talks. I also wished to maintain the confidentiality of the work as it was in progress, as several other attendees at the talks were also participants in the research, and to bring about their involvement through my own involvement would also influence the direction of the talks. I thus remained a passive participant, whilst also learning the language, codes, culture and key debates within the digital art subculture. This in turn influenced the foregrounding of certain topics in the following empirical chapters, as this tacit knowledge gained from the ethnography allowed an understanding of the key and critical themes which emerged for digital artists themselves.

### *6.3.2.3 Case Studies*

The combination of interview data and ethnographic immersion in the digital art sector facilitated an understanding of contemporary digital artworks, along with an understanding of digital art organisations and groups in Ireland. This allowed for the

third methodological component of case studies to be brought into the research project. However, as Silverman has observed, performing a case study for the sake of description is ‘a tricky activity which is inevitably theoretically laden’ (Silverman 2005: 127). This is problematised by Silverman as ‘if all you aim to do is simply to ‘describe a case’, you may rightly get the response: ‘so what?’’. Thus, the inclusion of case studies in this research project does not, following from Stake’s identification of three types of case study (2000: 437-8), fall in to the ‘intrinsic case study’ type, where for Silverman, ‘no attempt is made to generalise beyond the single case or even to build theories’ (Silverman 2005: 127). Rather, this research project has included the more theoretically grounded ‘instrumental case study’ type, where ‘a case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to revise a generalisation’ (ibid.). In this project, the cases are included to provide an insight into production aspects of digital art, as in two studies of digital art pieces<sup>87</sup>, into the broader contextualisation of digital art in a macro-level context through a study that deals with media engagement with the arts in general and one that analyses funding issues for a digital art group<sup>88</sup>.

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87 As included in chapter 8 where studies of the digital art pieces *Hard Drivin’* and *Corrupt* are undertaken

88 As included in chapter Chapter 10 where studies of media engagement following the government-led Farmeligh conference, and DATA, a digital art group in Dublin which lost its funding are undertaken

## **6.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have analysed the available research methods available for the study of digital media. The chapter argued, through a problematisation of research issues in art and cultural studies, that for a survey of cultural production, qualitative methods yield more relevant, meaningful results than attempting a positivist interpretation of art and cultural production of digital media. Having justified the decision to employ qualitative methods, the chapter then analysed the qualitative techniques employed, including interviews, ethnography and case study and outlined how these techniques were applied to this research project.

This chapter concludes the theoretical and methodological aspect of the thesis. In the next five chapters, I move to analyse the empirical aspects of the research, starting with an overview of the initial research findings in chapter 7, and three themed chapters that emerged from the empirical work in chapters 8-10.

# **Chapter 7**

## **Summary of Research Findings**

## **Chapter 7: Summary of Research Findings**

### **7.1 Introduction: Key Themes From Empirical Research**

In this chapter, I introduce key findings from the empirical dimension of the research. In chapter 1, I suggested that a clear-cut delineation of these levels exists mainly hypothetically, and how in practice such levels are synergistic, overlapping and mutually constitutive. Nonetheless, in chapter 8 I focus mainly on concerns at the micro level of enquiry, where artists have discussed their challenges and opportunities with respect to a digital practice. This chapter is influenced by elements of chapter 4, where I outlined some major characteristics of digital art, or a digital aesthetic. These characteristics are further expanded upon in chapter 8, through the micro-level accounts. In chapter 9 I broaden this focus to speak with workers at an institutional level, examining their meso-level interactions with artists at the micro level and also state bodies at the macro level. Chapter 10 discusses macro-level factors pertaining to digital art such as political and economic challenges within a broader cultural air of ‘crisis’.

As we saw in chapter 1, the key questions for this thesis centre around how artists interact with ICTs to produce cultural artefacts in Ireland. In positing these questions, broad concerns of ‘situatedness’ permeated the enquiry and the theoretical framework, driving the enquiry towards situating digital technologies as embedded in social, political, cultural, technological and economic concerns. Chapter 2 interrogated these issues of technological situatedness through an analysis of theories of the technological and societal relationship, arguing that technologies, while they have a place in influencing a broader societal context, can not be seen as ‘determining’ society, without considering how they are also ‘determined’ by social and political factors. This framing of technology as socially-situated has mapped to chapter 8 where I investigate the role of technology in digital art practice and artists attitudes to digital technologies, whilst also considering digital aesthetics, collaborative practices and an open-source ethos that underpins much of the use of technology.

Chapters 3 and 4 investigated major theories of cultural production and the role of art. In chapter 3, it was argued that cultural production could not be seen as outside political

and economic concerns, but cultural production was again ‘situated’ within these influences. Chapter 4 identified weaknesses in postmodern influence on cultural studies in its positioning of ‘art’ as ‘just another form of labour’. These threads are brought to chapter 9 where I investigate concepts of ‘art’ and digital art with actors at the meso-institutional level, whilst also analysing reactions at the micro level to institutional positions on digital art, its role and its validity as an art practice, and the extent to which artists are supported and enabled in their digital practice. Again, in situating the place of technology at this meso level, I examine issues of collection, acquisition and archival of digital works that emerge for meso-level actors. This is to aim at a balance that veers away from fetishising technology, whilst also acknowledging that for actors at this meso level, technology causes material challenges in their work as gatekeepers.

Chapter 5 incorporated a theme of a cultural situatedness in a postcolonial state. The chapter revealed how contemporary art criticism in Ireland often referenced the state’s postcoloniality. This theme is mapped to chapter 10 where the ‘cultural air’ at a time of political, and economic crisis is considered. Also influencing this chapter is again matter from chapter 3, where the role of the state was foregrounded in the production of culture.

### *7.1.1 A Spectrum Hypothesis*

As outlined in chapter 1, the approach informing this thesis engages with the place of technology in art practice, without leaning towards a techno-centric account. During the empirical process where interviewees were asked about the role of ICTs in their art practice, a conceptual ‘spectrum’ emerged. I have found this spectrum to range from what are considered as the most ‘traditional’ and well-established of practices - those involving video art - to those practices seen as highly conceptual, radical or experimental, such as net art, augmented reality and physical computing. For example, during the ethnography of the digital art sector, I encountered an installation of the work of video artist Clemens Von Wedemeier that for the curator was ‘digital’ as it had been transferred to Blu-Ray from 35mm. I suggest that this example was at the ‘traditional’ end of the conceptual spectrum of the role of ICTs in digital art as here, digital technologies functioned as a transferral tool. At the other end of the spectrum, I encountered works that fed networked information oftentimes from remote systems, into

self-authored programs that reconfigured this information. In one instance data was acquired from real-time information from a shipping buoy off Hawaii, into a computer program that then, using physical computing, would move a spirit level according to the intensity of movement of the buoy. The combination of using networked, remote information, and ‘parsing’ it into a moving sculptural piece using programmed physical interfaces was considered as belonging to the end of the conceptual spectrum where highly experimental practices were encountered.

Whilst it could be argued that the spectrum could incorporate ideas of ‘no role’ for ICTs in art, I suggest that this may not be so clear-cut. In the context of my review of the arguments by Lister et al., Lovejoy, Bourriaud, Lunenfeld and Quaranta outlined in chapter 4 relating to digital, new media and electronic art, it is well established and accepted that a ‘no role for ICTs in art’ position is already well discussed.

I also found that this spectrum concept could be mapped to two other concerns - institutional acceptance and the range, status or role of technology as tool or medium. When the spectrum concept was mapped to these areas, certain correlations between the type of practice, institutional acceptance and successful funding became apparent. For example, at the ‘traditional’ end of the spectrum, artists working mainly through video art saw the technologies in their practice as ‘tools’. These artists also largely felt a high level of institutional acceptance from galleries. In the main, they also reported more favourable application results from funding bodies. The art institutions themselves also showed a high level of acceptance of these practices, and generally when asked about the topic of digital art, or art and technology, tended to default to speaking about video art. Such findings imply that video art (and not for example net art, augmented reality or physical computing) was the accepted type of practice associated with the term ‘digital art’. I thus suggest that the spectrum concept can be considered with regard to the range of institutional acceptance encountered by digital artists.

At the other, ‘experimental’ end of the spectrum however, the practitioners themselves were more inclined to discuss the use of technology as more than a ‘tool’. There was acceptance of a ‘digital aesthetic’, a digital art medium, and even reference to electronic and digital art as moving beyond a medium and towards a ‘meta-medium’. At the institutional level however, there was a reluctance to consider these works as art, with one participant from a Dublin city centre arts institution observing that in her opinion a

digital practice is ‘not art, it’s craft’. The artists engaging in these more experimental practices also frequently cited funding as a negative issue for them, with many participants feeling that funding channels were largely unavailable to them. Therefore, I suggest that the spectrum concept also applies to the range of accounts that emerged regarding recognition and acceptance for funding. I outline the conceptual spectrum below in figure 7.1.

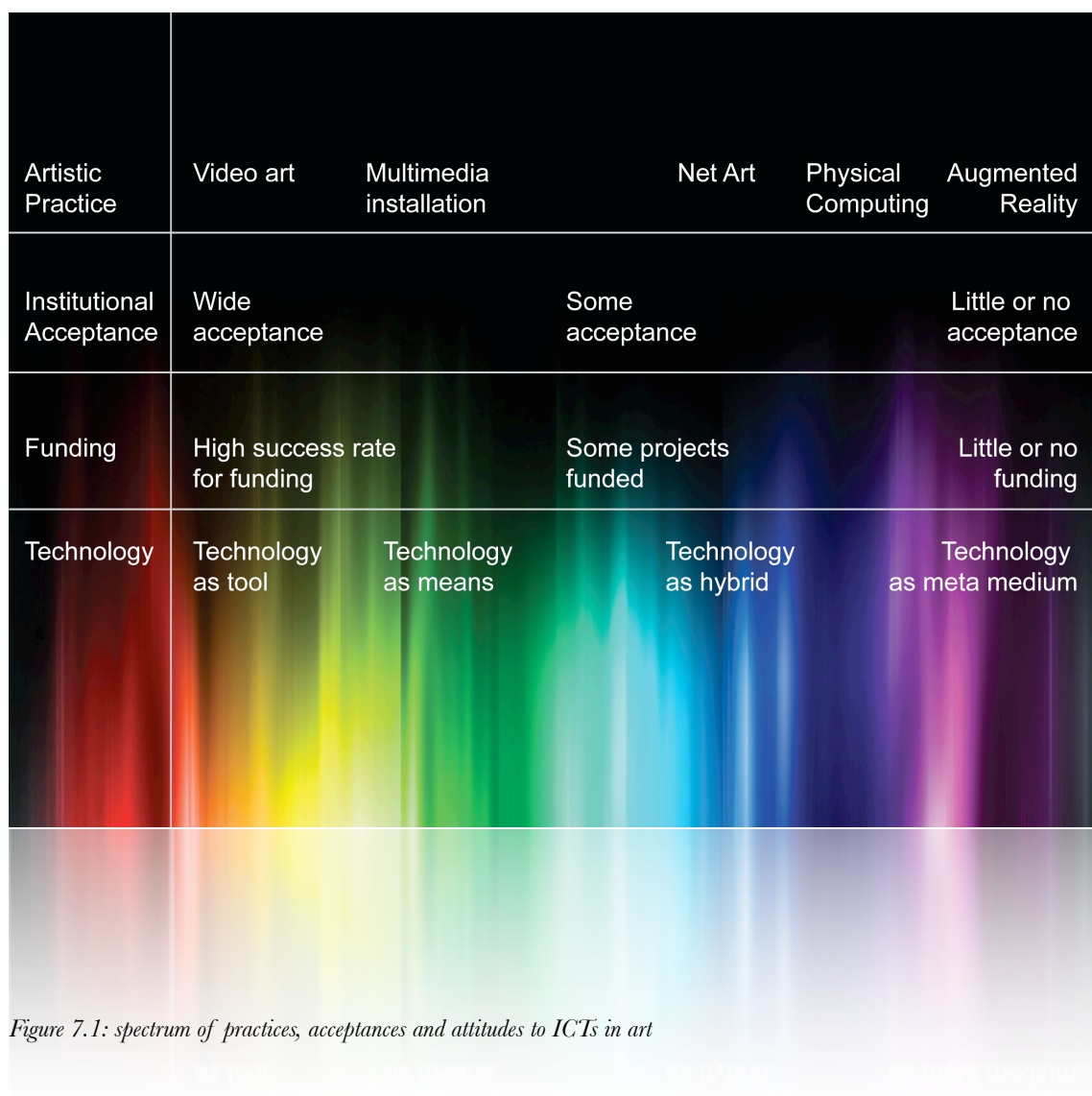


Figure 7.1: spectrum of practices, acceptances and attitudes to ICTs in art

Whilst the elements of this spectrum - artistic practice, institutional acceptance, funding and use of technology - overlap in practice, in the figure above they are disaggregated for clear identification of the ranges of values, opinions and accounts that were encountered in the empirical research. For example, from the chart above, it becomes



clear that video art could be described as along the ‘traditional’ end of the conceptual spectrum, video practitioners tend to see technology as a tool, they report high levels of acceptance from institutional gatekeepers and they report high success rates for funding.

I suggest that this spectrum of practices, attitudes, supports and challenges exists at the micro, meso and macro levels of enquiry. This conceptual ‘spectrum’ therefore continues in chapters 8, 9 and 10 as complex issues of use of technologies, support and enablement of digital practices are analysed in a ‘depth’ model of micro, meso and macro levels, along with the ‘breadth’ model that the spectrum hypothesis adds to the overall framework.

## 7.2 Overview of Key Findings

### 7.2.1 Chapter 8 Findings

In chapter 8 I employ the spectrum hypothesis to analyse the use of ICTs in art from a micro-level perspective. I analyse artist attitudes to the use of ICTs through ethnographic interviews with art practitioners who range from digital video artists utilising now well-established digital devices, to artists who employ emergent digital means in their practice. The findings from applying this hypothesis revealed how artists who used the more well-established devices such as digital video recorders and computer video editing suites were mostly more inclined to see these technologies as ‘tools’ for their work. At the other end of this spectrum, the artists who worked with emergent technologies such as augmented reality and emergent open-source hardware and software were more inclined to situate ICTs as an artistic ‘medium’. This finding relates back to the key question pertaining to the role of technologies as tool or medium for artists, revealing that the ‘answer’ to this key question lies not in an either/or delineation, but in gradations of use and contextualisation by artists. This analysis also revealed attitudes to technological determinism across the spectrum, revealing how some artists prefer to think of technology as a ‘tool’ as to not be determined by it, whilst other artists heavily use technology in an anti-determinist critique of it. In this analysis, I deploy certain concepts from the literature review and chapter 2 to provide a reflection on the key question of the place of ICTs in art.

Chapter 8 is also engaged in an analysis of the digital aesthetic and its links with innovation, providing an insight into the set of key questions that pertain to conceptualisations of aesthetic dimensions to digital art, along with the key question that asks how artists use ICTs to innovate. This chapter reveals a major finding regarding the aesthetic specificities or ‘features’ of digital art practice that are (1) specifically collaborative, (2) open-source and (3) repurposing. The chapter also finds that these aspects function also as sites of innovation for digital art practitioners. These specificities however are complemented by linking up with themes from chapter 4, where art was discussed as both a social form of capital and a site of potential ‘encounter’ and transformation. I thus argue how art, irrespective of medium has the

potential to provide political critique and ‘encounter’, in a move that veers from fetishising the specificities of digital art.

### *7.2.2 Chapter 9 Findings*

In chapter 9 I reveal findings from the primary research as to how digital artists are supported and enabled by institutional gatekeeping structures. This chapter engages with the key questions on the theme of art, this time with how digital art is produced and represented in Ireland. It also reprises the theme of situatedness, with consideration given to how digital artists are situated within a broader culturally-loaded art world and are subject to assessment, evaluation and critique from within that world. The chapter reveals a perception of under-representation and lack of acceptance of digital art practices within the wider art world by digital artists. The chapter also finds that a certain ‘situatedness’ applies to institutional gatekeepers, and that they are placed within an art world that can find issues of categorisation by medium or material, conceptually problematic. This expands on concepts of digital art as introduced by Quaranta and Bourriaud in chapter 4.

A primary finding in this chapter reveals that this nexus of situatedness can prevent digital art from a sympathetic assessment at meso level due to this position in contemporary art discourses. This furthers the critique of Quaranta’s work by observing how the negative ‘fetishisation’ or positioning of digital art within the contemporary art world first needs to be transcended before a ‘postmedia’ discussion can occur. The section also produces a finding on concepts of postcoloniality in Irish art critique, positing a second scenario for the rejection of digital art at meso-level. This finding reveals that Irish art criticism is still entrenched in romantic postcolonial notions of ‘specialness’ of Irish art. Digital art challenges those notions and is therefore marginalised.

One main finding from this chapter finds that at an institutional level, conceptual and practical issues pertaining to digital art emerge that can prevent its acceptance at this institutional level. They are (1) issues of context, categorisation and affiliation, (2) suspicion about where the artwork ‘resides’ if heavy technology use is employed and (3)

that digital art often interrogates and can undermine the role of the institution or museum by not requiring it for display and exhibition.

The chapter also finds that in the face of the perceived lack of acceptance or gallery representation, digital artists adopt strategies and attitudes that involve (1) disengaging from the 'traditional' contemporary art world, (2) detaching from support systems and (3) proactively looking to institutions, festivals and exhibitions abroad for representation and support.

### *7.2.3 Chapter 10 Findings*

Chapter 10 addresses the set of key questions pertaining to art practices and their situatedness within a macro-level political and economic domain. When I began this research in January 2008, there were mere rumblings in Ireland of impending financial instability, with discourses of the decline of the property industry couched in a discourse of 'soft landings' in the sector. The Irish citizenry was also still being reassured by our then political leader that the economy was sound, and how those economists and commentators who were in critique of the financial policies and unfettered expansion of the property and banking sectors were 'sitting on the sidelines, cribbing and moaning' about it. Bertie Ahern, in the same speech to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions mused how 'I don't know how people who engage in that don't commit suicide'<sup>89</sup>, a statement for which he later had to retract and apologise for. This discourse continued well into 2009, when even after the anything-but-soft landing in the property market had become a full-blown economic crisis, Ahern suggested in an interview that critics of the then government should 'dig the garden or grow bluebells or do something useful'<sup>90</sup> rather than be critical of the economic policies and regulations.

I include this short political vignette to foreground my methodological decision to highlight the temporal dimension of 'crisis' into the research. Drawing on influences from the Frankfurt School, as analysed in chapter 3, where the work of art was not treated in isolation from its environment, nor was the artist, I considered that the steep

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89 Source: RTÉ News and online content at <http://www.rte.ie/news/2007/0704/economy.html> retrieved April 27th 2011

90 Source: The Irish Times, November 30, 2009

and sudden decline of the Irish economy would not be isolated to financial or property matters. With this in mind, a main finding of chapter 10 reveals that historically, the arts have been foregrounded in Ireland, and argues that the ‘turn to culture’ in the current crisis is not without historical precedent. The chapter also finds evidence of a current trope that situates the arts as ‘rescuer’ to the problems facing the Irish economy. These findings were from evidence in short case studies of (1) a historical political engagement with the arts, (2) a think-tank set up when the current crisis emerged, and (3) a short study of media foregrounding of the arts.

The chapter also finds that in two major funding bodies in Ireland, the Arts Council does not appear ‘open’ to digital artists, whereas Culture Ireland plays a more supportive and enabling role for the digital art sector.

### **7.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined some key findings from the empirical research conducted for this study of innovation in digital media. It posited a 'spectrum' hypothesis through which gradations of use, support and gatekeeping of digital technologies within the artistic sector could be contextualised. The chapter also outlined how the review of literature in chapters 2-5 traced the key questions through to the empirical work. The next three chapters address the three key themes from the research, starting in chapter 8 with an analysis of ICTs in art as tool or medium, and the digital aesthetic with respect to sites of innovation.

# **Chapter 8**

## **ICTs and the Digital Aesthetic**

## Chapter 8: ICTs and the Digital Aesthetic

### 8.1 Introduction: A Usage Spectrum

In chapter 7 I suggested a ‘spectrum’ hypothesis to indicate some headline findings concerning the usage of ICTs in the artistic sector. This was in response to the set of key questions in chapter 1 pertaining to the technology/society relationship, and its application within the artistic sector. These debates in the research literature situated technology as alternating between ‘determining’ in some cases, but also ‘determined’ by social context. Thus in the art world, technology can function not only as a ‘tool’ but also as ‘medium’ which can be either a McLuhanite ‘determining’ medium, or a fluid one that is shaped by users. This chapter therefore aims to situate the arguments analysed in chapter 2 to the empirical research findings.

I am aware that the conceptualisation of a spectrum is contextual and that for some art theorists, the basis of the spectrum, which delineates partly by ‘medium’ is a site of ambivalence<sup>91</sup>. This underpins Quaranta’s framework as discussed in chapter 4, in outlining the need for a conceptual frame which unifies the opposing views of the contemporary and new media art worlds. Thus, whilst there may be a move in contemporary art towards a discussion of a ‘post-medium’ condition, I nonetheless argue that my categorisation applies pertinently to digital art, as digital art has not yet been incorporated into contemporary art discourses, but exists closer to media art. I argue that if digital or electronic artists have a desire to be termed as such, this desire points to a conceptual difference in aesthetic, in motivation and in the creative output alike that needs to be understood outside contemporary art discourses. Therefore, a second aim of this chapter is to investigate this spectrum of digital practices, or practices involving the use of technology, that I suggest artists not only engage in, but also innovate through.

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91 For example, I spoke with the writer and researcher Maeve Connolly who observed that ‘if you were talking to a lot of people in art education at the moment, or a lot of art practitioners, the idea of any kind of categorisation that relates to medium is problematic’. She explained how in the contemporary art world ‘people perceive those kind of labels as ghettoising’, and unhelpful insofar as it creates a barrier to the understanding of their work. Connolly did concede that there exists a group of artists for whom the particularity of the medium they use is central to their work. She suggested that these artists may ‘have ideological or political commitment to the idea of some of the values that are represented by networking, in the technological sense’, and that these artists may point to the particularity of their practice ‘by saying they are a digital media artist’.



The chapter thus interrogates the place of technologies as tools in art. It then examines whether and how ICTs are viewed as more than a tool in certain art practices. There then follows three sections outlining three specificities of digital media art practices that are afforded by new ICTs, which I suggest also can be understood in the context of sites of innovation, as analysed in chapter 2. Thus, this chapter, through engaging with the key questions around technology and its societal relationship also engages with elements of the debates concerning the use of ICTs for innovation in art.

## 8.2 ICTs as Tools in Art

### 8.2.1 Introduction

I start my analysis at the end of the spectrum where artists consider technology as a *tool* in their art practice. As introduced in chapter 7, these artists mostly comprise practitioners in the field of video art, although there was one artist working with more experimental practices who shared this view. In the interviews, the participants were asked what they considered to be the role of digital technologies in their work. In this section, I outline the opinions of those artists who considered the digital technologies as tools, and not an outright medium. This is in order to expand on the debates on the technology/society relationship as analysed in chapter 2.

### 8.2.2 *An Arsenal of Technology, A Tool, Means*

The video artist Jesse Jones expressed some concerns regarding the use of digital technologies. For Jones, a concern in her practice is that she ‘wouldn’t want to fetishise one medium over another, like analog or digital’. This informant prefers to think of her practice as involving an ‘armoury, or arsenal of technology’, and the role of that technology being ‘about how you extend your means of production into the world’. Jones related how technology fitted in to her overall practice, observing that ‘I really feel that it’s about how you taper technology to suit your practice and your thought process, and I think in a lot of ways, for me the technology is totally secondary to the ideas that go into the work’. Thus, for Jones, digital technologies are firmly on the end of the spectrum where they are tools of production. Jones engages with ICTs on a case-by-case basis, and fits appropriate use of technology into her artistic oeuvre in a pragmatic way.

The video artist Gerard Byrne expressed similar views to Jones in that he prefers to think of the technologies as a ‘means’. He observed how ‘these matters’, regarding the place of technology as a tool or medium, ‘are resolved at the moment of dissemination’, suggesting that the artwork is assessed at the moment of its reception by an audience, gatekeeper or taste maker, and at that point it becomes moot as to what means were

employed to get to that point<sup>92</sup>. Byrne's background involved working with 'a group of practitioners who work with technology and at the same time are ambivalent about the positivist rhetoric that surrounds technology'. This influence has caused him to reflect on his use of lens-based technologies, positing how 'you somehow have to take on board the implications of the proliferation of that type of imagery in the contemporary world'<sup>93</sup>. Thus, in a contemporary setting where audiences are familiar with imaging technologies, the artist has to work to transcend the aesthetic tropes of those technologies to produce a considered work.

Jaki Irvine agrees, noting how 'some things are still more appropriate in one form rather than another'. However, Irvine points to another point of concern regarding the choice of tools used for dissemination in that there is potential for 'a fetishism of the actual machinery' of older technologies such as slide projectors and 16mm film. However the fetishism Irvine acknowledges for older technologies also applies to newer technologies, and is, I suggest, one of the 'implications' that Byrne referred to.

A concurrent account emerged from the other end of the spectrum however, revealing how such a conceptual frame of usage can not be applied rigidly. This participant's (who wished not to be named) art practice explores physical computing, but expresses a

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92 Nonetheless, I felt that the means available to Byrne could potentially affect the type of work he could produce. Thus, a question to him was how those 'means' have influenced the artistic practice, even if those means became moot at that moment of reception by an audience. Byrne answered by citing an example of his work - a photographic project entitled *A Country Road, A Tree, Evening*. Byrne explained that the photos were shot in the analogue medium of film photography. At one point in the project, Byrne felt that this might be a significant factor for the work, but concluded that he 'wasn't going to make the project hinge around that', because the project was about a situation, and not about 'crafting photographic imagery into a look, which Photoshop seemingly makes readily available'. Byrne explained that he had been aware that the project could have proceeded in the trajectory of using Photoshop to craft a highly manipulated image. However, Byrne's wish for the project was to photograph a situation that for him was 'visually contradictory'. This desire brought about the decision to shoot the photographs in the analogue medium. This, for Byrne, reflected the visual contradiction of the work, in this instance a high-contrast image crafted to point to an assumption that the work was produced digitally. Therefore, whilst giving consideration to the digital aesthetic and how that aesthetic could be employed in a contradictory way, Byrne did not want the project to 'hinge' around the means of production, lest it become like 'bad digital art where somehow the means is the point'.

93 To illuminate this point, Byrne cited the example of his recent work *A Thing is a Hole in a Thing it is Not* where most of the participants were non-actors. Byrne found that these participants were nonetheless quite comfortable with being filmed, and he suggested this was due to their increasing familiarity with the lens in their everyday life. An implication for Byrne was that as an artist, 'you can't work with those means of production without having to negotiate the literacy of your audience'. For Byrne, that is the most important 'effect' of digital technologies in terms of his practice - there exists an audience who is familiar and comfortable with lens based media, and therefore the type of encounter with that media needs to be taken account of when producing a work. This elucidates how, for Byrne, consideration to the reception of the work is of concern, superseding the place of the technologies used in production, whilst also being somewhat involved in a balancing act of awareness of the proliferation of such technologies at an audience level.

view more in line with the video artists. When this participant was asked about the role of technology in allowing her artistic message to be expressed, she explains how the technology is 'just a medium that I'm comfortable with' and while technology can facilitate the creation of such works, 'I don't know if you need technology for that to happen. There are a lot of socially engaged artists that don't use technology at all'. For this artist the digital technologies that she employs - much like the accounts of the video artists examined above - are considered a means of production, and highly dependent on the context of use, and the appropriateness of when they are deployed.

I suggest that these accounts point to technology usage for some digital artists as a tool. Byrne, Irvine and Jones, all video artists, suggest that the tools of their production are digital, whilst also suggesting that they are *only* tools. In the context of the material explored in chapter 2 where it was argued that technology can *appear* to determine a 'message', I suggest that these artists are seeking to distance themselves from a state of being determined, through the framing of technology as 'tool' to be used, controlled and be in charge of. This stance, whilst an anti-determinist one implies that to heavily use technology in an art practice is to be determined by it, in what may be indicative of a fear of the work being labelled or defined by others' attitudes towards the technology. However, other artists present themselves as 'digital' artists and largely see technology as an integral part of their practice, viewing ICTs as a *medium*, whilst also exhibiting a similar stance against being determined by the technology.

## 8.3 A Digital Aesthetic

### 8.3.1 Introduction

The research elicited the views of a cohort of artists who ideologically situate themselves as ‘digital’ artists. These artists were more likely to attest to the specificities of digital and electronic art and a digital aesthetic. In this section I examine what these participants reveal about their practice, along with suggestions as to how the dimensions and parameters of digital art differ from other arts practices. This account therefore interrogates issues of a ‘specific’ digital aesthetic resulting from the features or characteristics of digital art. I suggest, drawing from themes reviewed in chapter 4, that digital art objects display three specificities in aesthetic form, which are the result of (1) their object characteristics, (2) where the artwork resides and (3) the technical complexity of digital art, as identified in chapter 4. I also suggest that there exist three sites of innovation in digital art that are related to their specificities in aesthetic form. The three aesthetic specificities can be identified as (1) that digital art is collaborative, (2) that digital art practices align themselves with the Open Source and Creative Commons movements and that (3) digital art practices are often concerned with the reconfiguring of existent materials - both physical objects and information datasets. First however, I address the argument posited in the previous section regarding a link between heavy technology use and a question around such use, positing that the use of technology in digital art does not necessarily correlate with the art or artist being determined by technology.

### 8.3.2 *Digitally Determined, or Aesthetic Critique of Technology?*

In the empirical research process, I encountered a set of digital art practitioners who analysed complexities and specificities pertaining to the material quality, the subject matter and the intent of their work. Quite often, the artists use technology to critique technology, but unlike the artists above who see technology as a tool, some of these artists employ media ‘to question itself, rather than merely to use it as a tool to make an artefact’, as Jonah Brucker-Cohen, posits. For Brucker-Cohen, the use of technology in this way facilitates a critique of a larger zeitgeist. ‘My work questions technology and

networks by providing a critical perspective on how networks are used and experienced in both public and private locations’ explains Brucker-Cohen, adding that his work ‘focuses on challenging what digital media is capable of and the rules of these communications platforms that it enables’. In this case of this artist, the technology is employed not as a tool for production, but in its own right as a medium to be critiqued through itself.

Likewise, Benjamin Gaulon outlines how much of his work ‘is about a critical view on technology, the idea of exposing planned obsolescence, issues relating to e-waste and environmental issues, but also the limit of technology and the failure of technology’. Thus if adopting a critical stance towards technology, the artist must be familiar with it. ‘There is this thing about being critical towards technology’ Gaulon observes, ‘but at the same time I believe that you can only be critical by knowing more about it’. This suggests that, as Brucker-Cohen posited, the use of technology to critique technology involves more than the use of technological *tools*. For these digital artists, their critique is of the *medium* of technology. For Gaulon ‘it’s not just a medium - of course when you talk about computers it’s more than just a medium, cos it’s a meta medium, or it’s more than just a tool’. In its specific nature as a medium, a computer is ‘a medium for diffusion’ but that also, within that medium ‘you can reconfigure information - the fact that it’s all this binary, that means you can reprogram any type of information [...] but the fact that you can literally access any information to a lower level and to binary, brings another level of communication, in the sense that you can reprogram that medium’. Thus, an artistic critique of computer technology as medium reveals the underlying logic of the medium, the inconsistencies of the medium and the limits of that medium.

Cliona Harmey also attests to specificities of working digitally, revealing that ‘I think it has really particular ways of working that is very different to other art mediums’. When asking her to explain how working as a digital artist differed to, say her background as a sculptor, she suggests that a major difference is ‘the method of working. You have to pre-programme stuff so you have to pre-think things in a way that say maybe a painter

wouldn't, where you can work very spontaneously'<sup>94</sup>. She also suggests that using technology in an art practice is also a challenge for an artist, noting that 'it takes a while to internalise it and to use it in a meaningful way'.

However, Harmey's practice is also concerned with 'sometimes rejecting technology or using very low end technologies'. Her reason for doing this is again, as a critique of technology:

"that's what is important, that people look critically at technology, and that you're not totally seduced by it, because it's totally powerful, it's amazing. But at the same time I think there's that thing, I would think that it's an artists job if they're working with technology to think a little bit critically about it as well"

A reconciliation of the tensions between using technology critically and yet appropriately has been for Harmey to return to a sculptural practice that incorporates technological elements. Harmey suggests a materiality to technology, just as there is a materiality to the more traditional sculptural mediums, noting that 'in some way it's the joy of working with materials, and the very particular material that technology is'. Thus for Harmey, technology is a medium *and* a material.

I therefore suggest that these accounts reveal how unlike the cohort of artists who see technology as a tool, wishing not to be determined by it, these artists working heavily with technology as a medium do so also in an anti-determinist stance. Thus, these artists use technology not in a fetishistic celebration of it and its McLuhanite 'effects', but because they wish to critique it through a deeper understanding of its uses, effects and limitations. Therefore, certain views of the contemporary art world, as outlined in chapter 4 erroneously 'read' digital art as a celebration of technology (Lovejoy, 2004), when its heavy use in an artistic context can often be a strong move against being

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94 Harmey outlined her work *Dublin Port* as an example of this. She recounted that 'in the Dublin Port piece, I started the programming myself but I got to the stage where it was going to take me months and whether I would get it to work. So I got Brian Solan to program the back end for me, and then I just did the front end. What's interesting for me about that piece is that it takes real time information but it displays it very slowly, so it displays it almost at the speed of the ships coming in. In one way I was looking at it as a type of flag as well. I'm really interested in signals and different systems of transmission, but what has happened this year is that I've been making things that are deliberately slow, to almost be a bit resistant to real time'. Online documentation of the work: <http://www.clionaharmey.info/pix/pix2.htm>

determined by it. I therefore also suggest that this critique of technology functions as a form of user-based innovation in what was outlined in chapter 2 as a parallel function for traditionally understood R&D functions. By investigating technology at a level above that of a consumer or user, the digital artist can be understood to be ‘researching’ the technology, finding novel uses for it, and thus innovating through it.



## 8.4 Innovation Through Collaboration

### 8.4.1 Introduction

Earlier, I introduced three specificities of digital and electronic art that I suggested also functioned as distinctive sites of innovation. In the following three sections, I analyse what emerged during the empirical research with respect to these three dimensions. In this section I examine how many of the participants attested to the collaborative aspect of digital art, revealing how innovation in digital art often occurs collaboratively in line with those theories of innovation that suggest how in the digital media content sector, innovation occurs through the absorption and acquisition of multiple or various forms of knowledge, including tacit skills.

One ethnographic example of this collaboration occurred in September 2010 when I participated in a workshop run in conjunction with the TWEAK digital art festival in Limerick. For this workshop, participants were invited to suggest proposals for a collaborative project. I submitted a proposal for an artwork entitled *Zen Pool*, outlining the hardware and software requirements for the project, along with a project timeline and conceptual overview. However, through funding cuts, the workshop was cut short and the project could only be realised in prototype format.

Nonetheless, the project prototype was exhibited at the festival, revealing how it is not necessary to have had a final version of the work ready for the exhibition. One informant, Ivan Twohig commented on this, as he was present at that exhibition (before we had been acquainted through the interview process) and recalls having interacted with the piece. Twohig commented how ‘I’ve done a few things based around the idea of the prototype, and that’s definitely something that’s very much accepted in say, [...] this 80%, 90% internet-based community that is maybe 10% exhibition’. For Twohig the digital art sector is often based on peer-review and collaboration, noting how ‘your audience is your peers and it’s much more community based’. I thus argue that community ethos is a strong feature of digital art practices, and through that community dimension the crucial ‘testing’ of ideas (or innovations) occurs, as seen in the example above, where feedback and peer-review assist in the creative process of developing the

artwork. Through a case-study in the following section I outline how the digital artist and the artwork itself benefits from collaborative practices.

#### *8.4.2 Hard Drivin': A Case-Study in Collaboration*

During the course of the ethnography of the digital art sector and subsequent interviews with both Gaulon and Twohig, I became familiar with one of their collaborative works, and thus I present it as a short case study to expand on the subject of collaboration. I follow this with some perspectives from other artists about the collaborative nature of their work, and their desires to encourage and facilitate collaborative practices.

*Hard Drivin'* (see figure 8.1) by Gaulon, Twohig and Solon consists of a Twitter-controlled installation comprising a 3D physical terrain and two remote controlled toy cars. The 3D polygonal modelling was created by Ivan Twohig, the remote controlled cars were 'hardware hacked' - or repurposed<sup>95</sup> for control through a computer - by Benjamin Gaulon, and Brian Solon provided programming assistance with the Twitter interface. For Gaulon, '*Hard Drivin'* is also an example of collaboration', the informant continuing that 'it's very crucial thing about working with other people, especially when you're starting to deal with more complex projects - you definitely need a team. Well you could do everything by yourself but I think it brings things to another level when you work together', suggesting that the innovative potential for the work is higher in a collaborative environment.

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<sup>95</sup> See section 8.6



*Figure 8.1: Installation of 'Hard Drivin' at Tweak Exhibition, September 2010*

Thus, for Gaulon 'Hard Drivin' was really about collaboration first'. Twohig's work with 3D polygonal sculptures drew Gaulon's attention to possibilities of creating a physical environment in which the cars would run. Gaulon was aware of this innovative potential of a collaboration, his primary motivation being to engage in a collaborative project that would complement both artists' skills. The genesis of the project was thus from a desire to collaborate with Twohig and his 3D sculptural works, combining those skills with his own physical computing and hardware hacking proficiencies, to make a more proficient work:

“we thought how can we make it that it's not just a game where you have remote control cars, but there's more to it? And then the idea of Twitter came, and then I got quickly stuck with that, and Brian came along to input a lot of ideas on how it could work in terms of the car following people, and that you have a command line that you can make the car follow somebody's reprints, so he really

brought a lot of input to that. So it was a really good mix that ties all of our practice together in one project”

From this account, it is evident that collaboration was Gaulon’s primary motivation for working with Twohig, as it increased the innovative potential of the work.

Twohig’s account suggests similar benefits to the collaboration. He observes how as an artist, the assortment of technologies available to him could be overwhelming. However, when an artist engages with other artists with complementary skillsets, a project can seem more achievable:

“because we’re surrounded by technology that we don’t understand, you can have an idea for something relatively simple, whereby an action involves a reaction, or you want to control some sort of something, but getting something like that to happen is ... there’s so many different people involved in making that happen”

This suggests that for Twohig, the frustrations around employing technology in an artistic practice could be somewhat offset through collaboration where skillsets complement each other, allowing for greater innovation in the works. Twohig attests to the creative benefits of working in artist collectives, suggesting that ‘there’s a lot of creativity in the teams, like small groups of media artists like Troika<sup>96</sup> and people who do these massive projects because they see themselves as a studio’. Thus, the establishment of a permanent collaborative working environment is important to Twohig, as it provides a baseline level of interaction with other artists, whilst also increasing the innovative and creative potential on a per-project basis.

The accounts of the two artists therefore reveal how the potential of the work is increased through a collaboration that pools both their skillsets to advance the work further. I thus argue that the collaborative environment, whilst more fluid and project-based than a traditional R&D department, functions as a site of innovation, where

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96 Troika is a London-based collective of three artists, Eva Rucki, Conny Freyer and Sebastien Noel whose practice merges digital and experimental art. They have also published a number of books and texts on digital art and design SEE: <http://troika.uk.com/>

acquired tacit programming, artistic and electronics skills are pooled in order to develop the artwork further than if one of the artists had attempted the project alone.

#### *8.4.3 Collaboration: Findings on Artist Perspectives*

In the course of my interviews, other artists spoke about the benefits of collaboration. Cliona Harmey observes how ‘you can do it on your own but it’s much harder, and takes much longer’. For Harmey, the collective nature of digital art has switched the focus of the work itself. Harmey observes that this way of working is becoming more accepted and it is becoming a more normal way to work, noting that ‘what’s interesting now is that there’s a lot more collective activity, so a lot of projects are much more about interaction with people’. This collaborative experience is a positive one for Harmey, the benefits emerging that the overall project could advance more quickly and to a higher level of accomplishment than a solitary one.

Jesse Jones also expresses not only an openness to collaboration, but an active drive for involvement with other artists that translates into a research group in the RUA Red arts centre where she currently holds their digital art residency. Her research group, entitled *In These Troubled Times* aims to interrogate the current crisis through collaborative discussion of artistic texts<sup>97</sup>. She expresses the benefits of collaboration in the form of peer research, including the possibility of extending the boundaries of the knowable:

“I feel a huge sense of wanting to be part of a community of other artists. I mean especially because of the project that I’m working on and we met through. I really like peer research and I like to be in the thinking space with other artists where they don’t totally know what

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97 Following an initial meeting with Jones when I had been invited to RUA Red by their development officer who had seen some of my work online, I was invited to participate in the research group. From this initial encounter and involvement in the research group, I then interviewed her. According to Jones’ mission statement for the group, ‘*In These Troubled Times* is an expansive collaborative research group, investigating economic and social models proposed in speculative fictional texts. From Swifts’s *A Modest Proposal* to JG Ballard, the project aims to animate these captivating fictions as preamble to emerging political orders and how these relate to the present conditions of reality. Through readings, screenings and workshops over the course of 6 months, with the collective ambition to, debate, cogitate, perform, gesture, agitate, plan, work, publish our findings as art practitioners’

I'm doing. Because I think that there is a shared space of not knowing that's potentially possible, rather than us all seeing our work when we go to an exhibition and we say well done"<sup>98</sup>.

Thus, collaboration for Jones elicits a form of increased innovation and creative potential through a shared means of knowledge production.

Innovation through networked collaboration is evident in the work of Conor McGarrigle, particularly in his *NAMALand* (see figure 8.2) augmented reality project<sup>99</sup>. NAMA<sup>100</sup> was set up to manage 'toxic' properties following the financial crisis in Ireland, but has not published an official list of properties in its ownership. However, McGarrigle relates how he found 'an anonymous blog which had put together a very comprehensive database' of the properties owned by NAMA. McGarrigle was granted permission to take the data from the blog, and build an augmented reality artwork from that list of properties. 'So it's collaborative', McGarrigle asserts. He explains how there are many disparate parties interested in attempting 'to get at the truth of the matter, to make this information visual and accessible, when in an official way you can't know this. It's forbidden'. Thus, McGarrigle's collaborations centre around the idea that a shared and varied skillset - in this instance the original blogger's skills at investigating media sources and court proceedings to find an unofficial dataset of NAMA properties, and McGarrigle's ability to visualise the data - has resulted in a larger level of innovation where an art piece is accessible to a wider public audience in the form of an augmented reality iPhone app.

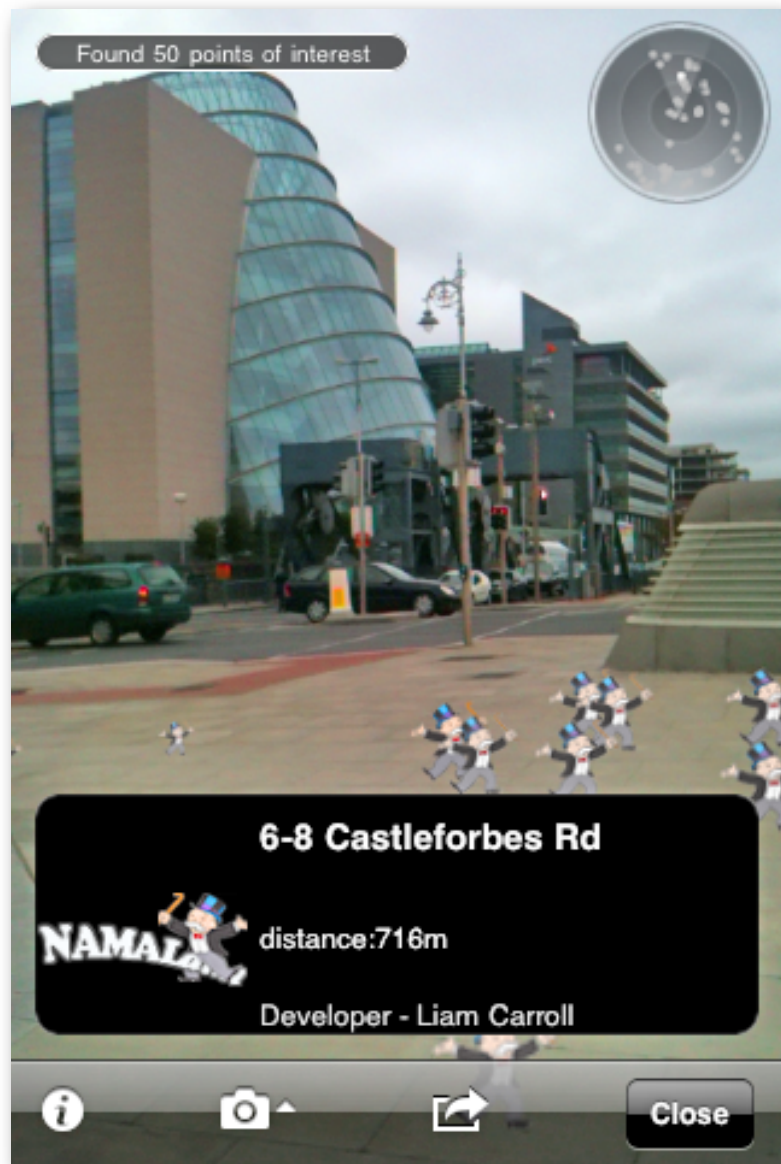
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98 Through my involvement with the research group as part of my ethnography of digital art, I can attest to Jones' sincerity in her desire for collaboration. Frequently, texts are selected for analysis and discussion by group members and it is not the case that Jones situates herself as the 'leader' of the research group.

99 The piece works through location awareness capabilities of smartphones. When a user is in close proximity to a NAMA property, whilst running the app, the application displays a graphic of the *Monopoly* man, signalling that the user is viewing a property they currently own through state investment.

The rather tongue-in-cheek description of NAMALand declares that 'At NAMALand we like to look on the bright side, OK the downside of NAMA is that it's costing you €40 billion, the upside is that you now own some of the best (and worst) properties in Dublin. So grab your phone, put on your tophat and enjoy your new role as a property tycoon with our augmented reality tour of NAMALand' FROM <http://www.walkspace.org/namaland/>

100 The National Assets Management Agency



*Figure 8.2: NAMALand Application Interface showing points of interest on a radar (upper right) and as 'Monopoly Man' icons, along with textual information in the main lower panel.*

I therefore suggest that these accounts link the aesthetic characteristic of digital art as specifically collaborative with a function that enables innovation. Thus, the often per-project, fluid 'teams' of collaborations between artists function as sites of innovation.

## 8.5 Innovation Through Knowledge-Sharing

### 8.5.1 Introduction

In this section, I discuss how open-source software and hardware tools are integral to certain digital art practices. As revealed in the previous section, digital art often involves collaborations with (sometimes remote, anonymous) actors for the sharing of content and of knowledge. However, this artistic collaboration often extends to mutual exchange of skills and competencies through the use of open-source software and hardware. Through using open-source resources, artists can teach themselves the skills required for their work and foster innovation. They cite the support from forums on open-source platforms as important, freely available resources. In conjunction with Creative Commons licensing for their works, they can then ensure due recognition for completed works without having to explore complicated copyright ‘all rights reserved’ routes. For the artists then, the resources that they were beneficiaries of through forums etc, can then be redistributed when their work is completed. I therefore posit that whilst collaboration as a characteristic of digital art enables the *transfer* of skills, the sharing of knowledge through open-source channels enables the *acquisition* of competencies in programming, authoring, networking and electronics, thus fostering innovation much as ‘training’ would in traditionally understood paradigms of innovation.

### 8.5.2 Corrupt - An Open-Source Net Art Piece

An example of this mechanism is *Corrupt*<sup>101</sup>, an open-source net art piece by Benjamin Gaulon (see figure 8.4). This piece consists of server-side software which enables the participant to upload an image file of their choice. The *Corrupt* software selectively interferes with the file, removing chunks of data from it in ten reiterations of the file, resulting in a visual output of the file displayed in its original format, and also in the ten corrupted versions. This work is influenced by an investigation of the limits of technology. Through the transformation of the digital files by the *Corrupt* interface, the user experiences the vulnerabilities of the medium, how technology can break, and how

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101 See <http://www.corrupt.recyclism.com/>



the ‘glitch’ in data can itself become part of an aesthetic. I suggest that this furthers the argument posited earlier that heavy technology use in digital art can involve, or enable and facilitate a critique of technological determinism, rather than fall foul of it as contemporary art theory often argues.

In terms of the place of open-source in this project, I find that projects such as *Corrupt* are built using the open-source *Processing* computer language. *Processing* is widely used in the digital arts for data visualisation, visual digital art and interactive graphic representation<sup>102</sup>. The basic ‘core’ of the software (libraries for functionality) can be included in a developer’s own code without the developer having to provide their own code back to the *Processing* forum or Wiki. Users are also allowed make changes to the core, as long as the changes are resubmitted to *Processing*. I suggest that this facilitates even more low-level development, leading to the fostering of innovation through development channels and the sharing of knowledge.

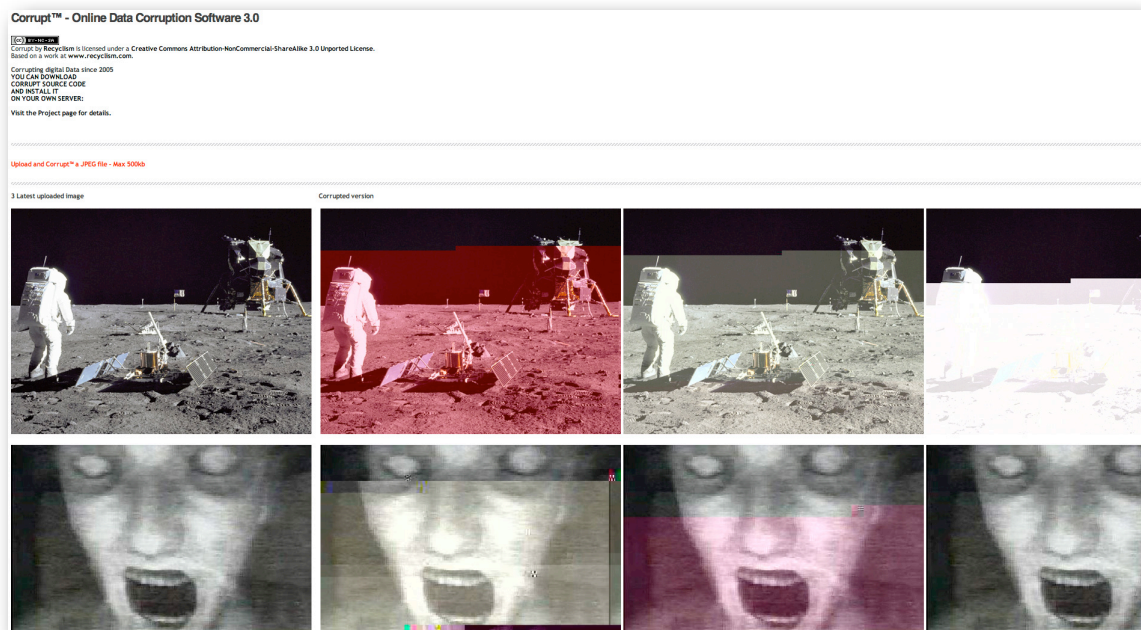


Figure 8.3: the *Corrupt* net art interface, showing images in various stages of ‘corruption’

The sharing of such tools facilitates the learning process for digital artists, adding to that ‘tacit’ knowledge that is important for innovation. This ethos of sharing is also prevalent in how the artists treat their completed works. Just as the *Processing*

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102 *Processing* was developed in 2001 at the MIT MediaLab. Significantly it is an open-source language, freely available from the *Processing* website<sup>13</sup>. However, the language is also richly documented by enthusiasts, along with tutorials, examples and an online help forum. This support is as much a resource as the programming software, as it encourages participation amongst the *Processing* community online, which benefits both the software developers and the users. The licensing for the software is through the GPL licensing platform.

environment has been released under GPL licensing, Creative Commons licensing was employed for the *Corrupt* software. In this instance, the Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike licence was chosen for the software, meaning that users can copy, transmit, distribute or adapt the work under the conditions that the author is attributed, the work is non-commercial and that the distribution is with a similar licence<sup>103</sup>. This I suggest is a further means for enhanced innovation where other users can develop the work akin to an ‘incremental innovation’ without the concerns of doing so illegally.

For Gaulon, the open-source and Creative Commons ethos has had ramifications for the work. He suggests that the use of these tools facilitates a greater level of experimentation with technologies than if he were to produce the works using proprietary means. He outlines how significant this has been for his practice, noting that ‘it is a very important thing for me in a way, that if you make an analogy with painting for example, you can either buy your pre-made paint or your can make your own pigments and mix your paint and find new techniques’. Thus, the exploration has extended beyond using the technologies as a means; the experimentation at such a granular level is akin to reconfiguring the medium and the materials themselves. ‘From my experience of making software or tools, you shape it to what you want and what you think that software should be doing. And this of course brings an aesthetic’.

Thus, the collaborative qualities of digital art are enhanced, supported and facilitated by the adoption of open-source software and hardware, and the use of Creative Commons licensing at the point of distribution. I suggest therefore that innovation is also facilitated by the use of open-source and Creative Commons licensing in a paradigm close to the one of incremental innovation, where innovations are improved gradually through knowledge inputs of various skilled users.

### *8.5.3 Open-Source: Further Artist Perspectives*

Other artists such as Conor McGarrigle, Cliona Harmey and Ivan Twohig have also employed open-source software and hardware technologies in their work. For McGarrigle, the use of such technologies fits in with the social shaping of technology

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103 See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/> for the parameters of this particular licensing

perspective, allowing the artist to reconfigure and tailor the technologies to their best fit. 'It's this idea of engagement' posits McGarrigle, 'that there actually artists involved in the shaping of the technology, and opening it up to a wider constituency of users, and even to a certain extent maybe democratising the technologies'. Thus, the use of open-source software facilitates wider accessibility of use, not only for the artist but for the art audience. It also has acceptance within the digital art community, McGarrigle observing how 'there's a different approach to what constitutes community work as well because it's always acceptable to build on work that has gone before you'.

Cliona Harmey also discusses issues of the democratisation of technology, observing how technology is 'in everything, and particularly now' in contemporary western society. She also posits that 'if you think about it, even in the last two or three years, how radically it's changed, so I think it should be interrogated. You have to'. Harmey argues that having some technological accomplishments facilitates a critique of the technological means. For Harmey, open-source frameworks help to develop that level of technological understanding required of that critique. She suggests that 'you'll never understand the whole thing' of technology, but continues by positing 'that's why I think things like *Processing* are very interesting because sort of give you an insight into how the languages are structured and it's very doable. And there are so many resources for teaching yourself how to do stuff. Open source is amazing'. For Harmey, open source frameworks are a resource that can enable a critique of the technological means of current times, where the realities of consumerism and proprietary technologies are of concern.

Ivan Twohig's perspective conjoins his opinions on open-source resources and his observations on peer review and acceptance. Twohig compares the positive, supportive ethos in the digital art world with the open-source world, suggesting that the 'shift' in reward systems towards the artists' peers is similar to the shift away from proprietary software as characterised by the open-source movement. 'It's that the peer group for digital art, it's about that shift like say open source, the community'. Thus, the community of practice and of learning is of significance for digital artists such as Twohig.

I suggest that these accounts suggest that digital artists associate a freedom of learning and upskilling with open-source resources, and these resources comprise learning tools

and resources that add to the pool of ‘tacit’ knowledges and competencies within the digital art sector. The open-source resources also supply tools for creating and outputting artistic works, and I suggest that the learning and supply functions of open-source resources thus enable innovation and act as a site of innovation in the digital art world.

## 8.6 Innovation Through Repurposing

The final specificity of digital art that I explore is that of the repurposing of materials as an integral part of the practice. I suggest that this repurposing has the potential to lead to ‘radical’ or unexpected innovations through the hybridisation of previously unconnected artefacts. Over the course of the research, I have come to the understanding that part of a consideration of a ‘digital aesthetic’ includes consideration to how artists in this genre frequently repurpose already existent materials and resources, both software and hardware. In a practice known as ‘hardware hacking’, digital artists make use of an obsolete technological product and repurpose it for an unintended use<sup>104</sup>. Data ‘scraping’ involves collating disparate sets of information through selective ‘mining’ of data from publicly available resources<sup>105</sup>, in what I posit is a form of radical knowledge innovation.

For Ivan Twohig, the reconfiguration present in his practice is situated within his fine art background. He sees part of the reconfiguration process as connected to a reconfiguring of perspective. He observes that ‘I think creativity is about, if there is a role for the artist, it’s about being able to be that fluid point of creativity, to spin the situation and look at it from a fresh point of view’. In Twohig’s work, we see a literal ‘spinning’ of perspective, as the points of view are reconfigured and reassessed, as in his *3D Skulls* sculptural works and his role in the *Hard Drivin’* project. We also see a reconfiguration of materials - both artistic and from popular culture - in Twohig’s homage to Nam June Paik. The installation *Nam June Paik Man* consists of magnetic tape on board, with a playhead attached whereby participants can become the playhead of the tape player. ‘I love that point of view that you are the reading head or you are the player’, notes Twohig in relation to the influence Nam June Paik had on his work.

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104 For example, at a workshop on hardware hacking that I attended at the Irish Museum of Contemporary Art as part of the ethnography of digital art, an obsolete but functional flatbed scanner was ‘hacked’ - repurposed - to become a functional, and humorously entertaining musical concertina

105 For example I was involved in a project where the online tool *ScraperWiki* was used to mine data from the Irish Road Safety Authority, An Garda Síochána (the Irish police force) and city and county councils to compare and visualise road deaths, penalty points and speed cameras in a way that was not immediately transparent. The project showed that the amount of penalty points applied in the Dublin City Council area, and the number of speed cameras was very much out of line with the rest of the country, suggesting that in this instance, the introduction of speed cameras could be seen as a money-making venture, less concerned with road safety than in other parts of the country. That data could not have been sourced from the separate websites alone, and needed a combination of data scraping/mining and visualisation to create viable journalistic content.

Twohig, in a 2008 presentation to DATA revealed the following about *Nam June Paik Man*:

“so there were drawings from people playing Pacman, and I recorded Pacman onto these tapes as people played, so that you get these drawings that are maps then of the game that you played. So if you run the head over ... the reason that it's called Nam June Paik Man is because in the 1970s did a piece called *Random Access*, whereby he took people's narratives<sup>106</sup>”

Thus, not only is Twohig ‘reconfiguring’ a previous work of Nam June Paik, he is secondly reconfiguring the audio soundtrack of the popular video game *Pacman* into a work that thirdly, reconfigures the objects of magnetic audio tape and playhead. The work itself becomes a complex conjunction of repurposed items, conceptually, culturally and materially<sup>107</sup> that nonetheless comprise a new work, or innovation.

Another informant, Cliona Harmey, also started her artistic training in sculpture, and her sculptural work provides another example of how digital artists combine digital data with what Harmey terms ‘object hacking’, to form new object. Harmey’s sculptural work uses both open-source software and hardware, combined with the repurposing of materials from a large furniture and homeware retailer. For Harmey, this is another way of critiquing the materials available to us as consumers, extending her critique of technology to also incorporate large-scale consumer products. As she describes of her practice, ‘one way of doing stuff, what I’ve been doing a lot of recently was just buying

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106 See Twohig’s DATA presentation on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2wj99kZxz2E>

107 A direct repurposing from a purely digital format to a material one is seen in Twohig’s work *The Fall*. Here, Twohig wished to explore the transition between a falling figure as a default virtual element in Google’s *Sketchup* program, and its inception as a material reality. For Twohig ‘you’re always making proposals, you’re always trying to project what your idea is going to be, what your plan for the space is’. However, these plans are always virtual, using for example, the virtual falling man in a Google sketch as a ‘filler’ type element in a broader proposal or artistic submission. Twohig relates in the same DATA presentation as above, how he unfolded the virtual 3D falling man from the Google *Sketchup* program, used another software program called *Pepakura* to unfold the figure into flat dimensions, and then proceeded to print out the unfolded elements onto A0 card. He then reassembled the elements to make multiple, scaled copies of his falling man. For Twohig, this repurposing challenges the intent of the virtual figures - they were never designed to be printed in reality. As he observes of the eventual installation in Dublin’s Digital Hub ‘these are architectural drawings and that’s the intention of them ... so I’m just playing around with the idea of them falling through architectural structures’. The figures were never intended to be made material, unlike the architectural designs they were to support, so for Twohig, this repurposing of the virtual falling man into the real world reflected a challenge for him when submitting a proposal - what remains virtual? How do we articulate artistic ideas that by their nature, often have to first exist in the virtual world?

things from IKEA and reconfiguring them [...] so I think that's another option, to reconfigure other systems'. Thus in Harmey's practice, the repurposing or reconfiguring that I am exploring in this research does not only apply to software or technology - it extends to household products that can be repurposed as sculptural components in a digital art practice.

A piece of work encountered during the ethnography that elucidates the principle of reconfiguring is Jonah Brucker-Cohen's work *!Alerting Infrastructure!*. The piece works thus: each time a computer user visits the gallery website, a pneumatic jackhammer suspended by cables in proximity to the gallery wall is switched on for 30 seconds, the action of which is to cause slow destruction to the gallery wall. Thus, an 'innocuous' website hit counter is, through the use of networked technology, repurposed to perform a physically destructive act on the gallery space itself<sup>108</sup>.

These accounts reveal how in the digital art genre, the concept of repurposing in the digital art domain can involve materials which range from software to hardware objects, and from gaming consoles to IKEA products. I suggest that whether the repurposing is through consumer objects, technological hardware or computer software and code, the ethos of repurposing is one that is integral to the aesthetic of digital art. I also suggest that repurposing can also contribute to incremental and/or radical innovations in a digital art practice, through reconfiguring materials for unintended use and therefore revealing an unforeseen and innovative application of the material.

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108 The complexities within the work impacted me further the next time I wished to visit the IMOCA website. Having seen and heard the destruction of the physical space whilst standing in the gallery through the random and unpredictable act of online users visiting the site, an element of conflict arose. I became acutely conscious that the hit counter on the website - usually displayed as a positive marker of popularity - would be mobilised in this instance for the destruction of the very space the hit counter in essence, depended upon. Thus, the repurposing was not just confined to utilisation of the software alone, the reconfiguration of the software became a vehicle for the reconfiguring of the gallery itself.

## 8.7 Art and the Political

In the previous four sections I attempted to unpack three specific dimensions of digital art and how they are connected with the question of how artists innovate using ICTs. However, the work also aims to situate the digital art sector to a wider art discourse, as digital art is situated within the broader art world. Thus I now attend to a topic that during my research emerged consistently amongst the digital artists, but which I could not situate as any way particular or specific to digital art. That topic is political critique, and how art - regardless of medium - can facilitate a critique of politics, ideology and authority. Thus, this topic relates to my fifth main set of research questions as set out in chapter 1 pertaining to art and its political contexts. Therefore whilst the overall research project is focused on a survey of digital art, I suggest that this section is indicative of stances adopted by artists and is applicable to the broader artistic context.

As seen in the analysis of works in the previous section, some digital artists explicitly engage in a political critique. Perhaps the most politically recognisable of pieces discussed to date is *NAMALand* by Conor McGarrigle<sup>109</sup>. However, artists across the spectrum of digital practices have attested to me how their work often seeks to challenge, subvert or undermine dominant discourses. In the case of Benjamin Gaulon, that manifests in a critique of consumer culture. It forms the basis for critiques of networked systems in Cliona Harmey's practice. In the work of Ivan Twohig, it is the critique of perspective itself.

A critique of a consumerist ideology is evident in the work of a Dublin-based artist who was interviewed but who wished to remain anonymous. An early work of this artist involves the creation of a machine that would play sounds of applause and encouragement when a participant activates it through pressure sensors. This artist had worked in a marketing company as a graphic designer and had become disillusioned with how the marketing industry encourages unnecessary consumption, and so she decided to create this piece as a tongue-in-cheek critique of how happiness can be sold

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109 McGarrigle explained to me how 'people are saying that it's a tool for political comment, and I think if you can get people to think of augmented reality as a tool for political comment or critique, that's fantastic. You've added something that's really quite concrete. Once you've got this idea that this is tool for political critique or political comment, for me the work is done. It's engaged with people in kind of a real way, engaged with real issues and things that are important to people, and that are topical and relevant. So certainly in that way, as an artwork it has engaged with a wider public'.



to us in trite ways - in this case through a machine that would give the participant a meaningless but emphatic applause. She explains how 'I was just coming out of working in marketing and I was really aware of the mechanisms [...] I think working in marketing was probably the last straw, because I thought there was something really sinister about it, not that I was doing anything particularly bad, but I just realised that I don't really want to sell crap to people that they don't need'.

Other artists and arts workers have spoken about the potential of art to facilitate critique and open up new sites of understanding. However, some of these artists would not place technology at the centre of their practice of critical engagement with societal issues. Jesse Jones makes the observation that technology can potentially hinder political engagement. For Jones, 'there is something about the disjuncture between technology and the embodied political gesture that is really really difficult for me to reconcile'. Jones attests to a stance around technology where 'I try to live in the world with technology as a tool and having a function, but not pre-determining anything in terms of my arts practice or in my relationship with reality'. As examined earlier, Jones' concern for her practice is that it is peer-engaged and collaborative. For Jones, the role of technology can however hinder this practice. 'I think it's really important to sit down and speak to somebody face-to-face, and meet with groups of people, and collaborate together in the same room' observed Jones. 'I think there is a feeling definitely that I have, that social media and the reliance on technology has incubated us away from each other, and incubated us away from the political'.

However, Jones argues that the visual image in popular culture has the potential to inform, provide critique and engage with political discourse. 'This incredibly rich tapestry of the visual within popular culture that kind of has the ability to excavate knowledges about ourselves and about society, and form political critique and trajectories of possibility for us as a society', argued Jones. She also attested to the potential of cinema, positing that 'I think that watching films can actually be a revolutionary act. It depends on what films you watch. And how you watch films'.

Jaki Irvine also speaks about the potential for critique, revealing how 'I think there are times that an artist is just an ordinary person who needs to protest, the same as everybody else'. However, for Irvine this protest may not be an overtly political protest, but might nonetheless point to an alternate political and ideological landscape. Thus,

the protest might involve exploring ‘the possibility of not agreeing to think exactly what you’re told to think, or think about even’. For Irvine, this potential for opening up a space has been particularly pertinent during Ireland’s financial crisis. ‘It’s not even the possibility you might think about something other than what you’ve been told to think about, we’re almost at the moment because of the crisis, being told to focus on this thing and nothing else, and I love the thought that there are other things besides this thing that we’re all supposed to be thinking about’ explains Irvine.

For Irvine, the opening up of space through art also centres around permission to think alternate thoughts: ‘It seems really totalitarian that there’s only this thing, and it also gives the impression that we’ve no right to think about other things at the moment. That the very thought about things other than this thing is a luxury’. For Irvine, this movement to alternate thought ‘could be vaguely political with a tiny little “P” to refuse to think about those things - to say actually I want to think about something you tell me is entirely irrelevant’. For Irvine, articulating this reality is an important part of her practice. ‘I think if we’re talking about the role art plays, the insistence that there is more, that feels important. I don’t know why it feels important. It’s not other, it’s not posed, it’s not in opposition to, it’s not outside of, it’s not this either-or scenario. It’s insisting we are in this thing’.

This section has examined how art in its potential has a facility for political critique. Some of my artist informants do not see technological means as integral to their practice, and Jesse Jones posited how technology can distance citizens from each other. Yet some other digital artists often see technology and the critique of it as central to a broader political critique of how society is organised and governed. I suggest that this finding challenges the spectrum hypothesis, revealing how the political potential of art to critique the status quo is evident across all parts of the spectrum, irrespective of the level of technology use as either tool or medium.

## 8.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I posited a spectrum of practices, ranging from the use of digital technologies as *tools*, towards at the other end of the spectrum, a consideration of a digital *medium*. Through examining contrasting perspectives from artists who debated the place of digital technologies in their practice, I conclude by suggesting that there is a spectrum of acceptance of digital means as a medium in their own right. Some artists purely considered technology as a tool. Others wished to engage heavily with technology, but not for its own sake, but to critique what they consider to be a medium in its own right. Thus, there exist tensions amongst artists themselves, and between artists and institutions as to validity of art practices involving heavy technology use, but with, I suggest, a commonality regarding a reluctance to be ‘determined’ by technology.

The chapter also suggested three specificities of digital art in terms of its aesthetic qualities. These qualities could be analysed as sites where innovations, both radical or incremental could occur. The chapter suggested that certain knowledge acquisition practiced in the digital art sector through collaboration could be compared to the traditional R&D functions. It also argued that similar to analyses of the digital media content sector, knowledge production in the artistic sector is formed through ‘soft’ or tacit skills, and innovation occurs through the acquisition, use and transfer of such skills.

# **Chapter 9**

## **Enablement of Digital Art Practices**

## **Chapter 9: Enablement of Digital Art Practices**

### **9.1 Introduction: Issues of Support**

In chapter 7 I posited a conceptual spectrum of practices in digital art, which in this chapter I examine whether or how this is concomitant with an associated spectrum of acceptance and of support/enablement of digital art in Ireland. I address this by analysing the relationship between the micro-level actors and those at the meso level, providing accounts from both levels that (1) foreground attitudes from the micro level towards the meso and (2) provide a perspective from the meso level that problematises digital art.

Maeve Connolly suggests that ‘I think there is a small group of artists, or small proportion of artists, and they’re not necessarily very well represented in Ireland’. For Connolly, this is the sector of artists who choose to categorise themselves as electronic or digital media artists. Thus, digital artists were queried for their perspectives on the reception of their art at gallery level, linking the micro and meso-level perspectives from both practitioners and institutional gatekeepers. The findings suggest that video artists are more positive about their experiences of support and enablement than those practitioners on the other end of the spectrum, who describe a relative lack of support, through representation, at gallery level. From these findings, artist strategies in the face of this perceived lack of institutional support are analysed, revealing strategies of disengagement from the institutional settings along with one of seeking support abroad.

Representatives of arts institutions were interviewed for their perspective on digital art at the meso level, including issues they face when considering the mounting of a digital art exhibition, or collecting works of digital art. This perspective also reveals problems at the meso level both conceptually and materially with exhibiting, collecting and archival of digital works. I suggest that the ‘spectrum’ hypothesis of support and enablement through representation thus holds true at this meso level, with institutional gatekeepers less reluctant to mount an exhibition of ‘digital’ video art than one heavily employing ICTs.

This chapter therefore interrogates issues of representation, support and enablement at a micro and meso level, and concludes by suggesting a possible opportunity for the digital art sector in Ireland to ameliorate this situation.

## 9.2 It's No Fun Being Digital in an Analogue Art World

### 9.2.1 Introduction: Under-Representation

In this section, I examine the lack of support through gallery representation that is perceived - and explained - by some digital artists. I interviewed an experienced gallery director whose evidence sheds light on the situation from the meso level of gatekeeping and institutional relevance. The last chapter indicated that digital art frequently involved the reconfiguration of materials. This section argues that a 'reconfiguration' of how digital art is positioned by art galleries and institutions is required for an understanding of the aesthetic of digital art. A cohort of the artists interviewed suggest that such under-representation is a particularly Irish situation, with several artists attesting to the more positive reception of their work abroad.

For Cliona Harmey, the digital art sector in Ireland has suffered from a lack of representation. 'I think it's very under developed here' observes Harmey. 'I don't know if you'd agree, but I'd say, I mean there's a lot of activity but [...] I don't think it's in the mainstream art market'. The underdevelopment extends beyond representation of the work to commercial concerns (which I will discuss further in the following chapter). For Harmey, this under-representation is coupled with a lack of comprehension about the attributes of digital art. Harmey posits that 'I think there isn't really an understanding of what digital art or digital media are outside a small community'. She suggests that this is an Irish situation, noting that 'in England and definitely in Europe it would be more recognised'. For Harmey, the lack of representation in Ireland is due to only a small community of interested parties in the attributes of digital media, which then results in a lack of opportunities for exhibition or for commercial representation.

Another digital artist and lecturer who wished to remain unnamed suggests that a broader cultural discourse around digital art is not well established in Ireland. For digital art practice, 'there is more of a culture of it in other countries like France or [...] the Netherlands'. In those countries there are well established networks of digital artists and collectives. 'People know each other and you know about different things going on in different countries' she observed, citing her own experiences of working abroad. For this artist, the contrast in Ireland is that 'there's a very small group of people who do

that here'. The artist also traces this cultural zeitgeist to an educational level. She outlines her familiarity with the attitudes within a Dublin art college, and how a particular postgraduate degree in digital art is not taken seriously, even within the institution offering the course. She explains how in her experience of the institution 'I don't think it was really taken seriously by maybe the other arts. There were several MAs going on, and the other ones that were going on, I didn't think that they thought it was a real masters'. Again, this artist suggests that the lack of acceptance of the digital art mediums was an Irish phenomenon. 'I think that's true for everything [Irish]', she notes. 'I mean you have actors and if they say there are good in America they must be good'. Thus, the cultural zeitgeist in Ireland is not one of acceptance of Irish digital artists. However, this artist suggests that the phenomenon is not particular to digital art, but reflects a broader attitude to the arts.

A further illustration of this comes from a director of a contemporary art gallery that specialises in digital art. He suggested that while 'digital art in Ireland is a big word I'd say [...] I'd say it's a very small scene'. For this participant, the digital art sector is culturally loaded with complex aesthetic concerns, and therefore 'big', but at once it is also a very small sector of artists. For an art institution such as his that is concerned with foregrounding digital art, the size of the sector and therefore the audience, is problematic. He describes the frustration of the directors when mounting a digital art exhibition:

"So, the last big show we had, *Enchantillion*, it was twenty five artists from France, from different towns, different groups of artists. Basically, the last part was two friends of mine from Strasbourg who have really amazing work, and they got their own funding. So basically we just provided the space, they got their own funding to come and do the show. And we did the opening, there was nobody. Like, literally us. Nobody came, not one person. I think we had two students came, of mine. So I'm just thinking, why do I bother doing things if nobody cares?"

This reveals how representation of digital art is an issue that exists at the micro and meso levels of analysis. The digital artists themselves feel a lack of representation. The critique of the educational institution as portrayed above was that digital art was not



worthy of serious consideration. The art institution wishing to foreground digital art could not find an audience for the launch of one of its exhibitions. I suggest that the perceived lack of support for digital art through representation is due to several factors which I explore in the following section.

### *9.2.2 Problematizing the Enablement of Digital Art*

In this section I examine why there is a perceived lack of support of digital art in Ireland. From the interviews conducted with artists and gatekeepers, and through case-studies, I have identified three issues pertaining to digital art which may prevent its acceptance, understanding and concomitant representation. These are (1) context, categorisation and affiliation, (2) suspicion about the produced work as technology and not art, and (3) that digital art interrogates the role of the museum. Thus, if a digital artwork can not be easily contextualised, issues of suspicion around the artwork as a work of technological fetishisation, and a subsequent reluctance to value or collect the work ensue. This is not however to suggest that there are not valid issues pertaining to the collection and exhibition of digital art. These issues will be addressed later in section 9.4.

#### *9.2.2.1 Context, Categorisation and Affiliation*

In chapter 4, I problematised current discourses in art theory and education with respect to categorisation of artistic works by medium, suggesting that digital art can be marginalised within contemporary art discourses. Here, I further examine issues of categorisation, affiliation and context of the digital artwork, arguing that two possible scenarios exist that impede the support of digital art in Ireland. The first scenario (1) reflects some theoretical perspectives from chapter 4, and argues that if there exists a current trend in art theory and criticism in Ireland to reject labelling of an artwork by medium, to be a media-specific digital or electronic artist may be problematic within the broader art world. The second scenario (2) reflects theoretical perspectives from chapter 5, and argues that in the light of Ireland's postcoloniality and its affect on art criticism where 'natural', 'uniquely Irish' subjects, materials and aesthetics have been eulogised and romanticised, the digital art aesthetic resides outside of that romantic, postcolonial frame and is therefore liable for rejection by arts institutions.

Maeve Connolly addresses the first scenario with respect to curators and institutional gatekeepers and how artists themselves categorise through affiliations. She explains that for artists, 'people don't want to be in a set that they haven't chosen. And I think it's a really interesting, and really pronounced phenomenon in art practice at the moment, that people communicate the particularity of what they do through their affiliations and their associations'. Thus, whilst it may not be *de rigueur* to categorise by medium, the artists themselves self-categorise through more tacit allegiances and associations, according to Connolly.

Whilst this trend may seem like a positive one for digital artists - and we have seen in chapter 8 how community is important to digital artists - if this trend is also applicable at a curatorial level, then it may have more negative implications for digital artists. 'A curator is going to make selections and groupings of artists that relate to their own research, their own enquiry' Connolly observes. 'In a lot of cases they are not going to restrict themselves by pre-existing categories'. It is therefore at this meso, gatekeeping level that I suggest issues of representation occur. At once, at a micro level, digital artists can and do form communities of affiliations. However, their affiliations are more medium-based than in other art forms. I suggest that when this medium-specific genre is forwarded for consideration at the meso level, the reluctance to view the work by its categorisation as digital or electronic art puts the work at a disadvantage. Thus, for a curator to include a corpus of work that is based on its medium specificity as digital or electronic art, invokes the negativity associated with medium specificity to make such an inclusion potentially detrimental to their curatorial career. As Cliona Harmey observes of curators evaluating a digital art proposal 'they might not be able to categorise what the outcome might be', and thus reject the work. If we consider the second scenario of an art critique in Ireland that is despite a move towards globalisation, still postcolonial, (as I have argued in chapter 5), a curator or institutional gatekeeper in Ireland who is situated within that postcolonial discourse in art criticism further places themselves in danger of reducing their own cultural or social 'capital', as outlined in Bourdieu's theories. The gatekeeper is therefore more likely to hold on to or advance their 'capital' through engaging with existing critical tropes.

However Jaki Irvine, a video artist, does not perceive an issue of acceptance of her work for grants and project funding. Irvine however expresses a difficulty with categorising or

contextualising how a project might evolve when first applying for funding. Like Harmey, she feels that it is potentially difficult for both gatekeepers and she herself to categorise the work before its completion. ‘What’s more awkward’ reveals Irvine ‘is the crossover between cinema and art, and that borderline that artists find themselves’. For Irvine, this crossover of mediums means that extra documentation detailing the projects is required for the institutional gatekeeper. She explains how ‘the requirements of scripts and those sorts of things, they’re very different to setting out what your project might be in advance’. Therefore, while Irvine as a video artist does not suggest that representation in itself is an issue, she does reveal how there does exist for her a difficulty in categorising the work before its completion. I suggest that whilst that difficulty exists for video artists, this difficulty is exacerbated in digital art practices, where multiple technologies, systems and aesthetics combine with an often interactive dimension, the direction of which may not be easily predicted at project planning stage.

Another issue of categorisation or contextualisation for Irvine occurs in the peer-review process. She explains how for the most part, peer review works quite well, as the peers are other practising artists who are generally sympathetic to the practice, be it in visual arts, music, dance etc. However, Irvine suggests that if the work is in some way *au-courant* or highly contemporary, there are potential inadequacies with the peer-review system. She posits ‘if somebody is making work that is at the edge of contemporary, and the panel of peers haven’t got their heads around it yet, if the work is potentially peerless, then you can see where a problem might lie’. She explains how in that instance the artist is ‘asking people to imagine something that might be at the forefront of something but nobody else has imagined yet’. Thus, there exists a potential situation for any art form to be so contemporary as to be ahead of its peers. I suggest that this issue may be particularly pertinent in the case of digital and electronic art, where the nature of the practice is often to interrogate emergent technologies, technological means and systems. I suggest that because digital art employs emergent technologies, by the time they have been accepted as ‘contemporary’, the practices have been superseded. The work can only be classified by a cohort of peers as ‘contemporary’ art once it has been accepted as such. If, as Irvine posits, a practice is so experimental as to have not been fully accepted into the ‘contemporary’ canon, how can an audience of peers evaluate the work through an established theoretical construct of ‘contemporary’?

Thus I propose that at a curatorial level, if the specificities of digital art are not investigated, explored and considered on their own merits, the judgment of the work defaults to the context of a zeitgeist where medium specificity has negative connotations. I also propose that digital and electronic art practices are quite often *au-courant* and experimental and thus are not easily categorised within ‘contemporary’ art discourses. When perceived negatively at curatorial level then, the natural course for the curatorial team is to reject the work on a ‘theoretical’ ideology residing in concepts of the post-medium condition and contemporary art. I argue that this reflects a gap in understanding between the micro and meso levels of communication in the art world. In the next section I explore how digital art can be greeted with suspicion by the art world.

#### 9.2.2.2 *Suspicion*

Benjamin Gaulon suggests that he has experienced particularly in Ireland a certain scepticism in relation to digital art practices, suggesting that the gap between the micro and meso levels is an Irish phenomenon. This scepticism concerns who the creator of the art is - if it is the artist or the technology. He observes that ‘there’s always this suspicion with computer-based artwork - there’s always this question of who’s doing the art and all that, which I think is not relevant’. For Gaulon, the suspicion around digital art is due to ‘generation’ and ‘tradition’ in the art world, combined with an institutional zeitgeist of ‘people trying to keep things the way they were’. Thus for Gaulon, entrenched views on the very role of technology and computers in art is still prevalent in art discourse in Ireland.

This entrenchment may explain a situation that Conor McGarrigle describes which also points to a suspicion within the art world regarding digital art. He relates that when his *NAMALand* piece started to gain publicity and notoriety within the mainstream ‘non-art media’ as he expresses it, there was ‘very little’ response to the work by the art institutions themselves. He describes how ‘when I made [*NAMALand*] and sent it out to people, it was the mainstream, non-art media that responded to it and were interested in it’. In contrast to this, ‘the press release and the information about it went to the art press and it didn’t get taken up at all’. I enquired as to possible reasons for this, and whilst McGarrigle could not be entirely sure, he nonetheless suggested that it was

perhaps because the gatekeepers consider the work to not exist as art. ‘My guess from my experience’ reports McGarrigle, ‘would be that they see it as technology in some way and it’s not art’.

I suggest that these accounts, in the light of the second possible scenario involving postcolonial issues in art criticism, can be explained by an ongoing conservatism and traditionalism in Irish art critique, as analysed in chapter 5. The skepticism and suspicion revealed by the participants is framed as pertaining to technology use. However, I argue that this suspicion around technology stands as somewhat of a ‘red herring’, and that it is a more likely scenario that the consensus, or centre of gravity of art criticism in Ireland is still bound up in romantic, postcolonial attempts to foreground our heritage, our ‘specialness’ and our ‘unique’ Celtic spirit as to make a discourse of ‘grey box’ digital art marginal in the face of ‘earthy’ sculptures and ‘evocative’ paintings. Thus, digital art challenges existing postcolonial tropes through the more ‘universal’ aesthetic of the digital age.

### *9.2.2.3 Interrogation*

I suggest that another barrier to representation of digital art is that by its very forms in, for example, net art, remote installation, and augmented reality, digital art interrogates the role of the museum. This was argued in chapter 4, where it was posited that digital art questions the default ‘art as commodity’ form of the traditional art world, where artworks exist as ‘property’ of an owner, can be bought and sold and have scarcity or ‘auratic’ value. Digital art which often employs collaborative processes and engages with Open Source and Creative Commons models of intellectual property thus stands in opposition to the default ‘art-as-proprietary’ trope.

As discussed in chapter 4, the object characteristics of digital art include an ambiguity regarding where the artwork resides. I propose that this object characteristic of digital art can impact negatively on representation, when the digital artwork questions the position of the museum or the archive by not requiring a physical space in which to be represented, such as net art. As Maeve Connolly observes ‘there are a lot of artists who are trying to pose some kind of question or challenge, maybe, to museums or to archives through their use of technology’. She suggests that within a tradition of questioning the

role of the museum in mediating relationships between the art and the audience, digital artists may 'produce demands for the presentation of their work that they know are somehow logically unfeasible'. Thus, as in the case of some works briefly described in chapter 7, the work resides as instruction or documentation, or as Connolly suggests 'effectively their work is becoming, to some extent, like a conceptual piece'. I suggest that whilst many of such works are of a quality deserving accessioning and archiving in an institution, they are often not collected due to the complexities of documenting, storing and archiving the pieces.

Whilst the art world in other countries such as the US, Spain and the Netherlands accept that digital art can reside outside the gallery, the Irish situation appears more problematic. A participant who wished not to be named, reveals that in Ireland, the art world is 'very gallery based'. This informant stated that digital works are 'always existing outside the gallery so you're always having to negotiate the idea of "is it an artwork, is it not an artwork"', because if it's in a gallery, that's already been decided'. For this participant, 'you've a fair idea that when you enter the gallery, what's in it is art' as the gallery stands as the gatekeeper of the judgement of art. Thus, even if the work is incongruous, once within the gallery space the viewer can be assured that 'if it doesn't look like art, it is'. The implication for a gallery viewer is that even if a work is not immediately recognisable as art, the fact that the institution have exhibited or collected it gives the work the status - or aura - of art. However with a piece of digital art, the work may reside on the internet or on a mobile phone, and the status of the piece as a work of art is more contested, having to negotiate its position as an artwork from a position outside the museum space. Therefore the discussion of the piece as a work of art happens independently of the museum, challenging or even undermining its position as gatekeeper or arbiter of taste. I suggest, again with a postcolonial lens, that if historically Irish art collections were built up by a foregrounding of 'Irishness', a more universal or 'globalised' aesthetic of digital art is problematic to such institutions, causing them to reject them for collection or acquisition.

### 9.3 Artist Strategies and Attitudes

#### *9.3.1 Introduction: An Attitude of Disengagement*

In this section I introduce some attitudes and strategies adopted by digital artists in the face of what they consider to be a palpable reluctance on the part of arts institutions to represent their work. This section thus interrogates the micro/meso relationship from the perspective of the digital practitioners and their interactions with the meso-level of the arts institutions and gatekeepers. During the course of the interview process, it became apparent that these artists are resolute about producing artistic works regardless of institutional acceptance, with many adopting the position, like one artist, wishing not to be named, who says of her practice ‘I just do what I want to do and I don’t really care to be honest’. For this artist, her feeling is that if the art world accepts her work that would be a bonus, but for her, the main motivation for the work is that her work is socially engaged with a general audience. ‘Obviously, if people like it that is a definite bonus’, she revealed, ‘but if I was making it for anybody I would be making it for the general public, rather than an art audience’.

Conor McGarrigle also expresses an attitude of disengagement with the art institutions in Ireland. He suggests that this was because ‘to go back to that place where you’re explaining to them why it is art, I guess a lot of people aren’t interested in doing that any more, because if you go to Spain or America, they know what it is, they see where it fits within the tradition. They see where you are within a wider body of work’. Thus, a ‘path of least resistance’ for McGarrigle is to disengage with the institutions in Ireland. For artists working with digital technologies, it does appear to be a ‘path of least resistance’ to show their work at institutions abroad where the work is more readily accepted within an artistic tradition (Futurism, Dadaism, Minimalism etc). As McGarrigle observes, ‘the sense that I get from people, that people aren’t willing to go to that place again, to convince people that working with computers is actually art and it’s not just messing about with computers’. For him, like other artists who have worked abroad, it is far more productive and rewarding to pursue other more relevant options than to struggle for acceptance in Ireland.

However, adopting this attitude is not unproblematic for artists. For Ivan Twohig, there is a sense of conflict between producing independent work, and having a desire for that work to be rewarded within traditional channels. Twohig contemplates how ‘I always have this dilemma of, are you looking to be doing something proactively for one, and do you want to be doing something that goes beyond, to push the boundaries?’. ‘But at the same time you want to be acknowledged’, he posits. Whilst Twohig attests to the peer group of digital artists who would assess the work in its context, he acknowledges how ‘there’s always this ideal of being accepted into certain galleries or having your work shown in galleries as a mark of acceptance’. Thus, whilst Twohig desires to create work that is progressive, he also expresses a conflicted stance where ‘there’s a reward system and you do need to feel - it’s just human nature - to feel acceptance from your peers’. The tension for Twohig lies in the complex nexus of gatekeepers. He posits that ‘the art community is based on this intellectual top down’ which requires the artist to ask of their own work ‘do the curators accept it, do the theorists who influence the curators accept it, and then do the galleries who show it?’. For Twohig, ‘curators look to theorists, gallerists look to curators’. An awareness of this on the part of the artist leads them to question the purpose of the work. As he asks of himself ‘are you trying to do something that slots in?’. Clearly, the stance of ‘slotting in’ is in conflict to Twohig’s desire to push artistic boundaries, yet there is a reward for acquiescing to what traditional gallerists and curators desire, in the form of wider recognition of the artistic output<sup>110</sup>.

### 9.3.2 A Strategy of Detachment

In the previous section I analysed certain *attitudes* that digital artists adopted in contextualising their work in the broader art world. In this section I now analyse some innovative *strategies* that digital artists employ in the face of their perceived lack of representation. I posit that a major strategy of digital artists is to detach from the

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<sup>110</sup> However, Twohig did also suggest that for digital artists ‘the real peer acknowledgement now is blogs’. According to his experience ‘Blogs are becoming the point of reference. If you get blogged about your prototype [it] is a major thing for anybody’. He suggested that to be blogged about is a major reward in itself, albeit ‘skewed’ because ‘it’s maybe more to do with the safety of the forum or the social network that you’re accepted within’. However, even this reward system has its complications in terms of expected production output. His critique of this situation was that ‘you have to be seen to be producing all the time’. For Twohig this situation was ‘another symptom to this networked society - that you need to keep up that online persona, or you fall off the radar or people will think you’ve just stopped making things or your work’s not good enough any more’. Thus, whilst the peer review and peer acceptance of blogs had many benefits, nonetheless they created ‘all these kind of built in pressures to being constantly viewed’.



broader art world, its challenges of gatekeeping and its reward systems, in favour of self-motivated, self-started ventures with a smaller peer group. For example, Benjamin Gaulon and Ivan Twohig, as well as collaborating on artistic projects such as *Hard Drivin'* have also devised a strategy whereby they offer their artistic works for sale in an online store for artworks, akin to how art galleries and museums have their own stores. 'So instead of going through a gallery where someone takes commission' report the artists, 'we just said we'll do it for ourselves'. However, in a slight deference to the art world culture, they explain how the artists do not wish to 'be selling stuff' on their artist portfolio website<sup>111</sup>, and so the *ProtoNoir* website was conceived as a separate entity to their individual websites<sup>112</sup>. However, there is a benefit to this strategy, because 'once we had done that we could sell other people's works'. On the website itself it is also revealed how '*ProtoNoir* curates carefully the projects and artists featured on the website', in a gatekeeping role of its own. Thus, the strategy employed is one of detachment from traditional channels of commerce within a gallery space, yet one of inclusion towards other, similarly minded artists.

Maeve Connolly suggests that this strategy of detachment was 'maybe a more naive Utopian idea', in that the artists believe 'that somehow they can create another, alternative structure or situation in which their work can be engaged with as art'. For Connolly, this alternative imagining of their work of art is not to interrogate the museum 'on its own grounds, through acquisitions or through archival instructions'. Rather the attempt is to 'try to establish some kind of imagined alternative, some other forum' existing outside the remit of the museum<sup>113</sup>.

As we saw earlier, Conor McGarrigle's 'path of least resistance' is to detach from the gallery space in Ireland, observing that 'one of the things for myself is that I don't really pursue galleries in Ireland all that much'. For McGarrigle, the task of 'breaking into'

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111 Twohig explained how the personal website of the artist is now very important. He revealed how 'it's gone from the idea of the artists sketchbook and the weight that they put on your sketchbook [...] and that weight of how you lay out your ideas is also the same now with how you approach your website'. Thus, in an art world where curators have certain expectations around the design of the artists website, the artist now needs to be mindful of their online identity. Clearly, for Gaulon then, self-marketing on the personal 'portfolio' website was viewed as unacceptable, and a separate site was the option he chose for that aspect of his work.

112 See [www.protonoir.com](http://www.protonoir.com)

113 I concur with this assessment with respect to the attitudes and strategies that I encountered being adopted by the digital artists I met with during my ethnography and interview process, and suggest that digital art in Ireland does adopt a 'tone' of detachment from the museum space, rather than challenging and interrogating it.

the gallery scene in Ireland seems like a significant undertaking. ‘I probably should go and break down those walls and approach’, admitted McGarrigle, ‘but for me I don’t have the time and it’s the effort’ of pursuing that relationship with museums and galleries in Ireland when it is unproductive and costly for him emotionally<sup>114</sup>. He suggests that he is not alone in this strategy, that ‘there are a lot of artists I know who work in similar ways because again, it’s too much of an effort’, or that the artists consider an approach to a major gallery with the intent of persuading them of the merits of digital art ‘as an insurmountable thing’. For McGarrigle like other artists, an alternate strategy that provides more recognition and reward is to work abroad. In the next section I analyse how that strategy circumvents the perceived negativity towards digital art that the artists regard as part of the zeitgeist in the Irish art world.

### *9.3.3 Proactively Looking Outward*

As a response to institutional neglect, I have found that one strategy adopted by the digital artists is to detach from the mainstream art world in Ireland, to not critique the museum through acquisitions or documentation, but to grow alternative communities. Another strategy encountered is that of proactively looking abroad for commissions, conferences and exhibitions. I posit that this strategy follows on from the perceived reluctance on the part of the art world to engage with digital art is one that is prevalent in Ireland moreso than in other countries. Many participants attest to positive experiences abroad, with their work being received well and also known better abroad than in Ireland. One curator of a digital art festival also attests to this, noting how their festival is ‘better known outside Ireland than it is actually in Ireland. I have a huge international community that would be aware of it’. Yet this curator has had difficulty with recognition in Ireland in terms of funding for the festival.

Perhaps the most prominent example of an artist who is based in Ireland, yet more well known and successful abroad is Conor McGarrigle. As we saw in the previous section, he suggests that perhaps digital artists should attempt to approach the large contemporary art galleries in Ireland to represent digital art. However, for McGarrigle, this is an unproductive route, revealing how ‘it’s probably something I should do, but the

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<sup>114</sup> From experiences of the work not being well understood, to out and out rejection of the work as art

path of least resistance for me is to exhibit overseas'. He reveals that in his experience, 'there's more support structures in place' abroad. There are also more invites for work from countries in Europe, as well as offers from the United States. He reveals how 'my work is known in Spain and the United States, exhibited all over really, and relatively little in Ireland'. McGarrigle posits that this is not an unusual situation for digital artists, and this puts their foreign experiences at odds with their experiences in Ireland. 'Most people working digitally have experiences where they go into spaces, people know what they're doing, they fit in and see themselves in a tradition, a body of work, there's a discussion going on' observes McGarrigle. In his own experience, he has been funded by Spanish agencies to present work and discuss the work at various events. He reports the experience as 'incredible' due to the support of the audience, and the familiarity of the art audience with his work. He explains how it was 'an incredible amphitheatre, quite full and with an audience who actually knew the work'. In contrast to his experience in Dublin at the time in which he was 'not getting any shows, not really getting anywhere', in Spain the exhibition was 'full of people asking intelligent questions and with a good knowledge of what you've done and what you've done before'.

During other ethnographic encounters I observed how many artists were working, or attempting to work on an international level. Jaki Irvine had spent a number of months in Mexico prior to our interview, in order to shoot footage for a film. She has since moved there permanently. Jesse Jones, as I describe in the following chapter is, at the time of writing, in Los Angeles working on a new film project. Ivan Twohig has exhibited in Norway and France.

#### *9.3.4 Space as Solution*

Whilst the last sections have posited a fairly austere picture on digital art in Ireland, I suggest that there are opportunities to ameliorate this perception of under representation. Many of the artists I spoke to express a desire for more physical spaces where they could gather, collaborate and exhibit digital art. A number of artists suggest spaces such as Rhizome or MediaLab Prado as models for an Irish space where digital art could be more 'mainstreamed' as Cliona Harmey suggests. Harmey also discusses how the current economic crisis has freed up physical spaces that are being repurposed

as artistic spaces. For Harmey this represents an opportunity for ‘very young graduates that are sort of kids of the Celtic Tiger’ to develop grass roots types of collectives.

Ivan Twohig also speaks of the need for physical spaces, suggesting that creativity does not work predictably, and that ‘you can’t impose that higher level of brainstorming and creativity’ in an artistic space ‘unless the group is a tight group of people and they’re brainstorming’. Thus, an artistic space for digital art would need to be quite fluid in how it organises itself. For Twohig, a desired space would be ‘open to that type of creation, where people come together and meet’ as opposed to some spaces where ‘it seems kind of trendy now to say this type of stuff, like be a hub of creativity and lots of brainstorming sessions’ that for Twohig are ineffectual and ‘very forced’. The benefit to having an established space is that when the space becomes ‘situated’ with a physical presence, facilities and equipment, ‘people start to see it differently, you start maintaining an openness’. Such a space, I believe would help to foreground digital art in Ireland and stands as a proactive, positive stance on the under-representation that has been outlined thus far.

For another participant, a specifically digital space ‘would be to have something like an institution like Eyebeam in New York, not so much Rhizome, but something that has facilities, workshop facilities, something like V2 maybe, where people could act as a focus for the thing and it would provide practical facilities’. Alongside these practical facilities would be a space for the consideration of the ‘theoretical aspect’ and the ‘residency aspect’ of digital art ‘where people come for residencies, meet locals, have the exchange and to become part of this internationally’. This would be critical for the development of digital art in Ireland as it would extend the visibility of this art sector internationally. ‘We have to build local and then we can be part of a wider scene’ he suggests, where the collective expertise locally can be expanded through international networking and affiliations. He suggests that if such a space were to become a focal point for digital art in Ireland, ‘then that is something that negotiates with the other art institutions’ and is taken more seriously as an art form, and not just as ‘the Cinderella of Irish arts’.

Such findings lead me to suggest that the creation of a physical space modelled on centres such as V2 or Eyebeam in Ireland would foreground digital art in this country. Whilst the economic context may not be conducive towards this, there are commercial

spaces unfinished, or nearing completion, which is currently part of the public's property portfolio. Such spaces could be repurposed - in the spirit of digital art - towards an arts centre that foregrounds digital and electronic arts practices, theory and education.

## **9.4 Why is Digital Art Undersupported? An Institutional Perspective**

### *9.4.1 Introduction*

In chapters 4 and 8 I outlined what I considered to be certain specificities of the digital aesthetic. These included specific object characteristics of digital art, such as the interactive dimension to the work, complexities surrounding where the digital artwork resides, and the technological complexity of digital art. As outlined in chapter 4, certain digital artworks require a response from the spectator as they employ high levels of interactivity. The artworks also potentially only exist for a set amount of time that is linked to availability of digital technologies. Sometimes the digital artwork exists in an ephemeral state such as computer code, in the case of net art. I therefore suggest that the object characteristics recounted in the previous chapter, and in chapter 4 can raise issues at an art institution level that potentially make it difficult for the art institution to mount or to collect a digital art piece. It is these findings on representation at this meso level that I now analyse.

### *9.4.2 Understanding Digital Art*

In this section, I outline the broad mix and spread of opinions on digital art that emerged from curators and arts workers at an institutional level, ranging from an acknowledgement of a specific digital aesthetic, to a problematisation of working with digital artworks. In relation to an aesthetic dimension, Carolyn Jones from the RUA Red arts centre attests to the specific aesthetic of some digital art, whilst also problematising it in the context of more traditional art forms. 'I can look at a DaVinci in a book and go wow, that's extraordinary' revealed Jones, 'but if I see a circuit bending thing, that's great but to be honest it just looks like some junk wired together'. For Jones then, whilst digital art can concern itself with exposing the hidden dimension to technology, the aesthetic problem arising from that exposition of the inward workings and components of technological objects is that the aesthetic form and effect are such that traditional art audiences are not familiar with.

Another challenge of the digital aesthetic, according to Jones, concerns the unfamiliarity with the object characteristic previously posited which is the interactive nature of digital work, and how the work can not be fully appreciated and explored without the participatory dimension. 'I think that perhaps what the problem of some of this work is that it's very interactive' posited Jones. 'You do have to actually be with it and experience it and participate in it or participate in the process of creating it to really understand it'. Thus, the object characteristic of interactivity that I earlier suggested, in combination with a specifically digital aesthetic can lead to a poor understanding of digital art.

I also spoke to digital art curator who runs an electronic art festival in the South West of the country. This curator cites digital art as situated within a broader ethos of collaboration, and for her, that is what marks digital art out from other art forms. She explains how 'the history of open source [...] was a response to something', and that response is also present in digital art. For this participant, 'I think that's what makes it unique, about digital art, or even about open source software or open source hardware. It's still that ethos of sharing and collaboration, and that's what moves it forward as well'. Thus, the ethos of open-source and collaboration that was discussed in Chapter 8 is here picked up at a curatorial level in this instance, and cited as an example of a specificity of digital art that marks it apart from other art forms. For this participant, this marks the digital and electronic practices as an artistic medium in its own right, but that in an institutional context the art is not accepted as such, and therefore not valued. When asked as to why she thinks this might be the case, she suggests that 'I think it's because they just don't understand it as a medium'. Thus, for this participant, understanding and acceptance of digital art, as a medium in its own right, including the

collaborative and open source practices, is necessary at an institutional level to expand the representation of digital art in art institutions<sup>115</sup>.

I support this view by contrasting it with another viewpoint that I encountered in an interview with Tessa Giblin, curator at the Project Arts Centre in Dublin. Giblin reveals that ‘my primary interest as a curator is in contemporary art, and the medium that is used is always a secondary consideration’. Therefore, for Giblin, the concept or the idea behind the work is primary, and the medium through which that idea is executed is of lesser importance. Thus, the natural trajectory for Giblin in considering digital technologies is as tools, and not as a medium. ‘What I’m most interested in with digital media at the moment is how this can be used as a transferral tool’ she explains about her relationship with digital media. For Giblin, ‘the transition to digital format has reached a level that the loss of quality is not as paramount as it was before’. Thus, the digital technologies can be employed as tools for displaying, archiving and collecting visual work that otherwise would have been much more problematic to exhibit in the gallery due to unreliability, cost and obsolescence<sup>116</sup>. However, for Giblin, digital technologies do not constitute an art medium within the canon of contemporary art where she has situated her interest. I suggest that this viewpoint highlights the conceptual tensions at a

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115 The foregrounding of open-source resources was also foregrounded in a different context by Carolyn Jones at RUA Red, who attested to the potential of such tools in her work. She explained:

“I love open source stuff. I use quite a lot of it, personally and in work, and I think it represents a lot of opportunity because it’s so changeable. I think the joy of it is being able to play with it and change it, because you don’t just get it and it does a function and it can do anything really for you, and I find it all kind of exciting”

Her insight into the open-source ethos and community also had resonances in explaining the attraction of open-source resources for artists, noting that ‘people are really enthusiastic about actually making it work for you, because if they get to do that function or they write that script it opens up another element to that software which they may not have thought of’. Extending the conversation from open-source software to software and tools that facilitated her work at a curatorial level, Jones spoke to me about how freely-available tools can facilitate collaboration and participation at a gallery level. She explained how ‘most of us have laptops, most of us have cameras built in. We’ve had a conversation the other day where we said “we can just Skype in the New York exhibition”. We can task each other to do things on different days and we can come back and wave at each other on the camera, and it can be as simple as that’.

116 Giblin explained that the artists she is familiar with have been working historically on formats such as 35mm and 16mm. However, in her role as visual arts curator at the Project, she has ‘completely decided not to work with artists using 35mm in the gallery any more, because of the expense’, and because the quality improvements suggested above mean that the transferral to digital formats no longer represent such a huge compromise on visual quality. She observed that there are many compromises in an exhibition installation and that this compromise was one she was prepared to investigate. She did note a sadness in relation to a reluctance for galleries to adopt this strategy, because of ‘some really great artworks that have been made’ and the fact that these films ‘are just being lost to the entire generations because no one can afford to do it any more, and the risk of breaking, and the vulnerability of the medium’. Thus, for Giblin, transferring such works to a digital format could allow these works to continue to be disseminated, and therefore, the digital media are of benefit to her, the artist and the gallery audience as tools.



meso level, revealing how the gap in understanding between the two levels is evident from the perspective of the meso level.

Emer McGarry, curator at The Model arts centre in Sligo, expresses a positive stance and an openness to exhibiting digital art including practices beyond video art. She stated that along the moving image, she would ‘also think of sound art or I might think of installation work that doesn’t necessarily have moving image or sound elements but that would employ technology in some way’. However, she suggests that technology ‘should be just a means to an end, rather than an end. If it becomes an end in itself, it just becomes a gimmick in an artwork world’. Thus at the institutional level, a perceived fetishisation of technology within a digital art piece is potentially read as excessively techno-centric, gimmicky and trite.

However some digital art practice aims to critique technology through exploring technology. Thus, I suggest that what constitutes a technological ‘gimmick’ in a digital artwork when viewed through a traditional art aesthetic is viewed differently through a critical aesthetic analysis of digital art that takes account of its specificities<sup>117</sup>.

Thus there are several considerations to be aware of when examining the understanding of digital art at a meso level. The contemporary art debates surrounding the art ‘medium’ appear to be uncritically transplanted to digital art. This leads to an understanding of digital art as a fetishisation of technological means where the aesthetic dimension of digital art is not considered as different to contemporary art aesthetics, as is required of it - see section 5 of chapter 4. This misunderstanding of the aesthetics of the digital medium thus lead to an impoverishment of representation at institutional level. In the next section I recount issues of collection and acquisition of digital works that also prove to be a barrier to representation of digital art.

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117 This is not to say that when all digital art is considered in this way, the misunderstandings it are reversed and somehow it is revealed in some true and profoundly revolutionary light. I have also seen some bad digital art - at a presentation of various digital artists’ work in the *Hello Operator* gallery in Dublin, I was most disappointed by one artist from Holland who completely overplayed the intentionality on her part when revealing to the audience visual examples of computer code malfunctions, or ‘glitches’. This artist also supported the validity of her artistic oeuvre by comparing her ‘glitch’ art to the uneasy, jarring aesthetic of the Daniel Libeskind designed Jewish Museum in Berlin. My disappointment was also due to having many years ago in the late 1990s encountered ‘glitches’ in earlier versions of software imaging programs. I recalled how at the time of my discovery of these ‘glitches’, I wondered if this could be appropriated as art. I decided that in all conscience I could not determine such glitches as art, as they required no intentionality on my part, nor did they possess any theoretical, ethical or revelatory dimension that could possibly add any contribution to the art canon, digital or otherwise.

### 9.4.3 Issues of Collection and Acquisition

In chapter 4 I posited that object characteristics, where the art work resides, and technological complexity were all characteristics of digital art. I now draw on the primary research to argue here that such characteristics can be problematic in terms of collecting an artwork in an institutional context. Emer McGarry suggests that despite the threat of the ‘gimmick’ in digital art, ‘ideally, we would love to be able to collect digital art and to enable artists, to give them a fellowship, and to commission more digital art’ at The Model gallery. However, McGarry provides an example of digital art that in the context of the more ‘traditional’ video art could even be problematic for a longer-term acquisition strategy for The Model.

She explains how ‘in terms of collecting it, we definitely have the added problem of, we would have to buy a synchronization machine’ in order to handle multichannel video that may be synchronised by motion or pressure sensors<sup>118</sup>. Another aspect of the collection dilemma for galleries such as The Model concerns issues related technological obsolescence. McGarry gives an account of a digital artist that had exhibited in The Model, Nina Canell<sup>119</sup>. She had been impressed by the work and had expressed a desire to collect it. However, McGarry problematises storage and obsolescence regarding such works. ‘Thinking about some particular works of art that would be lovely to have in our collection, say Ninas work, where the technology becomes obsolete’, suggests McGarry, ‘you’ve got a huge maintenance issues with it then, and you would have to think about storing that work because it can be very bulky as well’. Thus, issues of maintenance and

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118 As an example of such a work that had been exhibited by *The Model*, McGarry spoke about a Jaki Irvine piece they exhibited. McGarry explained how ‘all her work, it does employ a high level of technology, and again it has a sync unit and that was quite complex. I mean, all the disks had to be programmed with the unit. So it was like a hard drive and the units told each disc when it needed to come on and off’. However, this heavy time investment in the technology was worth it for McGarry. She revealed how ‘for Jackie’s [piece] it was really effective. It was very beautiful. We had loads of screens in one big gallery and it followed a birds path in flight. So he’d vanish for a little while and then come back, so it was lovely. So she is a great example of how artists can use technology to create really strong, beautiful, very moving works’.

119 Canell is originally from Sweden, but moved to Dublin in 2005. Her practice incorporates sculptural elements, often with electronic components. One review, in *Circa* magazine, 2008, described Canell as ‘bright as a new pin’. The review of her work *Slight Heat of The Eyelid* described how ‘most of Canell’s pieces have wire exiting from them and some form of electronics involved’. Yet also observed by the reviewer was how Canell ‘liberates us from the potentially baffling physics with obscure but descriptive titles and reassuringly familiar objects’. Source: <http://www.recirca.com/reviews/2008/texts/canell.shtml> retrieved April 26th 2011.

of obsolescence of technology, along with the physical dimensions of digital art work can be problematic for an art institution.

Carolyn Jones also problematises the aesthetic of digital art in terms of collecting and archiving. Jones advocates the use of documentation, also suggesting that technologies are now currently available to archivists to enable more thorough documentation of digital works. Jones suggests a solution to the problem of archival by suggesting that 'it's how we put that across in documents. In some ways it's great because if you have video recordings, interviews, people seeing people actually interacting, which we have, [...] I think it's a better way for people to learn'. Thus, whilst a digital artwork can be temporally ephemeral, the concomitant increase in digital archival tools can enable a rich archive around the artwork to exist, textually and visually.

Thus, while the capital cost of the technological equipment may be absorbed in expenditure budgets for a gallery, the ongoing cost of skilled labour for maintaining the equipment may also be prohibitive enough to prevent a gallery from investigating digital art not only for collections but for exhibitions. I therefore suggest that even if a gallery does not wish to collect a piece of digital art, the mere prospect of exhibiting a work can seem daunting, thus discouraging the gallery from investigating the exhibition of digital and electronic art<sup>120</sup>.

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120 This is not to say that the problem of acquisition and collection is solely at the institutional level. One participant revealed quite a shocking story whereby she discovered that a 9-channel work had been 'ripped' by the institution for their use online. In this case, the institution had decided to take the issue of 'archival' into their own hands by copying the work, illegally. I suggest that example was one of the institution attempting to repurpose the digital work, perhaps due to issues of money, or as Lovejoy pointed out, the form of representation has fundamentally shifted with digital, the artwork 'residing' on a DVD or hard disk until it is brought to representation. Perhaps for this institution, the artwork was not 'real' whilst it was a DVD copy or in low-definition online.

## **9.5 Conclusion - an Opportunity for Representation**

In this chapter I have drawn on the primary research materials to examine aspects of issues related to the relationship between the micro and meso levels of enquiry by providing accounts of the support and representation of digital art from both directions. The chapter finds and argues that support of digital art practices can be problematised through (1) the lens of contemporary art discourse and (2) a lens of postcoloniality in Irish art critique.

The chapter also argues that certain attitudes on the part of digital artists in Ireland have led to a strategy of disengagement with the broader art world in Ireland. I indicate how the artists proactively look abroad for reward and recognition in the perceived absence of such in Ireland, and how they also collaborate not only on artistic projects, but on strategic ones. I outlined how artists view the need for physical space as an important one, and noted that several artists have looked to models of digital art spaces abroad for potential models of how one could be implemented in Ireland.

The chapter also analysed how at the meso level of the art institution, art curators can have material difficulty with exhibiting, collecting and archiving digital art, and that issues of representation are due to the perceived complexities of digital works in terms of technical support and maintenance of the works. This draws on a theoretical perspective from chapter 4 which posited certain features or characteristics of digital art.

To conclude, I suggest that a remedy to the perceived lack of support and representation may lie in the fallout from the Irish economic crisis itself. With physical spaces becoming available, there are opportunities for digital artists to form a collective that can model itself on international exemplars such as V2, Rhizome, Eyebeam or MediaLab Prado. With the combination of practical, theoretical and residency aspects of the institution, this space could become an internationally known resource for digital art, encouraging a discourse with the wider art world.

**Chapter 10**  
**The Political Economy of Art**

## Chapter 10: The Political Economy of Art

### 10.1 Introduction: Political Engagement with the Arts in Ireland

#### *10.1.1 Introduction: A History of Foregrounding the Arts*

This chapter aims to analyse the macro-level political and economic discourses pertaining to both digital art and its broader situatedness within art and cultural discourses. This is in keeping with themes from chapters 3 and 4, where it was argued that art can not be considered as outside both political and economic concerns. Current discourses in Ireland have been making explicit calls to the arts and cultural services to act as a ‘rescue’ when political and economic measures, including massive bank bailouts, have failed to shore up confidence in the Irish financial and economic model. For these and other reasons, I suggest that the current crisis in Ireland is not merely economic, but social and cultural. In this chapter I analyse how the arts in Ireland have fared in the midst of this crisis; at once they are lauded as a saviour with the insight and inspiration to lead the way where our political institutions have failed, while also having to work against massive threats to funding.

When the government budget was announced in December 2009, both the Irish Film Board and Culture Ireland despite the recommendations of the McCarthy report. The department of the arts was also spared, and surprisingly, the overall budget of the Arts Council, rumoured to be facing radical downsizing, was only cut by approximately 5.6%<sup>121</sup>. I suggest that this turn to culture has not happened without historical precedent. Cultural studies discourses since 1980 have foregrounded and emphasised the role of culture in social and economic development<sup>122</sup>.

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121 Source: National Campaign for the Arts, December 2009 <http://www.ncfa.ie/index.php/blog/comments/national-campaign-for-the-arts-response-to-budget-2010-press-release/>

122 While this ‘cultural turn’ has had the benefits of widening the discourse in relation to the importance of culture - against a reductionist economic model of culture - I believe that the foregrounding of culture to the exclusion of where and how culture is politically and socially situated is equally reductionist and does not afford due consideration to the complexities of the production of culture within a complex civic and political society. This is in keeping with Frankfurt School theory, which as we saw in chapter 3 could not treat the production of culture as a realm apart from the society and the political zeitgeist in which it was being produced.

In addressing the current policy turn to the arts and cultural sector in Ireland, I note how this ‘turn to culture’ is not without historical precedence in the Irish state. 1981 saw the establishment of an Arts Council-funded body called *Aosdána*, founded to reward excellence in the arts. The reward for excellence is not just a symbolic gesture invoked by the prestige of membership; those who are recognised by being admitted into *Aosdána* also receive an annual stipend, called the *cnuas*, which currently stands at €10,180<sup>123</sup>. Membership of *Aosdána* is limited to 250 artists across various disciplines, and is negotiated through a process of peer-review<sup>124</sup> and election. Within this group of 250 artists is a subset of 7 members called *saoi*, whose title is bestowed by the president for an outstanding contribution to the arts. *Aosdána* was established by the then prime-minister of Ireland, Charles Haughey during a time of severe economic recession. In a later interview, Haughey explained the difficulties in doing this, yet emphasised the importance of the arts, explaining that ‘the establishment of *Aosdána* was a major innovation and a very significant element of my policy of enhancing the status of creative people in our society. It was intended to be their own independent academy, elected by themselves’ (Ryan, 2003: 83).

When asked whether establishing *Aosdána* fit in with the economic zeitgeist at the time, Haughey says ‘Not really. You must remember that in the 1980s, [...] the country was in a very depressed state, with massive unemployment, high emigration, huge deficits, crushing borrowings, a generally pretty bleak outlook. In these grim circumstances economic development had to take priority; the provision of jobs and sorting out the nation’s finances. It was not very easy to find money for culture and the arts but we managed to lay the foundations for a brighter future’ (ibid.: 84).

Yet, Haughey did persist with his commitment to the arts. Why? As Haughey explained, ‘in Ireland, we have had a sad history of our creative people going abroad either for economic reasons or from what they felt was an unsympathetic or even hostile climate. I felt that it was necessary to radically change all that. I wished the modern Irish State to make a positive gesture to our creative people. I wished it to say to them,

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123 Source, Arts Council of Ireland <http://aosdana.artscouncil.ie/Cnuas.aspx>

124 See Chapter 9 for a problematisation of the peer-review system by Jaki Irvine.

in effect, “you are valued members of our community. Your contribution is of unique importance. We wish you to stay and work here at home” (ibid.: 80).

Thus, I suggest that the current ‘turn to culture’ in Ireland has a precedent. The ‘cultural turn’ of the 1980s facilitated a discourse around the foregrounding of art and culture. Combined with the sympathy of the then prime-minister towards art, policies that supported the arts - even though they were introduced at a time of crisis - had long-term implications for the artist in Ireland. I suggest that this prior foregrounding of the arts set a precedent that had implications for the events surrounding the role of the arts in the current crisis.

### *10.1.2 Contemporary Discourses on Art and Crisis*

I now turn to present discourses on art in Ireland at this time of crisis, in order to situate digital art within a broader macro-level discourse. As I examine below, political institutions, broadcasting and print media, along with artists themselves have all been foregrounding the role of the arts and culture during this current crisis. As one national newspaper exhorted shortly after a government think-tank on reviving the economy, ‘the arts cement our reputation abroad, are crucial to our smart economy, provide employment at home, fuel cultural tourism, and help form the nation’s psyche – they are vital to our national recovery’ (Irish Times, September 23 2009).

This foregrounding of the ‘arts-as-rescuer’ trope has also been prioritised on RTÉ, Ireland’s state broadcaster. As I examine later, RTÉ has in recent times devoted significant time to coverage and debate on the arts and its role in rethinking ‘brand Ireland’. This programming strategically occurred during the week of the Irish national holiday, and on a peak morning-time radio magazine entitled *Morning Ireland*. A subsequent debate was held in April 2010 on RTÉ’s peak *Drivetime* evening radio show.

Political institutions have also been engaging with the role of arts, seemingly attesting to their importance in an ignoring of the advice of economist and *Bord Snip Nua* chairman, Colm McCarthy’s recommendations on the abolition of several cultural institutions. One government response to the McCarthy report was to convene a myriad of Irish innovators for a forum on innovation, recovery, and ‘rebranding’ Ireland’s image



abroad. This was not an isolated event - Irish government policy has shown that innovation is considered to be important, with Forfás (Ireland's national policy advisory body for enterprise and science) noting that 'while enterprises and individuals are the primary sources of innovation, public policy can establish the right framework conditions for innovation to flourish' (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2008: 2). Whilst this sort of vague recommendation and commendation is something to be wary of, it does highlight that discourses around creativity, innovation, and the importance of fostering these traits in the workforce are of some importance to the government.

#### *10.1.2.1 Global Irish Forum, Brand Ireland and Imagine Ireland*

The current sense in Ireland that artists can contribute to improving the economic, social and cultural lot of the people therefore has a historical backdrop along with a contemporary foregrounding mapped to discourses around innovation and the 'smart' economy. The policies introduced in the 1980s, including Aosdána, and a tax exemption scheme for artists showed that there existed a political will to engage with the arts, even when economically challenging to do so. The first department for the arts in Ireland was established at that time, further acknowledging the status of the arts within the political zeitgeist. So, turning to the current climate where Colm McCarthy recommended the undoing of so many of those long-term policies, I explore how the current government has been situating the role of arts in the current moment of crisis.

One answer to this lies in the Global Irish Economic Forum, organised with major support from the department of Foreign Affairs in September 2009. This forum encouraged members of the Irish diaspora to contribute their thoughts to a quasi 'think-tank' on economic recovery. The forum included prominent business professionals, but significantly, cultural producers were also invited to take part, with one of the eleven working groups focused on 'what role can Ireland's cultural and artistic capital play in developing our economy?'.

A major theme that emerged from the forum was the 'recognition of the importance of culture in promoting Ireland abroad and developing a unique brand for the country in new markets'. The report continued by noting how 'most participants agreed that our

unique and strong cultural identity provides the Government and the private sector with a strong competitive advantage abroad'<sup>125</sup>. Thus, the interplay of the arts and the state was foregrounded during these discussions. To implement this foregrounding of the arts and culture as a marker for national identity abroad, one initiative proposed was to 'establish world class centre or University for the performing arts and Irish culture housed in a landmark building in Ireland, to become a global centre for artistic and creative education, innovation and technology'.

The Forum also included a panel discussion on the topic of 'Promoting Brand Ireland through our Global Cultural Profile'. The report on this panel observed that 'speakers were united in agreement on the importance of arts and culture, not merely for arts sake. It was forcefully argued that this asset should be harnessed as a unique brand identifier, a significant employer and selling point for Ireland abroad'. Once again, the infamous McCarthy report was also discussed, with one newspaper reporting how 'reference was made to "terrible consequences" resulting if the recommendations of the McCarthy Report in the cultural sphere were implemented'. Another feature of the panel discussion was that of the conflating of the cultural and economic spheres, with the report disclosing that 'participants strongly argued that the arts are no longer a luxury or a charity, but are a hugely important part of the economy'. There was also some dissent amongst the discussion group in relation to the question of Ireland being 'rebranded' at all, the report stating that 'a number of speakers questioned the view that Ireland should be 're-created' as a brand, which would by nature be inauthentic, and emphasised the importance of authenticity in delivering a positive tourist experience for people visiting'.

These discussions culminated in March 2010 with the installation of a cultural ambassador for Ireland - the actor Gabriel Byrne - whose remit was to represent Ireland abroad for cultural matters. This was followed by a more ambitious venture, entitled *Imagine Ireland*, a €4 million<sup>126</sup> investment designed to foreground Irish arts in

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125 A similar theme featured in information society policy discourses from the 1990s, not only in Ireland but in other countries' 'information society' strategies.

126 <http://www.arts-sport-tourism.gov.ie/publications/release.asp?ID=101024>

America<sup>127</sup>. I suggest that a contextualisation of the current discourses in the Irish political, media and artistic spheres through an analysis based on the investigations of Benjamin and Adorno reveals weaknesses in the discourses surrounding the ‘arts as rescuer’ trope. Whilst in many areas the apparent ‘turn to culture’ in crisis provided for a frank discussion of the ways in which Ireland could be economically improved, I suggest that in the context of Benjamin and Adorno’s critique of culture, to mobilise culture for the purposes of economic gain is problematic. While Benjamin pointed to the potential of culture to liberate society, Adorno critiqued this romanticism, firmly providing the caveat that when the profit motive of cultural production was primary, it no longer fulfilled its highest goal of reifying the incongruencies of civic and political spheres. For Adorno, if culture was mobilised not to critique social inadequacies, but to be profitable, culture would become regressive and non-innovative. Therefore, for the Irish government - whose industrial policies currently focus on fostering economic growth via inward investment and innovation - the use of culture in such a way potentially brings about a culture that merely conforms to capitalist ideology, thus annihilating innovative potential<sup>128</sup>, according to Adorno.

#### *10.1.2.2 Media Engagement with Art and Crisis*

From the 15th to the 19th of March 2010, Ireland’s national broadcaster RTÉ featured in its flagship morning radio news programme Morning Ireland, a series of interviews that explored the role of the arts and culture in reviving Ireland’s economy during this

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127 The program, launched on January 7th 2011 aimed to include over one thousand artists and performers in 400 events in 40 states, and is currently ongoing at the time of writing. On the *Imagine Ireland* website itself, reference is given to its strategic origins in Farmleigh, noting that the venture ‘followed on the Global Irish Economic Forum at Farmleigh, Dublin, in September 2009, which placed a new strategic priority on culture as a unique long-term strength for Ireland, a vital door-opener for Irish business, and the most effective means of strengthening links with the global Irish community’.

128 This is not to say that I oppose state-sponsored arts. A recent discussion by economist John O’Hagan at Trinity College Dublin suggested that there is a conflict, not between ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, but between commercial arts and state arts. He attested to the role of the arts as social innovator, its role of critique, and the economic spill-over of the arts into other areas of employment. This provided an argument in favour of state-sponsored arts in their role as a test-bed for the commercial sector. O’Hagan posited that the state must therefore play the lead role in encouraging the arts, as the state arts somewhat act as a ‘loss leader’ but that they are a magnet for other industries. However, I note that in their role of ‘test-bed’, the arts at this incubatory stage need to have the freedom to not be entangled with the economic sphere, and according to the report on the Global Irish Economic Forum, this important distinction of the role of culture was overlooked.

time of crisis<sup>129</sup>. The included cultural producers, some of whom also spoke at Farmleigh, voiced a unanimous opposition to what were perceived as short-cuts on public spending in the McCarthy report. They also mooted somewhat of a dissatisfaction with monetising culture in order to ‘rebrand’ Ireland for a profit motive.

These series of radio interviews were significant in several ways. First, they were broadcasted throughout the week of Ireland’s national holiday, which was a strategic move given that it was noted at the Forum that ‘of the three million people who regularly access the RTÉ website, 40% are based overseas’. Second, RTÉ continues to have the full interviews available, despite having a general policy of listening back for a week. This availability encouraged those of the 40% of distant listeners to listen to the discussions, even if they missed them during the typical week long availability period. Third, the interviews foregrounded the arts as a way of ‘rebranding’ Ireland, and therefore took a position of investigating arts and culture as an economic entity with the potential to drive economic renewal and growth.

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129 One interview focused on the economics of encouraging the arts. Finbarr Bradley, a heterodox economist, argued that human relationships are more important than technology, and that digital media can distribute the ‘stories’ and meaning that he believes Ireland is good at. He also suggested that public policy discourses around innovation and creativity are centred around words such as the ‘knowledge economy’ and the ‘smart economy’ and are centred around the technology, not the emotion. Bradley however, was of the opinion that this should be the other way around for Ireland - to focus on our strength, which for him was the expression of emotion. Bradley, while an economist himself, was critical of the McCarthy report on public spending cuts in terms of the arts. He suggested that the problem with such a report is that it is fundamentally flawed from a policy perspective to use the short term to do damage in the long term. James Hickey, an expert in entertainment law suggested that Ireland needed to recognise the existing strength of the creative industries and the arts. Hickey cited a report from European Commission suggesting that creative industries are worth 2.6% of overall GDP. In Ireland, Indecon did a study of the economic impact of the arts in Ireland that found that the arts account for 3.5% of GDP. The report also found that between direct & indirect employment there are nearly 100,000 people in Ireland working in the creative industries. Hickey then called for policy that encourages growth in that industry and that existing schemes to encourage the arts be left in place. Hickey was critical of Colm McCarthy’s report that suggested removing the dept of arts, sport & tourism, the tax incentives for artists, or the film board. Fiach Mac Conghail, Artistic Director of the Abbey Theatre<sup>8</sup>, posited that Irish society is currently ‘fractured’, but that the arts can provide an enlightenment, through the dramatisations of events on stage, that allows the audience to introspect on themselves, and their role in society. While he admits that theatre can not offer a solution to the economic, cultural and societal woes currently in Ireland, it ‘can offer a roadmap or revelation’. Colm Tóibín, an author, suggested that Ireland has recently suffered a blow to its image abroad due to the banking crisis, and the sexual abuse scandals in the church. He posited that in terms of improving this image, the arts have been crucial. Tóibín was also very critical of the McCarthy report, asserting that institutions that were threatened in the report are strategically vital for the country, and need to be maintained. He also suggested that within universities, the arts and humanities faculties needed to be protected, as they ‘produce the sort of intellectual capital that is very hard to measure in the same way as the engineering departments’. He observed that positive policies in terms of the arts were put in place and that ‘to begin dismantling any of that would be extremely dangerous’. Neil Jordan, a film-maker and producer and film maker, spoke in response to the discussion at the Global Irish Economic Forum of cultural ‘products’. He found a difficulty with the idea of ‘monetising culture’ and using culture as a product. When asked about continuing with institutions such as Aosdána, Jordan posited that such an institution provides a stable income for a practicing artist and should be retained, noting that ‘as every country has to have a hospital service, every country has to have cultural funding, doesn’t it? Isn’t that one of the definitions of being a country?’.

I suggest that the Irish state broadcaster has been seen to be interrogating the role of arts and culture in 'rebranding' Ireland. However, if we once again turn to Benjamin and Adorno, we are drawn to the question of the manufacturing of an 'affirmative' culture. If the state broadcaster sets an agenda of culture-as-economic-rescuer, there is the danger of that broadcaster setting an agenda whereby culture is seen only for its economic potential, and not for the wider civic, social and even ethical insights it can provide. Again, Adorno provides a caveat - it is not a given that culture in the form of an autonomous art *will* provide these insights, but it does *in potential* have this ability, whereas a culture based on profit or, for that matter, state direction, does not. Also, considering Benjamin's concept of aura in this context, I suggest that as the national public service broadcaster, RTÉ may possess both the sense of authenticity, of historical testimony and indeed the cultural objects themselves that make the possibility of their agenda having an auratic component. Therefore, to frame the interviews in Benjamin's context, the state broadcaster can use this aura - this sense of authenticity - to promote culture-as-economic-rescuer in such a way as to preclude the more dialectic approach of culture-as-potential-to-inform-about-other-possibilities. Thus, as predicted by Adorno, the relationship between civic society and culture becomes 'petrified' into that mode, and other discourses around culture are lost.

## **10.2 The Role of Art at a Time of Crisis**

### *10.2.1 Introduction*

As outlined earlier, there has been a recent ‘turn to culture’ in Irish political discourse and practice, which has seen the arts foregrounded as economic ‘rescuer’ during Ireland’s financial crisis. I here interrogate and problematise this trope of ‘arts as rescuer’ somewhat more granularly in this section, by looking once more to artists’ opinions on what they consider to be their ‘role’ - if any - at this time. As I analysed earlier in chapter 8, a cohort of digital artists felt that their ‘role’ was to critique technology’s role in society through the use, manipulation and undermining of technological means and systems. In this section, I analyse how I expanded the enquiry to ask digital artists and arts workers where they see their role at the time of crisis, when arts have been foregrounded at a macro political-economic level.

### *10.2.2 Artist Perspectives*

As analysed in chapter 3, the ‘role’ of the artist according to the Frankfurt School of critical theory is a complex one, involving societal critique and interrogation, whilst also comprising a somewhat visionary role, where the potential meaning of society could be explored and envisioned. We also saw how the Frankfurt School also distanced itself from a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the role of art, which saw the only valid art as overtly political art. Drawing from this theoretical perspective, I aimed to draw from artists and arts workers a temporally situated account of the relevance of such discourses on art. As Frankfurt School theorists wrote at a time of great economic, social and political instability, I explore whether or how their observations had relevance to the current mode of instability, or if postmodern critique and globalised culture placed the discourse around ‘role’ in art as obsolete.

Gerard Byrne reveals how he is not ‘phobic’ about discourses of ‘role’ or ‘function’ in art, rather suggesting that ‘to work around those ideas of role and function might be a useful thing to do, when at the same time being very circumspect and very critical about any claims or conclusions within that field’. As an example, Byrne posits a theoretical

position on the role of art which suggests that all artworks act as a ‘model’ for other artworks. He observes that this position is in contrast to a more typical suggestion of the role of art as a special, rarefied ‘encounter’ with a combination of knowledge and the sublime. For Byrne, the current mode of capitalism has brought about a ‘ubiquity about the means by which the work is made’. This situation makes the means through which the work has been made, unremarkable. For Byrne however, this brings about a zeitgeist in which his work is ‘something to be read’ as ‘something legible within a broader cultural syntax’, as opposed to a rarefied, auratic object<sup>130</sup>. Byrne suggests that interrogating the role or function of art in this way can yield oblique, tangential and unfamiliar insights. The discourse opened up is of a different ‘tradition’ in terms of the role or function of art, to that tradition that presumes that the art aspires to be unique and unprecedented experiential encounter. In this way, Byrne attests to the ongoing intellectual validity of interrogating the role of art.

However, in the current crisis he finds it ‘curious as to why on the one hand [the McCarthy report on public spending] was commissioned, and on the other hand, largely ignored’. For Byrne, it is ‘conspicuous from afar that the same government that commissioned this McCarthy character to do this audit, then basically pretty much ignored all his recommendations’. Byrne suggests that ‘the real cynic would wonder if the report was commissioned precisely so that it could be ignored’.

For Maeve Connolly, the social roles of artistic practice are more ‘fluid’, instead Connolly positing that art has ‘quite a communicative function’. In Connolly’s view, the practice of art can stand in a ‘counterpoint’ to Habermas’ theory of the continuity of rationality. Whilst Connolly notes that ‘a lot of artists have really bought into the idea of the public sphere and the idea of constituting publics, and the potential that exists through art practice and engaging in that, or making it possible’, she suggests that this standpoint can be overly rational about the social function of art, which she found problematic. For Connolly, the counterpoint is to interrogate the conditions of artistic production, the dependence on the economy, and changing labour practices, and to

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130 Byrne described his work as ‘primarily discursive’, and because of this, it acts as a type of model for other works.

situate those interrogations with ‘the capacity to be social, but not just to be involved in this incredibly ruthless production of the self as a project’<sup>131</sup>.

Regarding the current crisis in Ireland then, Connolly warns that the political turn to culture is ‘really dangerous in some ways’. For Connolly, the danger exists in the ring-fencing of funds away from the day-to-day needs of artists and towards the production of a brand. She posits that ‘if funding for example by organisations like Culture Ireland starts to become really heavily instrumentalised to communicate this message of “brand Ireland”, that’s really at odds with the kind of resourcing artists need to operate in an international artworld’. Thus, whilst turning the attention towards exhibiting and showcasing existent cultural products abroad, the policy is in danger of cutting off funding to emergent artists and thus in a sense, cutting off the potential at source. As Connolly observes, artists ‘cannot be too prominently marked by that kind of rhetoric without being disadvantaged’ when trying to establish themselves internationally.

However, whilst Byrne and Connolly engage with concepts such as the role of art and the potential of art, not all artists are affirmative of the validity of discourses of role or function. Ciara McMahon explains how she becomes ‘really nervous’ around a discourse of ‘role’. For McMahon, a discourse around the role of an artist ‘implies obligation’. McMahon describes how she ‘would be very nervous about pejorative applications of the word obligation and role’, as it potentially implies a loss of artistic autonomy. McMahon elaborates on this point by explaining how she considers the type of practice she engaged in as of her own free choice and free will. Her motivation has ‘come from medicine and the desire to interact with people’, which for her is not determined or determining, but a free choice to develop her practice in such a way.

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131 Connolly suggested how interrogating this trope of ‘production of the self as a project’ in contemporary art reveals insights about deeper economic, monetary and capitalist modes of production. She revealed how in working with young critics and curators, she saw their belief in needing to engage in a ‘period of hyper production, really a production of themselves as a brand’. She believed that the curators themselves believed ‘that they were operating and competing in this globalised economy as an independent curator’, and they also believed that they could work in such a hyper-productive mode ‘for a few years and then they get into an institution and well, then they could take a deep breath and relax’. However, partly due to the crisis, that trajectory was no longer likely, and this crisis in curatorial ‘hyper-practice’ then revealed a deeper role for artistic practice. For Connolly, ‘what you end up is having to stop and calm down a bit, and think how is it possible for these interactions, these situations to have some kind of meaning or significance that isn’t about propelling you to the next moment’. Through a more Deleuzian theoretical influence, Connolly posited that this curatorial practice can be recalibrated away from the trope of becoming their own brand or self-as-project, through ‘understanding our [artistic] practice as a kind of offering a space or kind of moment in which it’s possible to think about these things, and to talk about them, and to question them’. Thus, artistic practice, for Connolly, can provide a ‘gap’ in our contemporary world.



When asked about the potential role of the arts or the artist, McMahon stated ‘have I a duty to do it? No’. For McMahon, the role of art is not necessarily political. ‘A beautiful aesthetic object or an ugly aesthetic object has as much a role as the type of work that I would do’ posits McMahon. She suggests how her life is ‘enriched’ by artistic objects in her possession, objects that ‘are aesthetically pleasing to me, they may not be to you, but to me, and that’s a really important thing for me’. Thus, for McMahon, the creation of aesthetic objects is the important gesture ‘even if it’s connected politically with society, allegedly, or overtly’. This gesture then becomes much bigger than a political one, as the aesthetic drive for her is a universal. ‘I think it’s a covertly embedded and really important part of being human, that we like beauty, that we like to be jarred by ugliness, we like that kind of thing’ concludes McMahon.

Another digital artist is also wary of the relationship between government sponsorship and artistic production. In her view ‘I just think there is a payoff, like somebody has to pay for stuff’. This artist explains that there is, in her opinion, a trade-off between government grants and autonomy. With respect to the Brand Ireland concept then, she suggests that ‘if artists want to get something from the government, there is always going to be a price’. For this artist, the price is that cultural products are potentially commercialised through the government endeavour to rebrand Ireland. She is also wary of how the government situates culture, observing that ‘I don’t know if they do appreciate art, and if they do appreciate it, it’s just another marketing tool that they can use’. Thus, for this artist, the relationship between artistic autonomy and state sponsorship with a particular agenda of marketing and branding is problematic.

Therefore, whilst a discourse on the role of the artist at a time of crisis can be problematic, I suggest that the insights from the practitioners above show some consistency in terms of the potential of art to be transformative, to open up space, a gap in the current tropes of production and society, as argued of the potential of art in chapter 4.

### *10.2.3 The Place of the Institution*

Moving on to examine how the arts institutions understand their place - or role - at the time of crisis, Tessa Giblin also warns that the turn to culture in political discourse

through 'brand Ireland' is problematic. She suggests that whilst it could be seen as a positive gesture to have a 'flagship' type cultural enterprise to foreground the arts, 'your flagship is also the thing you sink when it all goes wrong'. For Giblin, a better way of understanding the question of role, function or potential of art during this crisis is to ask 'the fundamental question of why art?'. Giblin suggests that at an individual level - for the practitioner themselves, the critic, the academic - the question should be contemplated. She revealed how she practices a reflexivity around why she chooses to work in the area of art, of all possible careers. 'The clearest thing I can say about it' posits Giblin 'is that it's the area in which I am most inspired to have an independent thought, something of my own that I came up with'<sup>132</sup>. For Giblin then, a more fundamental question surrounding 'brand Ireland' is not if art should be marketed in such a way, but if art has the kind of potential to inspire independent, autonomous thought. 'And frankly I do' concludes Giblin, adding how art, in its potential 'teaches you to take responsibility for your own thought, and your own decision, and your own action'.

The result of this for Giblin is that art can question ideologies, including those of authority itself. She observes how 'art can also provide a destabilisation of authority, and not just political'. For Giblin, this questioning of authority can extend to more subtle forms such as 'the authority of the aesthetic gaze', or the authority of the artist', or that of 'who writes the narrative'. Giblin posits that through that destabilisation of authority in the space of the gallery, the gallery audience maintains an autonomy which can be practised in general forms. 'By destabilising that in the space of the gallery so that you don't give over your spectators autonomy to anyone, the curator, the artist, the actor onscreen, the material of the sculpture', posits Giblin, 'you don't give over that autonomy. I feel that you start to retain a little bit more autonomy in your everyday life as well. I mean the gallery world is not in everyday life, it's a special place that you enter into'. Thus, for Giblin, the potential of art - the highest form of its role - involves questioning authority, including a political authority. I therefore suggest that any 'top-down' attempt to shape the arts into a culture machine for branding a financially

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132 Giblin explained how this inspiration 'might be well gazing at a film that I'm seeing for the third time, that I'm being around but not totally concentrating on, it might be sitting in the corner of the gallery writing some notes in my notebook having just seen a number of wonderful works intelligently put together'. Giblin suggested that 'if you're someone who values independent thought yourself, no matter how complex or simple, something that really sends a shiver down your spine and sets you on fire, that the sector that I've had it in - contemporary art'.

bankrupt country has very real and dangerous pitfalls in the form of the propping up of political ideologies.

Other institutional representatives speak in a focused way about the role of their institution. Alison Carey of the Science Gallery reveals how she would have ‘no qualms’ in positioning the Science Gallery as ‘provocateurs’ who ‘mean to put things together and shake them up’. This provocation is not, for Carey, on the level of thought and critique only, but is extended ‘to provoke action really’. She reveals how, in connecting art, science and technology, the gallery ‘want[s] to incite research, we want to incite discussion, but also we want to make things happen’. Carey reveals how her role within that space is driven by a desire to ‘create some contexts in which amazing things can happen, and if I can provide the right environment and the right tools for something to happen...you can’t legislate for what this is going to be’. An important part of this context for Carey is that the work be brought to the public in an interactive and accessible way. Therefore, through having a clear understanding of where the Science Gallery wants to position itself, the gallery’s model of research and engagement has implications for policy, according to Carey. ‘I mean, art is research and it’s research into a way of living and a way of doing things’, posits Carey, ‘and if you have a successful organisation that’s working in a creative way it’s a huge area that you can look to for knowledge about how to do things in different industries’. For Carey then, the policy to situate the arts as rescuer is ‘quite a romantic notion to be able to say that we’ll save ourselves through art’. She suggests that a more valuable focus at policy level is to investigate the way arts institutions are run as a business model. Whilst she attests to ‘audience respite’ as a valid role for the arts, and how the idea of ‘providing something free like we are, that you can do that gives you an experience outside of what you’re facing I think is an important service to provide’, the most valuable offering by the arts to a broader policy level is ‘a model of adaptability’. Carey notes how ‘the structure of our organisation is highly tuned to be able to cope with any situation that is coming to us’. Thus, for Carey, adapting the innovative, flexible and fluid business models of arts institutions serves as a more valuable asset to draw on from the arts than the trope of cultural rescuer.

Emer McGarry suggests that for her institution, there have been no direct challenges or changes to the role of The Model, apart from operating difficulties due to a decrease in funding across the board. For McGarry, the broader threat to the arts is the coupling of

arts and tourism at a departmental level. ‘I think there was a danger when it was culture and tourism together’ revealed McGarry ‘that there may be, I just want to word this carefully, there might be a tendency to make things not as challenging for the members of the public’. For McGarry, a potential danger therefore previously existed through a drive at a departmental level to encourage work ‘that could be seen as attracting a lot of tourists, but wouldn’t necessarily be seen as at the heart of what we want to do and where we see ourselves’. Therefore, a drive towards branding Ireland through the arts, in order to encourage inward touristic visits was potentially problematic for the future programming of The Model.

Another account of potential problems in this regard is indicated by a participant who, whilst agreeing to be named in full, requests that this section of their account remain anonymous. This participant reveals how their institution had recently mounted an exhibition which proved very successful, as it provided an excellent catalogue of the work of an artist, whilst also boosting the presence of the gallery and its environs. This participant reveals how with a success such as that exhibition ‘comes a question from members of the public and from other stakeholders, “is this not what you should always be doing, it’s such a success, is perfect for [the institution in question]”’. This participant reveals ‘a tendency to push us down this road’ of commercialisation and strategic touristic programming which is problematic for the institution, as it is not within their policy to foreground themselves for popularity or touristic value. This participant reveals how the pressure to mount similar exhibitions is not just from within the institution but ‘laterally, from other stakeholders in [the locale in question], that they feel this is the role [the institution] should have’. The participant reveals how it was suggested that ‘we should charge people to come in and access culture,’ rather than the institution’s own desire to mount the exhibition in order to ‘raise critical questions’ about the artist’s practice and place in art history.

Thus, the exhibition became a victim of its own success insofar as it drew the kind of touristic attention to the institution at a time when the ‘brand Ireland’ trope was to the foreground of other interested parties. I suggest that in this instance there was a subtle ‘top-down’ pressure applied to the institution to position itself for touristic reasons, and even to implement a policy of charging for entry to the space - a policy at odds with the institution’s policy of making culture available to all through the absence of admission charges. I suggest that whilst the pressure did not come directly from political interests

at a governmental level, it was nonetheless applied to the institution ‘laterally’ from prominent local interests who were influenced by the broader political attitudes to the foregrounding of the arts, and the harnessing of culture for economic benefit.

Another participant active in the South West of Ireland suggests that whilst the government was ‘looking outside of Ireland to make those choices’ regarding which cultural entities to fund, ‘there is a huge amount of arts activity that is going unsupported’ at a local level. Whilst this participant could not attest to all local and grass roots art ventures as worthy of funding, she nonetheless suggests how ‘it’s just a shame that they were ignoring what’s going on on the fringes, because that is the most interesting thing, and that is actually where it is an act of practice’. For this participant, these small arts initiatives are highly motivated, engaged with fellow artists and local audiences alike, and were sites of creative and innovative practices. It is thus a ‘pity’ for this participant that the funding bodies were not awarding support to these groups, or that the more traditional institutions are not ‘looking to collaborate with those people’, and are instead focusing their attention on showcasing Irish art abroad.

These institutional perspectives reveal complexities around issues of role and function at this time. I suggest that the role of the art institution such as the gallery, is somewhat tied in with funding concerns, and it is difficult for the institutions not to be aware of potential pressures that can come from a departmental, policy level which may affect their funding. Whilst I attempted in this section to keep the discussion of the level of ‘role’, it was nonetheless difficult to decouple it from funding concerns. In the next section, I turn my attention more overtly to issues of the state funding bodies.

## 10.3 Cultural Funding Bodies in Ireland

### 10.3.1 Artists' Perspectives on Funding Bodies

Just as I posited a spectrum of practices and of representation in the previous chapters, I now suggest that there exists a spectrum of funding in digital art. The research uncovered a spectrum of success rates for funding, and even a spectrum of attitudes towards funding. In the main, I found that video artists experienced higher levels of funding than those artists working through digital and electronic arts practices. I also found that attitudes varied from artists who were positive about funding bodies, to artists who felt they could or would not approach the funding bodies for grants, as they felt the bodies would not understand the work, or that the work could not be contextualised in such a way as to enjoy a favourable response. I also note that opinions of two main funding bodies - the Arts Council and Culture Ireland - varied, with digital artists in the main suggesting that the Arts Council was not responsive to their work, whereas Culture Ireland was more supportive of these practices.

When I asked Jaki Irvine whether it may be difficult to secure funding in a work requiring technology (as opposed to the traditionally funded forms of painting and sculpture), she responded with 'no, in that respect the Arts Council are very good'. Irvine, a member of *Aosdána*<sup>133</sup>, is situated as a well-established artist however, with potential access to the *cnuas* stipend, along with a career history that has been rewarded and recognised at a state-level through her *Aosdána* membership. Irvine's practice as a video artist is also at the end of the spectrum where acceptance and recognition of the practice itself are at a high level. I thus propose that her perceived lack of any funding issues is markedly at that end of the spectrum where funding success, and regard for the funding bodies is established. This is not to say that Irvine was not critical of the Arts Council - whilst a member of the board of the Arts Council, Irvine discovered

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133 See section 10.1.1

anomalies in the funding structure that placed visual artists at a disadvantage to other types of practitioners<sup>134</sup>.

For Jesse Jones too, her video projects have also been met with success at a funding level. She reveals how ‘I know there is a real push for us to go and work in the States’ from a strategic policy level, and how she would be travelling to the US in 2011 to mount a solo exhibition in Los Angeles, whilst also making a new video work. She reveals how this venture ‘has been partly financed for the travel, by the Irish government under Culture Ireland’. Jones has also secured funding from the US for the production of the new work, in what she describes as ‘this Irish facilitation of us making work, or showing work in different countries’, whilst also acknowledging the ‘huge contributions from the countries we are going to as well’.

Jones notes that through the Culture Ireland funding, she has retained a high level of artistic autonomy, noting that ‘there hasn’t been any restriction on what kind of work I’m making’. She says of her experience with Culture Ireland ‘they don’t even watch what you are doing - they’re really quite standoffish’. She also describes how the focus of Culture Ireland is to give an artist who is ‘going to make a capable show artistically’ international attention, thus foregrounding Irish culture abroad in an organic way where the merits of the work itself are not judged. I suggest that this is an important factor for digital artists (whose funding experiences I recount later in this section) insofar as the work does not have to rest within a context of traditional art discourses where, as I posited earlier, a representational disadvantage occurs.

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134 During Irvine’s membership of the board of the Arts Council, she discovered that ‘visual artists are more or less actively not allowed to make a living from state funding while on the board of the Arts Council’. This prohibited Irvine from seeking state-funded grants, awards, or commissions in a publicly funded space in Ireland while sitting on the board. Whilst she did receive a stipend of €4000 (before tax) per year, she revealed that ‘you can be asked to do 4 day weeks’, thus potentially taking the time of a visual artist from their practice. Irvine ended her tenure on the board by resigning after two years, observing that as the procedures stand, a visual artist needs to ‘be privately funded or independently wealthy’ in order to have the means to follow their tenure of the board through. She also stressed how ‘this only applies to the visual arts or individual artists - if you’re part of a theatre company, a theatre company can be funded’ because it is a company and not an individual. This has led to a situation where visual artists are not represented at board level, as the cost to the artist through a prohibition on applying for commissions, bursaries and awards is oftentimes too much. As Irvine noted ‘it means you don’t have many practitioners on the table’ at a level where Arts Council policy is made. When I observed how this led to a vicious circle for visual artists, she agreed, observing that even if a visual artist agrees to sit on the board in some act of altruism, ‘if you’re sitting on a board agreeing that you don’t really need money, how on earth can you argue for other people?’. Despite Irvine’s repeated attempts to change this anomaly, ‘they all voted and no, they wouldn’t change the standing order so I felt I had to leave on this account’.

Regarding the Arts Council, Jones suggests that an upskilling of workers with respect to technology in art could be advantageous for digital and electronic arts. She posits how ‘I think there could maybe be the potential to upskill, in terms of how to understand this work at proposals stage’ within funding bodies. For Jones, ‘in the Arts Council maybe people are not all that well versed on technology’, and thus, extra training could help remedy the skills shortage. She suggests that if a work isn’t ‘immediately visual like sculpture or painting’ it can take the arts administrator time to understand the project. She suggests that this, alongside the routines of reviewing grant applications, puts digital art at a disadvantage because ‘in the Arts Council possibly when a proposal comes to the table, it has to be read within five minutes - that’s the length of time that they have’. Thus, when a complex piece of digital or electronic art is proposed, it takes the administrator ‘a little time to listen to, to view and see and get the texture of the work, and in a five-minute thing, they’re not going to get it’<sup>135</sup>. Jones posits the difficulties in translating a complex work of digital art to the Arts Council, asking ‘how can you translate it to a proposal to the Arts Council, to other human beings who don’t know anything about the type of technology you are proposing to use?’. ‘Because very few people do’, Jones observes.

Ciara McMahon also reports how she had secured Arts Council funding through their Create program, revealing how she feels ‘really happy to be part of a society that chooses to do that’. However, even with this success, she problematises the artists’ relationship with funding bodies. She explains how the relationship ‘will always be problematic’. ‘If somebody is paying for something’ McMahon asks, ‘then how much control have they got over it?’. McMahon then notes how her type of practice is often ‘more than a little critical of the way our society and our interpersonal human relations work’, and for her, seeking funding is difficult when a critique to societal structures, in which funding bodies are embedded, is mounted through her practice. Thus, concludes McMahon, ‘once there’s money involved - I’m not saying it’s not possible to work it - but it’s a fraught relationship’<sup>136</sup>.

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135 Jones did observe the corollary to this situation for the arts worker in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner by noting that ‘if you open a brown envelope while you drink your really bad coffee and you see some paintings, you’re like, “grand, I get it”’, thus increasing the chances of a traditional art piece securing funding.

136 A sentiment also noted by Jonah Brucker-Cohen who observed that ‘it is difficult for artists to live off of their art without getting funding through institutions of some kind. This relationship may be difficult depending on how the artist gets the funding or if they don’t get the funding and they have to compete with other artists for this funding’. Brucker-Cohen suggested also that ‘art organisations have to be sure that they are not biased in who they select to give funding to’.



The artists above work mainly with video art, and while they problematise funding it is evident that all of these artists have been successful in funding applications. Looking at artists working at the other end of the spectrum of digital technologies, Cliona Harmey suggests that funding for digital art is necessary, as to practice digital art requires ‘a really specific sort of skill’. Citing the example of programming skills, Harmey suggests ‘that’s where you do need the funding’. She observes how she herself is learning programming as it is not feasible to hire a programmer to facilitate the work, but the time cost of this is high, as upskilling in this regard is ‘like learning to speak’. Harmey suggests that at a funding level, digital art ‘needs a certain type of support’. Whereas, according to Harmey, some artists can make work in a couple of weeks, for her ‘a lot of these things take longer, to process in my head, and to actually realise’. Attesting to the characteristic of collaboration analysed in chapter 8, Harmey also suggests that ‘it’s important that the Arts Council fund things that aren’t just about artists working away on their own, that they’re more humanistic about people working’. For Harmey such an initiative would ‘not necessarily [entail] having to collaborate’ as an imperative to funding, but to foster a creative environment in which ‘there’s dialogue and engagement’ between artists and arts institutions.

Some digital artists are critical of the funding bodies, particularly the Arts Council. One practitioner describes how she had once secured Arts Council travel and training funding to travel to the US. Whilst she was very appreciative of this funding, it is the one and only time she had secured it. She describes how in her broader experience ‘I have applied for bursaries once or twice, but I didn’t really think that I fitted into what they wanted’, due to the nature of the practice. The artist elaborates on this, noting that ‘you do have to fit into certain criteria’ in order to be successful with funding applications. As a digital artist, this practitioner does not feel that she fits in to the criteria that the Arts Council requires. ‘I think you would have to be a more important part of the art world’ she posits, suggesting that as a digital artist, the Arts Council does not see her as part of the broader art world, but outside it. She explains that her perception of the Arts Council is one highly situated in a fine art genre and that is ‘something that definitely does hold me back’ from seeking funding. She explains how ‘I don’t know if I can use the right words or the right references that they want, or I think that they want’. Thus, if the application process for digital artists is couched in a fine art genre, which, as discussed earlier is problematic in its disregard for medium specificity,

then the applications of digital artists for funding may be judged unfavourably. I suggest that this perpetuates a cycle through the micro, meso and macro levels, whereby digital and electronic art remains outside the discourse and the canon of the traditional or fine art world in Ireland.

Ivan Twohig also problematises the funding bodies, again particularly the Arts Council, whilst revealing a more favourable attitude towards Culture Ireland. With respect to the Culture Ireland funding that he had received to take part in an exhibition, he recounts how ‘they gave us some nice support, in a very clear agenda, and we did exactly what we said we would do’. However, Twohig suggests how other funding agencies are ‘very entrenched in a very established application process’. Like Jesse Jones and the other participant above, Twohig suggests that funding is dependent on how the application is judged at an administration level. ‘I think it’s more to do with how you apply’ he observed, adding that ‘I think they judge the application process’. This is, for Twohig problematic, as he could not see a ‘quality control’ at this point, nor could he see ‘any judgement of art’. Expressing his frustration at this, he reveals ‘I see total crap being funded - I see people who I know for a fact don’t produce, who live on their funding from the Arts Council and don’t produce a lot of stuff’. Twohig calls for more transparency in the application process, whilst also suggesting that a more robust review process be established. In his opinion:

“Well I just think it’s all about the application process. It’s not about the review process. What happens to the person who receives fifty grand? How are they reviewed? You can fill out review forms but they go through the same process. It’s still somebody at a desk dealing with this big lump of paper. It’s probably being outsourced to an administrator”

Thus for Twohig, these problems he perceives with the Arts Council bring about a reluctance to source funding for digital art pieces. ‘Well I’ve never even tried to seek funding for a digital [piece], I don’t really get funding’ for digital art projects Twohig reports, while in contrast he had applied for and secured funding that was ‘very much in the remit of fine art’ through traditional sculptural works. This situation is problematic in that indicates that Twohig in his background as fine art sculptor felt comfortable and confident that his work was in the context of Arts Council requirements, yet as a digital

artist, he was so assured that the Arts Council would not value the digital work that he self-funded his digital projects.

Issues of funding are also discussed by Conor McGarrigle, who explains how he has been ‘very fortunate’ with securing funding from Culture Ireland. In his account:

“Culture Ireland have funded me several times to big events, things like that. So I’ve always found that if I’ve something that I need to go to, Culture Ireland will generally fund me. They’ve always funded me actually. So I’ve gone to Brazil, I’ve gone to America several times, so I’ve gone to lots of big exhibition events, so I’ll normally go and do a talk and I’ll show some work. And they’ve been great”

He also expresses confidence in the Culture Ireland application process, attesting how ‘it’s very straight forward - I understand with Culture Ireland where funding will come from’<sup>137</sup>.

In contrast to multiple positive experiences with Culture Ireland, McGarrigle strongly critiques the Arts Council, outlining how he formerly received one-off funding from the Arts Council for his website, but that it was partly through their publications grants, and also because a particular arts officer had an interest in digital media. He reveals how he ‘got funding then as long as [arts officer]<sup>138</sup> was there, but it was a very personal thing’. According to McGarrigle’s experience, ‘[the arts officer] was very much always reaching out ... but since then, no, the Arts Council has been quite shut down for me I found, to

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137 Also, McGarrigle revealed how the work is judged in the Culture Ireland application process. I suggest that this is in apparent contrast to how the Arts Council evaluate applications. ‘They look at it and they’ll take it on its merits’ observed McGarrigle of Culture Ireland. He recounted how he had been funded through Culture Ireland to take part in a prestigious festival of electronic art in Sao Paolo, Brazil. For McGarrigle this was a significant invitation as he considered Brazil to be ‘one of these really dynamic countries for digital media’, where this art form is in the mainstream. He supplied Culture Ireland with a comprehensive outline of the work he was undertaken, who had invited him, attendance figures for the festival and a list of international bodies, including the British Council, who had funded artists to participate. ‘So I put it through’, McGarrigle recounted of his application, ‘and obviously they looked at it and considered it to be a high merit event. People go to it from all over, they’re funded by the British Council, various other international funding bodies. All over Europe and all over America, people have funded people to go to this, so obviously it has some merit, so they funded me’.

138 McGarrigle named the arts officer during our interview. However, I did not feel it appropriate to name this person as they themselves were not a participant and therefore could not consent to being named.

the point where I haven't applied for a couple of years now. It just seemed to be more of an effort than it's worth'. This stance is not unlike the accounts revealed above. For McGarrigle though, this stance emerges having made attempts to meet with members of the Arts Council to foreground the role of digital art. He reveals how the Arts Council 'doesn't seem to be open at the moment' to digital art. He explains how 'it's a door I've tried to knock on before, I've actually gone and set up meetings, I was recommended people to talk to and literally I couldn't get a meeting'. This clearly frustrating situation is one where McGarrigle not only cannot secure funding, but cannot access the gatekeepers in this funding body in order to discuss funding. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to arrange meetings, McGarrigle desisted, observing that when no response was ever forthcoming, 'you get your message'. This message, concludes McGarrigle, is not to seek funding from the Arts Council. 'The effort that I would spend putting in this application, would I not be better applying somewhere else?' he concludes.

McGarrigle, like Twohig also problematises the large amounts of funding given to certain practitioners without a review of output. For McGarrigle, this is a 'growing feeling' amongst his peers where 'you end up in a position where you're totally dependent on them and the work doesn't get done if the Arts Council doesn't fund it'. He suggests that this is not 'necessarily a healthy thing', as the artist potentially exists as a client of the funding body. He suggests how this stance may be problematic in the digital art field, as 'the work gets done whatever - it's a very DIY ethos, and they just manage to hack it together somehow'. Therefore, this ethos may be regarded by the Arts Council as not requiring funding, and they take the stance that 'all this work is getting done, and you don't need to fund them if they're going to do it anyway'.

This section has revealed issues pertaining to digital art and the funding bodies in Ireland. In the main, Culture Ireland received a favourable response to participants, whereas positive accounts for the Arts Council were in the main, attested to only by video artists. I therefore suggest that the 'spectrum' of use, support and acceptance of digital art practices holds true at the macro level, where a greater degree of state funding and support at the macro level was experienced by those artists working on the scale of the spectrum closest to the more 'established' practices of video art. In the next section, I reveal how some arts institutions regard the cultural funding bodies, foregrounding the relationship between the meso and macro levels of enquiry.

### *10.3.2 Institutional Perspective on Funding Bodies*

Just as my evidence from interviews with artists reveals insights about the macro state level funding bodies, I suggest that an enquiry at a meso-level can also reveal insights on the political economy of art. In this section I analyse some attitudes at an arts institution level towards the funding bodies - noting that these examples were from institutions engaging heavily with digital media. I also focus on a case study of a digital art association, their experiences with the Arts Council, and how their experiences were discussed amongst digital artists.

Carolyn Jones suggests that with respect to mounting a digital art exhibition, 'I just don't know how they would react to it'. She reveals how RUA apply for annual programme funding through the Arts Council, but they are never successful. 'We know we're not going to get anything, but we put in anyway' Jones observes. She reveals how the organisation was (at the time of writing) planning a festival of digital art and that they were going to apply to the Arts Council for a small festivals grant. Whilst not securing annual funding, she was a little more hopeful of securing funding for this festival 'because it's a robust programme and it's very much about participation and about audience and about getting people involved'. However she suggests that she is unsure if they regard digital art 'necessarily as being valid' as a participatory practice, despite the Arts Council being aware that the focus of RUA's programming was to be community-oriented and participatory. 'We've talked to them about it and they've said well that's a good idea, but then everybody says that to your face', Jones muses.

Another participant involved in a digital art festival outside Dublin is also critical of funding bodies in Ireland. Whilst again, this person is grateful that the festival had been funded, as far as she is aware 'if you look at where the Arts Council funding is going, I think I'm the only festival that they are funding that is in any way related to digital art'. This participant suggests that instead of funds being allocated to digital art, they are being allocated to the more traditional art forms such as literature and music. This reflects the account of Carolyn Jones above, who suggests hope at being funded for a digital art festival, yet had not secured funding previous to date. This participant suggests that to remedy this deficit, the Arts Council 'need to set a broader agenda for

Ireland and look at it as a whole'. She also suggests that the smaller, artist-led initiatives would benefit greatly from funding, whilst contributing to their local communities. She suggests that 'there is an awful lot of grass roots DIY practices that are happening that they're not funding, and they're missing out on so much' innovative, culture-setting practices. Like some of the other practitioners, this participant draws attention to the fact that there does not appear to be a review process for funding. She suggests that the Arts Council would benefit from reviewing the 'effect on the community of this event happening'. This participant could not see the benefit in rewarding one artist with funding if the community would not be involved:

“So things like, I don't see the point of awarding one artist to go off to the middle of south America for a month so they can go off and do some documentation on a project, and then have five people show up to the exhibition because it's such a narrow thing”

Thus, the participant is critical of repeated funding awarded to exhibitions that are not well-attended, do not include the audience, do not convene seminars or talks, or do not invoke responses from attendees.

Whilst other participants chose not to discuss particular funding concerns, I suggest that the accounts above are consistent with the body of feedback from practitioners. To further complement this position, I now provide an account of a funding issue that unfolded for a digital arts group during the empirical research.

#### *10.3.2.1 DATA - A Case Study in Digital Art Funding*

The Dublin Art and Technology Association is a group, established in 2002 by Jonah Brucker-Cohen and Nicki Gogan. Brucker-Cohen outlines how he had moved to Dublin that year to work at the MediaLab Europe research centre (which closed in 2005), and as an artist, was interested in working with local digital artists in Ireland. He also had a desire to 'start a community around this practice'. Benjamin Gaulon took over the running of DATA in 2006, before recently handling the running of the association to Rachel O'Dwyer, a researcher at Trinity College Dublin. With the

assistance from colleagues, Gaulon secured yearly funding for DATA from the Arts Council. However, in 2010 the funding from the Arts Council was withdrawn from DATA in a seemingly obscure move. Gaulon reveals how the organisers of DATA had to ask ‘the question of do we go on or not’ in light of this funding cut. The ethos of DATA is ‘that we invite people from abroad but also get local people, but knowing that the local scene in Ireland is very small, you tend to always have the same people’. Thus, the Arts Council funding is vital for DATA to bring influential digital media artists from abroad, and the loss of that funding potentially means that it was not viable for DATA to run events, talks and workshops. However, the director of the Science Gallery intervened, and replaced the funding that DATA had lost<sup>139</sup>. DATA’s Arts Council funding was €4000 per year, and with that relatively small amount ‘managed to run nine events and six workshops’.

During the ethnography of arts institutions, practitioners and events, I observed how DATA did indeed provide an engaging context for digital art in Ireland. I attended several of their talks in various locations (before their funding was replaced by the Science Gallery, DATA had no fixed venue) and also engaged in several workshops on e-waste, hardware hacking and circuit bending<sup>140</sup>. During the interview process several digital artists cited DATA’s predicament when discussing funding, even though this was not a specific route of enquiry on my part. I include some of the accounts to foreground the perspectives gained from the ethnography which attested to the key role DATA played in the digital art sphere.

Accounts describe the funding decision as ‘crazy’ and ‘strange’, with participants both attesting to the high contribution of DATA in the digital art arena in Dublin and expressing bewilderment at the withdrawal of funding. ‘To be honest the amount of work they actually do, [...] their output is very prolific’ Harmey observes. Considering

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139 Conor McGarrigle described how DATA was only continuing due to funding by the Science Gallery. He gave the account as thus:

“Yeah it’s still going because it’s being funded by the Science Gallery. They kicked in five grand of funding because Michael John [director of the Science Gallery] said “we can’t let this go, I’ll find you the money”. It was just that response at being so appalled that this was being lost. It was such a great resource and such a lively thing, and completely run on volunteer effort and dovetailing with, and tying in quite well with NCAD, certainly who would generally bring someone over. If at all possible we’ll get them a lecture up at NCAD. So we can’t afford to pay them to speak but they can always get a guest lectureship in NCAD which will pay them. So the universities have kicked in quite well with DATA”.

140 Analysed further in chapter 11

this prolific output, Harmey asserts how she did not understand why the funding for DATA was withdrawn, and posits that the Arts Council should reinstate the funding.

Conor McGarrigle compares the situation with the setting in other countries where 'you've got so many places in Spain and Germany - you've ZKM, Ars Electronica, loads of places in the UK, and everywhere has these centres of digital art' that are funded enough to become 'conceptual centres' that are 'driving innovation in this area'. In comparison then, Ireland has an impoverished digital art scene. 'We have DATA' posits McGarrigle, 'which lost its Arts Council funding and it had what, five thousand euros to put on twelve events, bring international artists over'.

Thus, within the digital art sector, the role of DATA is understood and valued. However, despite accounts attesting to the valuable, prolific and innovative programming, the Arts Council has nonetheless withdrawn the funding. Accounts stress how DATA 'delivered', and how 'that's one thing the Arts Council was meant to be focusing on - people who actually did deliver'. Participants also suggest that the funding given to DATA represents good value for money for the Arts Council, as DATA provided a resource for digital media where 'you know you'll get a big crowd, full houses, really lively debate, and active grassroots artists, technologists [...] bringing in people from all over the world. The decision is also described as 'a waste' by one institutional curator. This participant also reveals how she is 'really really shocked they lost their funding', adding how the decision 'says a lot' about the Arts Council, that despite reports from DATA as to their programming and events, funding was withdrawn. 'I don't see what else they could really want to see back for their investment' she concludes.

Ivan Twohig, whilst also expressing bemusement at the decision, suggests that the withdrawal of funding may have had a strategic intent, positing that 'maybe they [the Arts Council] do it on purpose'. He suggests that for the Arts Council 'it's good to keep fine art fine art - to define it', in a move that would serve to underline the conceptual tensions between contemporary and new media art. Twohig also suggests that had digital art been foregrounded through funding support, there may have been repercussions within the art world. 'I'm sure there'd be a pretty big backlash if the Arts Council started giving fifty grand to net art based projects', Twohig posits, concluding that 'maybe it's to do with the political understanding of what art is'.



I thus suggest that whilst the Arts Council fund many worthy projects, their decision to cut DATA's funding completely has been detrimental to the digital art sector in Ireland. If it had not been for the goodwill from the Science Gallery, DATA would most likely have been discontinued. I suggest that the neglect of the digital art sector by the Arts Council thus potentially poses a threat to the development of that sector.

#### 10.3.4 *The Art Market*

A discussion of state funding bodies such as the Arts Council is one key aspect of the political economy of art in Ireland. Aside from state funding bodies, this chapter would be incomplete without considering the larger political economy of art during the crisis. Newspaper headlines such as *I'm an artist - can I take your order?*<sup>141</sup>, *How the bust painted artists into a corner*<sup>142</sup>, *Why shouldn't poets do the State some service?*<sup>143</sup> from a national broadsheet, to broader reports such as *Recession threat to London's place in art world*<sup>144</sup>, are indicative of the latest 'turn to culture' that has emerged during the period of this research. Whilst such a discussion is necessarily abridged here, I posit that a brief overview of how commercial art - or the art market - is situated in Ireland, adds another facet to the topic of political economy of art.

Jaki Irvine posits that 'there isn't a big enough private collective system' in Ireland to allow artists to make work independently of state funding. She explains this further, observing how 'there's a gap between people's perception of public and private spaces' because of a misguided perception in the Irish art world that the private galleries are 'not doing public work'. However, Irvine notes how 'everybody knows the private galleries are plugged into the public system - they have to be', as the private art market is so small in Ireland. Thus, even for a well-established artist such as Irvine, her income is from a combination of state and private sources. 'Even if you're working with a private gallery, you might get a bursary from the Arts Council, you show your work either in a private gallery or in a public space or ultimately be asked on the basis of your private

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141 The Irish Times - Tue, Jan 18, 2011

142 The Irish Times - Sat, Sep 25, 2010

143 The Irish Times - Thu, Aug 12, 2010

144 The Times, March 14, 2009

gallery show to go public' illustrates Irvine, 'so the notion that it's separate is silly'. She compares the gallery situation in Ireland with that of the UK, explaining a drive there currently to 'interweave' the public and private sectors in art. In contrast, Irvine posits how in Ireland 'we have them locked off because we don't have a decent private gallery market here'. For Irvine this is a mistake of perception here, as the country is 'too tiny' to marginalise the private galleries.

Likewise at an institutional level, Tessa Giblin also suggests that there is not a strong art market in Ireland. However for Giblin, there is hope that the current economic crisis could foreground the arts positively through new funding initiatives. 'Coming out of the crisis', Giblin hopes 'it would be wonderful if a market for art appeared in Ireland'. Giblin elaborates on market funding for the arts, observing that 'there's very little philanthropy and there's no contemporary art market' in Ireland. She notes that whilst 'Irish people are extremely generous' in relation to charitable donations, cultural philanthropy is not well-established in Ireland. She perceives a recent development in Ireland however, which she feels might 'begin for the first time, this idea of philanthropy, cultural philanthropy in Ireland'. This development is in funding mechanisms known as micro-philanthropy, or *crowdfunding*, where small donations towards cultural producers or institutions are sourced. She cites the example of a recent Irish initiative called *FundIt* which encourages micro-funding for cultural institutions and artists<sup>145</sup>. Giblin posits how 'whether that comes from a slow mechanism where everyone's feeling that we're a little bit responsible', cultural philanthropy is 'extremely important for the support and growth of the significant artists' in Ireland. She explains that with this support, the artist

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145 I recently observed how the Irish Museum of Modern Art reached 113% of their FundIt target of €4800 to invest in four paintings for their collection. Source: <http://www.fundit.ie/project/buying-four-drawings-by-bea-mcmahon>

can reach an international art market, thus foregrounding Irish culture abroad in an organic way. ‘I think that’s what we have to gain the most from’, she posited<sup>146</sup>.

Based on such evidence, I suggest that the art market in Ireland is in a complex position. From the brief survey above, the sense is that whilst the private galleries are contributing to the cultural landscape of Ireland abroad, they also contribute domestically to encouraging artists and arts audience to participate in production and appreciation of art. However, the divide between public and private sponsorship is problematic in Ireland. Whilst the state sponsor the arts through numerous initiatives, the private institutions also contribute to the support of artistic production. Yet an air of ambivalence and suspicion surrounds these supports. Whilst the ‘commercialisation’ of art is, according to a Frankfurt School analysis problematic, the artist nonetheless often requires commercial representation for their oeuvre. In this respect, the role of the private market is relatively under-developed and neglected in Ireland. I suggest that in the extreme, this divide between public and private sponsorship for the arts potentially makes for an artistic sector reliant on the state. Where this becomes problematic then, is when state initiatives such as *Imagine Ireland* not only foreground existent cultural products, but attempt to encourage new productions with a particular commercial aim.

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146 In conjunction with these accounts, media investigations of the art market reveal similar positions. In the aforementioned *I’m an artist - can I take your order?* article, the author observes how ‘in the art world, levels of recognition don’t equate to income’. The author cites the case of the artist Alice Maher who is described as having ‘exhibited in the Royal Hibernian Academy and whose work is held in some of Ireland’s major public and private collections’. Maher has also been recognised for her contribution to the arts by membership of Aosdána. Quoted in this article, Maher observed how ‘you could have a huge reputation as an artist [...] but you still mightn’t be making a living from your work’. Maher continued, observing that ‘some of Ireland’s best-known artists are in that position’. In the same article, Maher commended the stipend she receives through Aosdána in the absence of market income. She noted how ‘in the good years, when your income goes above a certain level, you don’t get the *cnuas* [...] but it’s there to apply for if you need it in the hard times’. For Maher, this dearth of private income can mean that the state income from the *cnuas* can prevent her from having to claim social welfare. Maher observed how this stipend means that ‘top level practitioners can keep contributing to the culture without having to sign on’.

In the aforementioned *How the bust painted artists into a corner* article, reports from a gallery level suggest that the private art market in Ireland is weak. The author observed how in Ireland, ‘buying art is seen as a pastime for the rich, an indulgence and a luxury at odds with the needs of communities’. The attention in the article turned to corporate philanthropy for the arts, suggesting that in the 1970s and 1980s this funding source was rich, as private corporations created their own art collections. However, during this crisis, collections are now being sold off as corporations attempt to recoup financial losses. The article quoted Barbara Lawson, the director of the Hugh Lane gallery, who suggested that this loss of funding would be hugely detrimental to the cultural landscape in Ireland. ‘If corporations erroneously believe that it’s no longer their role to support the visual arts’ Lawson observed, ‘the downward spiral would be enormous – disproportionate, actually, to what they put in’. The article continued with a discussion of how private galleries operate ‘at the point where money for art changes hands’, and is thus a source of suspicion in the art world. The author suggested how ‘the rest of the art world can be ambivalent about the role they play, yet they, as much as the Arts Council and the major institutions, form the backbone of the art world’. Citing an account from Kevin Kavanagh (of the eponymous Kevin Kavanagh gallery), ‘commercial galleries are important components of the arts infrastructure that artists and audiences depend on’. Yet as Jaki Irvine noted above, this persistence of suspicion around the private galleries negatively affects their place in the contemporary Irish art market.

## 10.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have conducted an analysis of macro-level factors related to the political economy of art. I indicate how both government and media interests have foregrounded the arts and cultural services as ‘economic rescuer’, whilst the chapter also problematised this ‘turn’. From artist and institutional perspectives, I revealed how the discourse around ‘brand Ireland’ is subtly in the awareness of the art community. The funding bodies themselves have been analysed, finding that whilst Culture Ireland is positively (or neutrally) disposed to the genre of digital and electronic art, the Arts Council adopts a more oppositional stance, with artists and certain institutions and groups foregrounding digital art remaining unconvinced of their support for digital arts. In the analysis of the RTÉ coverage of ‘brand Ireland’, some of the interviewees critiqued the reductionist economistic positioning of culture, again in sentiments that are *simpatico* with Frankfurt School discourses. However, just as Adorno’s writings concur with this sense of the potential of ‘high’ art, Benjamin’s work is concerned with popular culture. Therefore, for these artists there is a balancing act that they are faced with - to not compromise on the Adornoesque sense of potential of ‘high’ art, whilst also understanding, through Benjamin’s work, that the general populace is more oriented towards to popular culture, state programming and the national broadcaster. Thus, it is a challenge to cultural producers in Ireland to not retreat into an art-for-arts-sake stance that can justify ignoring its imposed ‘role’ as ‘cultural rescuer’, but to strike the balance of producing cultural works with an integrity and an honesty that can expose and critique such tropes to relevant taste cultures, whilst avoiding the trap of culture-for-profit.

# **Chapter 11**

## **Research Findings and Conclusions**

## Chapter 11: Research Findings and Conclusions

### 11.1 Introduction

This research thesis has explored, analysed and problematised the area of innovation in digital media cultural production in Ireland. In this chapter, I discuss how the theoretical framework and the key questions were addressed. I move on to then outline possibilities for further study and examine the potentials along with the limitations of the research.

As previously flagged in chapter 10, when I began this research project the general ‘structure of feeling’ amongst Irish citizens was that the aggressive economic growth of the country had hit a bumpy patch. There was much talk of a ‘soft landing’ in the grossly over-heated property sector. However, this thesis evolved in parallel with a dramatic unravelling of those predictions regarding the economy that far exceeded the ‘soft landing’ predictions. The resulting crisis is marked by massive negative equity in the property sector, massive cuts in public expenditure and an ever-worsening crisis in the financial and banking sectors that ultimately required an EU-IMF bailout. As this thesis is concerned with issues of ‘situatedness’, this unfolding economic crisis shaped the research, not least because policy rhetorics began to frame the arts as an economic ‘rescuer’. Thus, whilst an early goal of the research was always to consider themes from three levels of micro, meso and macro, the crisis acted as a *punctum* (to borrow from Barthes) of commonality between the levels.

Thus, in this chapter I argue how applying a theoretical framework that prioritises situatedness, has provided a robust foundation through which to consider the key questions posited in chapter 1. Had the economy either stabilised or continued an upward trajectory, this study would have yielded very different results - possibly pointing to an optimism regarding the digital media artistic sector, rather than problematisation of the prior ‘feel-good gulag’. Opportunities for digital artists would possibly be enhanced by continued spending on the arts. However, as the crisis unfolded, an opportunity was provided to assess this sector at a time of upheaval, change and crisis. I

suggest that consideration of the crisis has therefore yielded rich results, where prior knowledge and analysis of art, the culture 'industry' and the role of culture at a time of late-capitalist, postmodern expansion and contraction can be especially valued for their relevance.

## 11.2 Theoretical Framework - A Reprise

As first outlined in chapter 1, the framework was designed to provide a ‘depth’ model through which the complexities, tensions and interplays in the cultural and artistic sector could be examined by conducting research in to one such sub-sector, that of digital art production in Ireland. This was done through consideration of the ‘I’, ‘We’ and ‘It’ dimensions of research, pertaining to the individual, the intersubjective and the interobjective connections in the digital media art world.

The research thus aimed to track innovation, its sites, its characteristics and its threats by first considering how digital artists innovate. This micro-level dimension was analysed through a combination of an ethnography of the digital art sector, along with in-depth interviews of a subset of artists working with digital media. The meso level was also analysed using these means, as at this level an analysis of the ‘intersubjective’ relations between individual actors and gatekeepers was key to understanding the relationship between the micro and meso levels. The ‘voice’ of the meso level actors and their engagements with the micro and macro levels was best revealed through the interview process. Finally, as posited in chapter 1, micro-level actors also engage with the macro level, as do meso-level gatekeepers. Therefore, the macro level was analysed, partly through accounts of interactions between micro- and meso-level actors with the macro level, and also through accounts of media and policy positions.

I therefore suggest that the theoretical framework enabled an account of digital art production in Ireland from multiple vantage points. That framework, along with the overarching theme of situatedness, allowed for consideration, inclusion and foregrounding of the massive economic changes that occurred between 2008 and 2011. In chapter 1, I mapped the ‘big three’ framework to that of the area of digital art in Ireland, to annotate the flexibility of the framework. This flexibility has allowed the research to also ‘flex’ as the economic crisis hit. Indeed the crisis provided an example of how the framework can incorporate changes to the parameters of the research by being specific enough to require an account of the macro, whilst also being flexible enough to cope with the macro either during a time of stability or a time of crisis. Whilst the thesis outcomes would have been different had it taken place at a different time, nonetheless the framework would still have performed adequately.



### 11.3 Key Questions Addressed

In chapter 1 I posited a set of key questions that unfolded from one major central question, namely, how do artists innovate and interact with digital technologies to produce artistic works in contemporary Ireland? Chapter 1 suggested that this key question raised sub-questions in five areas of analysis: (1) socio-cultural situatedness, (2) art, (3) technology, (4) innovation and (5) the political-economic. I suggest that these five themes have been addressed through the research, and here outline how this was achieved.

#### *11.3.1 Situatedness*

The first overarching theme of situatedness has been accounted for throughout the thesis and formed a backdrop for analysing how the micro, meso and macro levels are not distinct spheres, but how they overlap. The primary research revealed examples of this situatedness. In chapter 8, the primary research findings uncovered a ‘distinct’ digital aesthetic, where artists were themselves self-situating as ‘digital’, the chapter also revealing that this move was in contrast to the contemporary art ‘fashion’ to problematise media specificity (in what was another example of a genre situating itself).

Chapter 9 problematised situatedness in the context of gatekeeping, the primary research finding that the situatedness of an art curator potentially views the inclusion or foregrounding of digital art as problematic in the context of their own career. It found that their situatedness within a contemporary art discourse that ‘frowned upon’ an engagement with media specificity meant that the curators were unlikely to foreground work that specified itself by medium.

In chapter 10, the theme of situatedness was analysed at the macro level, where a major finding revealed that the arts sector is itself situated within an economic and political zeitgeist that has been in massive flux. This finding also revealed how economic situatedness had ramifications back to the meso level in funding concerns and even in one example, programming constraints. The situatedness was also tracked back to the micro level, where issues of ‘role’ of the individual artist were considered.

### *11.3.2 Art*

The second theme centring on art has also been addressed both through an analysis of key theoretical perspectives, and through accounts of art, the digital aesthetic and its characteristics in chapter 8. The primary research found that these specificities or ‘features’ of digital art comprised (1) collaboration, (2) knowledge-sharing and (3) repurposing/reconfiguration. Thus I propose that such primary research findings resonate well with, or advance and serve as a complement to the characteristics posited in chapter 4. In chapter 4 I outlined how digital art can be identified by three factors; (1) object characteristics, (2) where the artwork ‘resides’ and (3) technical complexity. The primary research as analysed in chapter 8 complemented this analysis by adding descriptions of features of digital art such as practitioners regular use of collaboration, of influences from the open-source movement and how the repurposing of materials for unintended use through hardware ‘hacking’ also feature prominently in digital artworks.

Digital art was problematised in chapter 9, where gatekeepers’ accounts of their concerns regarding the exhibition, acquisition and archival of digital art were foregrounded, along with a key finding that revealed a perception of under-representation and lack of acceptance amongst digital artists into the broader art sector in Ireland. Chapter 9 also found that some characteristics of the digital art work itself can cause issues of acceptance at an institutional level. The primary research found that (1) context, categorisation and affiliation, (2) suspicion around where the artwork ‘resides’, or for that matter whom or what has created the artwork and (3) that digital art can interrogate the traditional rose of the art institution, all emerged from the primary research as sources of contention at the institutional level.

The key theme of art and its political dimension was also foregrounded in chapters 8 and 10, where a key finding revealed that a ‘universal’ potential of art, regardless of medium, is that of critique. This key primary research finding potentially challenged the ‘spectrum’ hypothesis presented in chapter 7, as the potential political motivation for making art was presented irrespective of where in the usage spectrum the practitioner fell.

The nexus of art and capitalism were also problematised in chapter 10. In this chapter, a key finding revealed both historical and continuing discourses in policy and the media that situate art as a ‘rescuer’ during a time of a crisis.

### *11.3.3 Technology*

The third theme of technology has been addressed in this research thesis through interview accounts of participants and through case studies and an ethnography. Chapter 7 introduced concepts of a ‘spectrum’ of use of technologies, and posited how some artists view ICTs as tools only, whilst other artists argue that these technologies are also a medium, or even a ‘metamedium’. This primary finding was again picked up in chapter 8 where I explored artists’ views on technology. The primary research found that whilst those artists who viewed technologies as tools were doing so in an anti-determinist stance, this did not imply that artists who heavily employed technology were less concerned about determinism.

The empirical research found that in our current ‘mode’ of technology use, ICTs are becoming so embedded and domesticated as to make a critique of them *through* their use increasingly likely, a point verified by observing that a significant cohort of digital artists heavily use technology as a medium through which to mount such a critique. This was evidenced in the accounts of artists wishing to ‘push’ technology, to seek the ‘limits’ of ICTs and to ‘slow down’ the networked systems of our current social mode.

### *11.3.4 Innovation*

The fourth theme of innovation was discussed in terms of ‘sites’ of innovation in the digital art sector. Chapter 8 provided a major primary finding that revealed how the three specificities of digital art dovetailed with concepts of sectoral innovation. Thus, a key finding on the subject of innovation revealed that the specific characteristics of digital art also functioned as major sites or enablers of innovation for the digital art sector.

The primary research in chapter 8 also showed how the collaborative ‘nature’ of digital art also allowed for innovation through those collaborative encounters, where knowledge transfer could occur. It was also found that the characteristic of digital art which saw extensive use of open-source technologies also functioned as a site of innovation. Through the use of open-source hardware and software, innovation was fostered by the knowledge acquisition facilities afforded by these ICTs. Online discussion forums, knowledgebases and ‘Wikis’ where code could be shared and collaboratively improved upon are all ways in which this innovation-supporting knowledge acquisition occurs for digital artists.

Chapter 8 also suggested that through the practice of repurposing of materials and software, as is common in digital art, both incremental and radical innovations can occur. It was also suggested that much like an R&D function in traditionally understood paradigms of innovation, these collaborative, experimental practices can provide sites of, and foster innovation.

Chapter 9 found that a potential site of innovation was in the ‘proactivity’ of the digital artists who (1) looked to foreign sources of funding and/or enablement of their practice and (2) suggested that vacant urban spaces could be employed as cultural centres for digital media.

Chapter 10 problematised the limits to artistic innovation through an analysis of two major funding bodies. Key findings from this chapter revealed how a major source of funding from the Arts Council was effectively ‘closed off’ to digital artists. This finding was coupled with a finding that showed how Culture Ireland was supportive of digital artists attempts to innovate, revealing problems at the state level and artistic/cultural innovation.

### *11.3.5 Political Economy*

The fifth theme dealing with the political-economic factors has also been addressed in the primary research, particularly in chapter 10. The chapter charted the impacts of political and economic decisions on culture. A key finding from this chapter revealed how the arts have been positioned as political ‘rescuer’ during this time of crisis. This

highlights the position of both the Frankfurt School and Pierre Bourdieu by the attempt to place economic value or *capital* on to the arts, in a move at odds with Frankfurt School thought and in an elucidation of Bourdieu's mechanisms of how art can be mobilised as a form of capital. The theme of crisis was therefore considered in terms of the impact of political and economic factors at the macro level on the arts. Media engagement with the arts at this time was also analysed. A key finding here showed that media organisations, just like commercial cultural producers are liable to have an 'auratic' quality.

Chapter 9 also found that at the institutional level, some awareness of this 'arts as rescuer' dimension to political discourses was evident. Whilst the findings did not show a direct interventionist stance on behalf of the state, one account revealed pressures from local political and economic interests to make their programming more suitable to tourists.

#### **11.4 Contributions to the Field**

I suggest that this research contributes to the general fields of innovation studies and related policy practices, particularly in terms of the role of collaborative and user-based innovation. The findings revealed that the very practices that digital artists engage in, and those specific characteristics of digital art function as sites of innovation. Also, whilst the artist does have to function within a capitalist system, they serve as a subset of innovators who may be motivated by non-commercial goals and values. Thus, this research, in foregrounding their practices and processes contributes a complement to traditional innovation studies which in the main situate the innovation processes within a market outcome for the innovation. The research has found that a significant role for collective rather than proprietary models of intellectual property exists within this sector. I suggest that this sends a 'flag' to scholars of innovation that highlights how this trend is being utilised in an innovative way by this subset of cultural producers.

This research has also revealed complexities regarding the relationship between technology and society, and contributed to the understanding of this complex relationship. A major finding from the primary research revealed that the relationship was not an either/or one, but a complex spectrum of usages, practices and critiques of technology. The research found that whilst 'onlookers' in the art world sometimes saw those artists who heavily employed technology as determined by it, a cohort of artists employed heavy technology use to critique technology.

This research also contributes to the field of art, both contemporary and digital art. The key primary research findings revealed three aesthetic specificities of digital art (collaboration, use of open-source and reconfiguration). These specificities add to and complement the previously understood dimensions of digital art which included (1) object characteristics, (2) where the artwork 'resides', and (3) technical complexity. The research findings have also revealed a tension between the digital art 'world' and the contemporary art 'world', contributing a voice that straddles between the promises of Quaranta's 'postmedium' age, and the current divisions existing between the 'new media' and 'contemporary art' worlds.

## 11.5 Limitations of the Research

Whilst this research aimed from the outset to be as thorough and inclusive of issues and concerns in digital media artistic production at three levels of research, nonetheless the research has its limitations. The field of digital media is so rapidly morphing as to be like a changing geographical landscape. Where one technology can be in the moment on ‘solid ground’, it can be quickly superseded and ‘cut adrift’ by another innovation. However, this study was from the outset aware of this, and attempted to guard against that type of ‘neologising’ by steering away from a technological account of the ‘differences’ or ‘newness’ of ICTs in digital media art, but by drawing on historical perspectives, continuities and long-term patterns of use, appropriation and remediation.

The digital art sector in Ireland is a small one, and thus a limitation of the research was in the number of participants it was feasible to include in this study. Several participants initially declined to be interviewed. One participant having initially agreed, subsequently declined. This participant’s ultimate response and reason for declining the interview also characterised the malaise of the country in the aftermath of the economic downturn, explaining that ‘I’m not sure I’d have a very positive view of digital art research at the moment, having to take time out to make ends meet...’ (personal communication with unnamed digital artist, January 13<sup>th</sup> 2011). Another participant had agreed, but was living between Ireland and Germany and despite several arranged meetings, something always ‘came up’ and she had to cancel, on one occasion about 15 minutes before our meeting. Other potential participants did not respond to my enquiries<sup>147</sup>, leaving a relatively small pool of participants.

Another limitation of the size of the sector itself lay in the ‘voices’ that emerged. Had the sector been a larger one from which a more varied pool of artists could be sampled, this may have increased the likelihood of contrasting or dissenting voices. Thus, whilst the thesis identified strong specificities, sites of innovation, attitudes to determinism, issues of exhibition and collection, and political and economic constraints, perhaps a broader sample could have enhanced the material.

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147 My strategy when contacting potential participants was always to leave a two to three week gap in between requests, and to make three attempts to contact them. Thus, when no response was forthcoming, it was not due to having made only one attempt that may have been ‘forgotten’ or neglected.

However, an advantage of conducting a small-scale research project is the depth of material encountered. The nature of the study elicited subjective, lived experiences on the subject matter that allowed for a problematisation of digital art in a way that may not have as efficiently been gleaned from say a large-scale, quantitative survey. Also, the ethnographic work and practice as research dimension added complements to the material, and provided a breadth of material to complement the in-depth interviews.



## 11.6 Possibilities for Further Study

As this research thesis was conducted at a time of extreme economic flux, it was informed by the ‘structure of feeling’ of crisis, or change and paradigm shifts not only in artistic production, but in capitalism itself. Thus, as the dust settles, it would be of benefit to chart and follow the participants over a longer time scale, after the ‘crisis’ has hit, and while the ramifications of it are yet to fully unfold. However, this stresses the point that any further study would also need to adopt a theoretical standpoint that places ‘situatedness’ even more to the fore.

The field of digital media is in flux by virtue of the market-driven pace of change of ICTs, making any sustained study of the technologies problematic. Thus, whilst certain open-source hardware and software has emerged as *currently* ‘hot’, a further study would require the researcher to straddle a position that involves a knowledge of these technologies, whilst also understanding that the fetishisation of these technologies carries the risk of a one-dimensional perspective on innovation in digital media. I therefore suggest that whilst this research has strongly attested to the value and potential of technologies such as the *Arduino* hardware and software, the *Processing* programming environment and the *PureData* interface, these technologies may be superseded in the short to medium term. Thus, further research would require ethnographic and/or practice as research components that could embed the researcher in the ‘current’ tools and means, so that they can converse in an in-depth way with their participants. However, the researcher must also be open to those tools being discarded in favour of ones deemed more appropriate. Thus, a fetishisation of the technologies of the day is not an appropriate research trajectory.

The field of innovation studies could be furthered by continuing research that prioritises the innovation processes where the goals or outcomes are not primarily market-driven. This research has yielded insights that pertain to the non-commercial aspect of cultural production. I suggest that further research along this trajectory could yield further insights on innovation practices and processes that complement existing studies of commercially-influenced innovations.

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# **Appendix A:**

## **Chapter Addenda**

## **Appendix A: Chapter Addenda**

### **Chapter 2 Addenda**

#### **A2.1 Case Study: Determined Dystopia, Determined Utopia - A Critique of Determinism**

##### *A2.1.1 Technological Dystopia: Neil Postman and Technopoly*

Cultural critic Neil Postman presents a decidedly dystopian yet determinist critique of technology-centric society in his 1993 work *Technopoly*. In this work, Postman sets out his explication of a *technopoly* as a society where ‘the primary, if not the only, goal of human labor and thought is efficiency, that technical calculation is in all respects superior to human judgment ... and that the affairs of citizens are best guided and conducted by experts’ (Postman 1993: 51). In a technopoly, Postman suggests that culture takes a subaltern place to technology, positing that ‘culture seeks its authorisation in technology, finds its satisfactions in technology, and takes its orders from technology’ (ibid.: 71-72). Whilst this work serves a critique of bureaucracy, mindless technological advancement and the organisation of US society, which Postman considers to be a technopoly, I critique it for its basis in a technological determinist stance.

The work posits a dystopian world where machines are ‘intelligent’, they exist anthropomorphically as pseudo ‘brains’ and ‘thinking machines’. Postman includes quotes from the ‘coiner’ of the phrase ‘artificial intelligence’ to suggest that ‘even machines as simple as thermostats can be said to have beliefs’ (Postman 1993: 74). Postman, in his own analysis of this onslaught of the machine states that the computer ‘subordinates the claims of our nature, our biology, our emotions, our spirituality’ (ibid.). I suggest that Postman’s alarmist stance regarding technology is determinist insofar as he anthropomorphises the machine, elevating it to a status on par with that of human beings, the implication of which being that machines can possess will, consciousness and intent. He suggests that human metaphors and machine metaphors are now interchangeable, citing the use of the words ‘programming’ and ‘deprogramming’ as



now referring to how humans work out thought processes. He details how discourses now attribute breaches of security systems and malicious computer code as ‘viruses’ and ‘worms’, noting how computers are ‘infected’ with them. Postman claims that this is not just anthropomorphism but a shift in perception in the human/machine dynamic. His warning is that if computers can have a status of being ‘sick’, they can also have the status of being ‘well’. ‘Well’ could also connote the state of being *compos mentis* and therefore in a position to make decisions.

To elucidate this point, and a very dystopian view of the human/machine relationship, Postman cites the controversial work of social psychologist Stanley Milgram<sup>148</sup> concerning obedience in an attempt to illustrate the dangers of deferring decisions to others. For Postman however, those ‘others’ are, by implication, computers. The Milgram experiment showed that between 65-70% of participants took orders from a supposed official to the extent that they inflicted electric shocks on others to the extent of severe harm or even death (the ‘official’ and the ‘victims’ were both actors – in a sense the only true ‘victim’ was the subject of the experiment who had to deal with the knowledge of what they were capable of doing to another human being). This work was used to explain how killing within a military setting could be justified as ‘following orders’, potentially negating the perpetrators from any real responsibility. For that reason alone the experiment is still controversial to this day, whilst also deriving controversy from its own reductionist, behaviourist ideologies (Slater, 2005). I suggest that Postman’s use of the findings however, by transposing the implications of the experiment to the context of computer technology, is wholly determinist. Postman posits that the results of the Milgram experiment demonstrate that if ethical responsibility is relinquished, as in the Milgram experiment, ‘we have relinquished control, which in the case of the computer means that we may, without excessive remorse, pursue ill-advised or even inhuman goals because the computer can accomplish them or be imagined to accomplish them’ (Postman 1993: 78).

My critique of Postman’s work is its double-determinism. Critics of the Milgram experiment have found it to be flawed. Lauren Slater suggests that the experiment may

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148 Stanley Milgram (1933 – 1984) was a social psychologist and assistant professor of psychology at Yale University. Although probably best known for his experiments on obedience, he is also the originator of the ‘small world’ experiment, which preceded the ‘six degrees of separation’ hypothesis. His work is the subject of many media representations, my personal favourite being Peter Gabriel’s track on his album *S&P*, entitled *We Do What We’re Told (Milgram’s 37)*.

not have been about obedience at all but about trust, and therefore is framed in a reductionist way. Other critics of the experiment have noted that the situation the subjects found themselves in was so far removed from real-life that one cannot possibly take the findings as being a reliable marker of human behaviour (Slater 2005). Thus, to adopt this problematic experiment uncritically as a warning against the pursuit of technological advancement doubly-determines technology, through Postman himself and through the dystopian outcomes of the Milgram experiment. According to Postman we are, to paraphrase the subtitle of *Technopoly*, surrendering our culture to technology. However, I suggest that such dystopian views are alarmist and determinist, positioning technology as inevitability progressing in sophistication until it takes over human decision-making and ethical judgment. The irony in Postman's usage of the Milgram experiment is, despite its flaws, it shows that the results could be determined with any certainty. If that were the case the experiment would have seen a 100% result of either those who obeyed orders. Milgram has provoked the field of behaviourist and experimental psychology to ask about that 35%, the significant number of objectors to the experiment. Thus, I suggest that were Postman to analyse the complex dynamics behind these numbers, a determinist pronouncement on technology and society would not be so certain, instead seeing within the experiment the complexity of the human and social psyche<sup>149</sup>.

#### *A2.1.2 Technological Utopia in Castells' Information Age*

In contrast to the dystopian setting of Postman, there is a champion of technological determinism who does not see our future reduced to such nihilistic ends, Manuel

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149 Certainly Postman is not alone in his dystopian-determinist stance on technology. Jean Baudrillard, although working in the field of cultural theory, has also unleashed what I consider to be a similarly determinist view of modern – or for him, postmodern society. In his work *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, he charts three eras of modern signification, the last stage being simulation. According to Preston, Baudrillard's assertion is that 'culture no longer copies the real but produces it, postmodern culture is viewed as largely an effect of electronic technologies and networks' (Preston 2001). Again, I posit that this serves as a technologically deterministic stance, implying that meaning and reality have all but disappeared, instead having been replaced by meaningless representations and simulations of technology. It all but shouts 'The Medium Is The Message' – content is unimportant, it is meaningless. However, Baudrillard goes one step further in his apocalyptic view that the loss of the 'real' and the rise of the 'virtual' that results is an insidious enemy of contemporary society, stating that 'it is in the Virtual that we have the ultimate predator and plunderer of reality, secreted by reality itself as a kind of self-destructive viral agent' (Baudrillard 2005). Those aphorisms in Baudrillard's disjointed, poetic style amount to a knife that threatens to bring about the culmination of Postman's sword of Damocles regarding the increasingly complex role that technology plays in contemporary society – Postman's sword at least hangs by a single hair, but add in Baudrillard and one is hurtled from the sphere of the potentiality of dystopia to depressing inevitability.

Castells. It is perhaps unfair to call him a technological determinist when he himself rejects this label. However, it is difficult not to label him as such upon reading the fifth chapter of volume one of his three-volume work *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (Castells 1999). In this chapter, Castells makes determinist claims regarding media, outlining how television and radio have ‘overwhelmed’ textual communication. Castells posits that society is undergoing a seminal change (for the first time in 2700 years) because of the convergence of different communication forms into an interactive network. He describes this new world order as a ‘Super-Text and a Meta-Language’, claiming that this order integrates text, sound, oral and visual communication whilst also suggesting a unity developing between machines, the two sides of the human brain and social contexts (Castells 1999). I suggest that these determinist statements pay a fitting homage to Carey’s beautifully articulated phenomenon of the ‘rhetoric of the technological sublime’ (Carey 2005).

My critique of Castells is in how he does not elaborate on how this unity might be possible, and merely expects the reader to accept the inevitability and universality of its occurrence. He declines to make reference to the digital divide and unequal access to new technologies, rather claiming that despite all the ‘hype’ surrounding the ‘Information Superhighway’, its significance cannot be ignored as it - in grandiose determinist fashion - fundamentally changes the character of communication. Castells suggests that communication decisively shapes culture, in an exercise in *reductio ad absurdum* that starts with the premise that reality is linguistically structured. Ergo, in Castells’ first reduction, our world languages constitute the media. The media can thus be considered as ‘metaphors’ due to their basis in language. These ‘metaphors’ are in turn the building blocks of the construction of culture. Thus, in a reductionist swipe that no doubt McLuhan would be proud of, the medium is once again the message, with the power to construct culture.

In effect Castells suggests that because our cultures are mediated and enacted through communication media, our cultures are transformed by the new networked technological and media system. I suggest that this is technological determinism at its most fundamental. Whilst Castells does concede that at the time of writing, the technological system he outlined is not fully developed, and whilst also acknowledging that it may not develop equally over geographical areas and even temporally, he nonetheless assures the reader that its development is an inevitability, surmising that ‘it is

a certainty that it will develop and embrace at least the dominant activities and the core segments of the population in the whole planet' (Castells 1999). Castells does not in this chapter give any time frame for this, or address how, for example, when a majority of the world's population is functionally illiterate, they will become technologically savvy enough to engage with this new world order in any meaningful way.

These details evidently do not deter Castells, however. He proceeds to lyrically espouse that this technological system is in existence in embryonic form in telecommunications systems, in interaction on the internet, in 'the imagination of people'<sup>150</sup>, government policy and 'the drawing boards of corporate offices'. He questions the ability to assess its potential impact on the world without resorting to 'the excesses of futurology' which he apparently wishes to avoid. However, Castells seems to have no problem with resorting to the excesses of technological determinism. This may not be surprising in the light of his reference to McLuhan's studies of television as a form of mass communication that may be expanded upon for the information society.

Thus from the dystopian futurology of Postman, Castells stands a celebrant of new technology, and its potentials to homogenise and bring equality to society<sup>151</sup>. However, as my critiques have outlined, both stances comprise determinist approaches to the relationship between technology and society. Whether utopian or dystopian, the accounts place technology at the foreground of societal change, with an inevitability around technological advancement for either the universal good, or universal detriment of society. I have alluded to the simplistic stance that both authors adopt, critiquing Postman for the dystopian inevitability of the machine's progress towards ethical decision-making, and critiquing Castells for uncritically describing the universal and inevitable progress of the information age and the debordering and equality he suggests

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150 In my opinion also in the imagination of people is the existence of aliens, armageddon, time travel, a 12,000 year old world and fairies, this statement revealing Castells' utopian and vague sentiments about his network society.

151 With due respect to Castells, I have reflected on this championing of the information age and contemplated that I myself may be practising a reductionism in my critique. Upon reading Castells' chapter in Mackay and Sullivan (Mackay, O'Sullivan and Open University 1999), my opinion of Castells softened somewhat. In that chapter, entitled *An Introduction to the Information Age*, Castells outlines his theories of sociology in the post Cold war, postmodern, post Communist age. Whilst this is just an introduction, Castells details compelling observations of social polarisation and exclusion, proposing the acknowledgement of a 'fourth world' of those excluded from the information society, noting that these people could equally reside in rural Asia or in the Bronx. Thus, despite the difficulty I have with his position on the information society in his main three-volume work, the subsequent analysis of social division pertaining to technology use is noteworthy.

it will usher in.

## **A2.2 Aramis**

*Aramis: Or A Love of Technology* is Bruno Latour's sociotechnical study that charts the failure of a Parisian personal transit system named Aramis. Aramis was a personal rapid transit (PRT) system whose research and development spanned from 1970 until its eventual abandonment in 1987. In its conception, it was meant to function somewhat as a hybrid between a car and a train. It was to have the flexibility and convenience of a car, in the form of a point-to-point transport system. It was also designed to link up with other cars to form trains, so that urban congestion and pollution would be lessened in Paris.

Latour's account of Aramis is a postmortem of the mechanisms of the failure of the transit system in which a fictional professor of sociology and his engineering assistant assemble facts pertaining to the failure of the system, in the hope of reaching a consensus on who 'killed' Aramis. The work is in the unusual form of a hybrid between a sociological analysis, a novel and a fact file that cites data and interviews from some of the key players in the Aramis project. Latour explains that in his work he has 'sought to show technicians that they cannot even conceive of a technological object without taking into account the mass of human beings with all their passions and politics and pitiful calculations, and that by becoming good sociologists and good humanists they can become better engineers and better-informed decisionmakers [sic]' (Latour 2004: viii).

He wishes to show the humanists that machines are worthy of their respect, and show the technologists that the artifacts they create are not possible without human influence. He posits the view that far from our culture being subsumed by machines, a converging of the human/machine dynamic could enrich our culture. By including technology alongside text, Latour maintains that our culture could 'take on added density' (ibid.).

At the end of the work, the professor comes to the conclusion that there was no 'crime', that Aramis was not 'killed' by one fatal flaw, be it design or financial or planning. It was more that there was an inherent fragility to the project on many different levels; political, financial, interpersonal, planning, engineering and design. The conclusions that the professor draws are that despite the multiple fragilities that existed in the project, the people of the project believed in Aramis, and this was ultimately its reason for failure. To put it in Latour's succinct language 'You believed in the autonomy of

technology' (ibid.: 292).

Clearly this work is another swipe at the technological determinists, but it is also an example of how the social shaping model falls short of explaining the complex relationship between human society and technology. The technology affected the humans and their decisions were informed by the changes in the project over time. Thus, there was not one clear path of evolution of the project, either from a technologically deterministic view or from a social shaping one. It was much more like a symbiotic organism – the work showed how as governments changed, the direction of the project changed, but the love of the project over time also kept it alive.

### **A2.3 The Psychology of Innovation**

In the process of researching into theories of innovation, what has repeatedly struck me is the notion of some hidden variable, or chance quirk that can either scupper an innovation's success or ensure it. Rogers referred to the unpredictability factor in innovation, he also mentioned that perception of newness is more important than objective newness. The aforementioned Forfás report uses words such as 'creativity', 'ingenuity', (p.1) 'imagination', (p.33) when referring to their goals and successes in encouraging innovation in Ireland. This points to a need to look at what is behind those words, what is behind the unpredictability, what is this creativity, ingenuity and imagination that leads to innovation?

I am aware that this topic could comprise a paper in itself, and not being a qualified psychologist do not consider myself an expert in matter of the human psyche. However, I have attempted to pursue some study into the human nature of innovation, and have found some research from the field of clinical neuropsychology that could provide a jumping-off point for further consideration.

Tanja Sophie Schweizer<sup>152</sup> has investigated the psychological and neurocognitive aspects of innovation and postulated a neurocognitive model for innovation, creativity and novelty-seeking (Schweizer 2006). In this article, Schweizer considers the role of novelty-seeking behaviour in a work environment, behaviour which she deems significant particularly in companies engaged in innovation and creativity. She reveals that from a neuropsychological perspective, individuals with high levels of novelty-seeking behaviour have certain personality traits that 'also require specific work conditions' (Schweizer 2006: 164). What is interesting about this postulation is that Schweizer not only considers the psychological consequences for the individual who has these personality traits, but she also considers the economic consequences for the companies who employ these individuals. This work is therefore valuable for offering an insight and potentially a management resource for the creative and cultural industries, who seek to employ and retain innovative, creative individuals in order to grow their

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<sup>152</sup> Tanja Sophie Schweizer is an assistant professor of clinical neuropsychology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Her research interests include investigations into creative cognition, stress vs relaxation on brain functioning and the effects of meditation on generative processes. Like Daniel Levitin, who I referred to in my previous paper in terms of music cognition, Schweizer uses research from fMRI imaging to investigate the creative functions of the brain (Vrije Universiteit 2008).



business.

Although it is possibly outside the remit of this study, I find it interesting to note that Schweizer explains that novelty-seeking behaviour is linked to the levels of a neurotransmitter in the brain, called dopamine, and that certain genes have now been identified that control the levels of dopamine in the brain. These genes have even been called the 'novelty-seeking genes' (ibid.: 165). Other studies have found that a high level of novelty-seeking is also linked to what are described as attention deficit behaviours and addictive behaviours. What Schweizer then observes is important for any study of innovation in my opinion, namely that such personality traits have important knock-on effects for social interaction, including interactions in the work environment. She suggests that while the individual with these traits need their own support, support also needs to be given in terms of management in the work environment in order to bring out the best of the novelty-seeking traits in the form of creativity and innovation. Given that Schweizer has already stressed the economic significance of managing novelty-seeking behaviour, this explanation further elucidates the importance of understanding these psychological processes.

She then further explains the psychological complexities of creativity, explaining that creativity involves certain ways of looking at and solving problems, and that creativity emerges from many different types of brain functions. In explaining the innovative process, Schweizer notes that 'in order to find something new, focused attention is necessary, but also the defocusing of attention: creative thinking involves intuitive leaps, which are facilitated by states of unfocused relaxation' (ibid.: 165). She also explains that the ability to have 'many things on your mind at the same time' is linked with creativity as it may encourage lateral thinking, and seeing something from different points of view. Again, Schweizer stresses the importance of understanding these processes and calls for further research to be undertaken so that individuals with high levels of creativity can be understood and supported by structures within companies, such as management and human resources.

When Schweizer proceeds to describe some of the personality traits of creative individuals it helps to further understand the importance of her call for enhanced interdisciplinary research between psychology and human resource management. She notes that creative individuals possess traits such as 'judgmental autonomy, self-

confidence, risk-taking, non-conformity, independence and a critical attitude towards norms' (ibid.: 165). Having worked in two Fortune-500 companies whose human-resource rhetoric spoke of encouraging creativity and lateral thinking, I may permit myself to observe with some credibility that personality traits associated with creativity are most definitely *not* welcome in such environments, where underneath the rhetoric, obedience, conformity and structure are paramount.

Schweizer in her article also mentions other personality traits of creative individuals including curiosity, the openness to new experiences, and seeking out new experiences. Two specific characteristics are defined as *experience seeking* (ES) and *boredom susceptibility* (BS), and if one considers the implications of these personality traits for individuals involved in the innovative process they become quite significant. ES is described as 'the seeking of novel sensations and experiences through the mind and senses, as in arousing music, art, and travel, and through social nonconformity, as in association with groups on the fringes of conventional society (e.g. artists)' (ibid.: 166). BS 'represents an intolerance for repetitive experience of any kind, including routine work, and boring people' (ibid.). This shows that for individuals involved in innovation, a creative and stimulating environment is necessary for both their psychological well-being and for their performance at work.

Critically, what Schweizer also notes is that this openness to new experience 'has been found to be related to trait creativity (McCrae, 1987), creative personality (Feist, 1999), creative achievement (King, Walker & Broyles, 1996) and cultural innovation' (ibid.). Thus, this part of Schweizers article reveals the personality traits of innovative individuals and calls for a need to understand how these individuals' talents and traits can be better managed in a work environment so that they encourage the innovation process.

The next part of the article is valuable for the understanding of the innovation process in terms of the social reception of innovations. Schweizer in this section posits that an innovation 'is not "something new", but more appropriately referred to as "something that is *judged as new*", thus a label resulting from a social comparison and judgment process'. This insight is very valuable as it furthers Rogers' postulation in his definition of innovation as being something that is *perceived* as being new. What Schweizer clarifies is that just as a product can be perceived as being new, it can also be re-judged socially

as no longer being new. Schweizer then seeks to understand the neurocognitive processes that play a role in this judgement of an innovation. I believe this is important for researchers engaged in innovation studies, as an adequate knowledge of the processes involved in judging a product as innovative could help encourage innovation, just as understanding how innovative individuals create can also support the innovation process.

Schweizer notes that an individual or firm can be involved in production but the products may not be innovative or really new. This view is complimented by the Garcia and Calantone report which notes that ‘many firms have taken an innovation strategy of imitating and improving upon existing products or technologies ... often viewed by their competitors as great imitators and not highly innovative’ (Garcia, Rosanna and Roger Calantone 2002: 117). Thus, Schweizer suggests that a model of creativity and novelty-seeking could help frame the individual personality traits, the behaviours that result, and also the sociological processes that all synthesise to produce an innovation. She created a model that elucidates this, and refers to this model as the Novelty Generation Model. She outlines it thus:

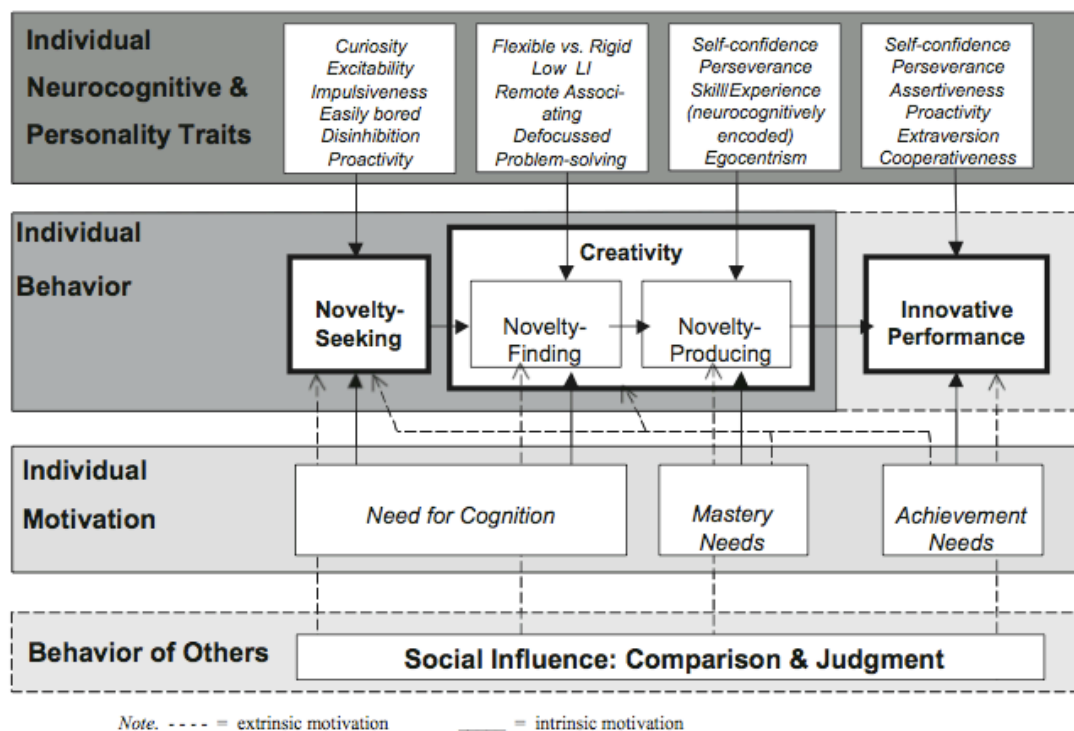


Figure A1: The Novelty Generation Model (Schweizer 2006: 168)

This model explains the neurocognitive and social functions involved in the innovation process. I believe that this model is valuable for providing a holistic understanding of what innovation actually *is* for the individual, the workplace and the social arbiters and adopters of products and services. It provides an understand on what feeds in to innovation – the four-fold areas of individual traits, individual behaviour, motivation and the social influences.

In this model, it can be seen that Schweizer frames the areas of novelty-seeking and creativity as being qualities that lead to innovative performance. The model also explains what within the individual feeds into supporting both creativity and novelty-seeking. Through this clear elucidation of the processes, one can see that personality traits alone will not necessarily translate into creativity. There are needs for motivation, expression and achievement, all of which I believe could be fostered in a working environment that shows consideration towards encouraging innovative behaviour. The social needs are also expressed in this model – showing, as Rogers mooted, how external factors contribute to innovative performance.

## **A2.4 Garcia and Calantone's Typology of Innovations**

Garcia and Calantone (2002) posit that in defining innovation typologies, the existing literature on innovation can be lacking in an understanding of which perspective 'newness' is measured. Thus, an innovation could be perceived as new by the firm involved in creating the innovation, but not the world, the adopting group, the industry, the market or the consumer. The authors posit that this confusion has hindered innovation research, as the research cannot be compared between disciplines.

However, the authors note one consistent feature in the definition of innovativeness - 'discontinuity in marketing and/or technological factors' (ibid.: 112). Therefore, on the macro level, innovativeness is the capacity of an innovation to cause a paradigm shift in the market or technology structure in an industry. On the micro level, innovativeness could shape internal processes in marketing, strategy etc. The authors note that product innovativeness does not equate to innovativeness in a firm - a highly innovative product could be introduced into a non-innovative firm. They give the example of Microsoft, who, the authors suggest is not a very innovative company, but they imitate and improve upon existing technologies.

The authors suggest that through the lenses of different typologies or categorisations, the same terminologies can be used for different types of innovations, and vice versa - a similar innovation could be classified in different typologies. Citing the example of the typewriter, in one study, the typewriter was classed as a 'radical' innovation as it brought about discontinuity in industry. However, another typology classed the typewriter as an 'incremental' improvement on an existing innovation. This was similar in the case of accounts of the Canon laser photocopier. This digital technology was termed in one study as 'radical', as it moved from analogue to digital and was capable of being networked. However, another study noted that the radical technology of the digital was embedded in an *existing* technology, so therefore was incremental. Thus, the inconsistencies of what constitutes 'newness' prohibit a holistic way of measuring the degrees of newness.

The authors thus posit that recent literature has classed innovations as either radical or incremental in a simplistic manner, suggesting that radical innovations are rare, only accounting for about 10% of innovations. However, the authors suggest that two

categories are not adequate to define types of innovations, and believe that a third category is necessary. They refer to this category as the 'really new' (ibid.: 120). They also suggest that a boolean logic could help to categorise the innovations on a macro/micro and marketing/technology perspective. They describe how this typology results in eight possible types of innovation based on five categories and a boolean logic of whether marketing and/or technology discontinuity are present.

I suggest that this framework provides a clarity around the description of the types of innovation. It provides a subtlety by having a five-level description of innovation types, whilst also providing a systematic way of categorising an innovation. This framework clarifies for interdisciplinary research, the parameters operating within discourses of innovation, and allows for innovation processes to be decoupled from market concerns.

## **A2.5 National, Regional and Sectoral Innovation**

The categorisation of innovation systems into a national system is just one of the systems within the systems of innovation framework<sup>153</sup>. The concepts of national, regional and sectoral innovation represent subsets and complementarities of the broader systems of innovation approach. For example, according to Johnson (in Edquist 1997: 36), studying sectoral innovation can be useful to gain a more in-depth study within a national or international context of the systems of innovation framework.

The national systems of innovation framework provides a strong underpinning of the large-scale processes at work. However, firms do not only interact with institutions and organisations in a nation, there are more complex relationships involved, including relationships between firms in a similar industry (sectoral) and geographical relationships between firms (clusters). The regional system of innovation is also considered to be a subset of the national system, Edquist citing Silicone Valley as an example of such a system (Edquist 1997: 11). However, in Ireland, regional innovation is considered to be important in terms of government policy, Forfás noting in a section entitled 'Regional Innovation' that 'The National Spatial Strategy identified nine Gateways with the potential to drive balanced regional development; and to support distinctive and innovative projects in Gateway areas, the Government established a €300 million Gateway Innovation Fund, as part of the National Development Plan 2007-2013' (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2008: 18).

The weakness inherent in just trying to categorise firms by a national system of innovation is that the system can be too broad. For example, many industries now transcend geographical and national boundaries, and therefore analysing them using the national systems of innovation approach falls short. As Nelson and Rosenberg note, 'the system of institutions supporting technical innovation in one field, say pharmaceuticals, may have very little overlap with the system of institutions supporting innovations in another field, say aircraft' (Nelson and Rosenberg, 1993: 5 in Edquist, 1997: 11). This

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153 There is also a regional approach to studying innovation and industrial development, the example Edquist cites as Saxenians 1994 treatise. There emerged in the 1990s two major works on national systems of innovation, one by Lundvall in 1992, the other by Nelson in 1993. Edquist positions the works as 'complimentary', describing how Nelson's book stresses empirical research on the subject, detailing case studies of national systems of innovation in fifteen countries, whereas the thematic approach of Lundvall serves as a theoretical complement to the work of Nelson. Also conducting research through a national framework is Modeste, who in 1992 conducted a study using the national systems of innovation approach which included European countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, Austria & Ireland.

supports their call, amongst others, for considering a system of innovation that takes into account the fields of endeavour of the firms being considered.

The difference between national and sectoral systems of innovation is that borders are not delineated in the sectoral system<sup>154</sup> as it focuses on types of industry. For example, the automotive industry may manufacture components in one country yet market the completed product in a different country. In such an example, the national system of innovation approach would not adequately explain the complexities international linkages occurring in the industry. Various attempts have been made to categorise sectoral systems. An early one by Pavitt and Patel notes that the industrial sectors ‘can be grouped into three broad “technological families”, mechanical, electrical, and chemical’ (Patel and Pavitt, 1991: 45 in Edquist 116). An earlier study by Pavitt attempted a taxonomy of sectors, categorising them into scale intensive, science based, specialised suppliers, and supplier dominated or traditional (Pavitt, 1994 in Edquist 116). Through an analysis of these taxonomies, Paulo Guerrieri and Andrew Tylecote attempted a taxonomy of their own, which delineated sectors according to the following: mechanical and electrical, electronics, chemicals, ‘effects’, ‘volumes’ and biochemicals. Whilst this research is formidable, especially to someone studying innovation from the humanities, it does provide a jumping-off point for considering innovation in terms of the ‘type’ of industry being considered. Whilst the research that Pavitt, Patel, Guerrieri and Tylecote centres on the industrial industries, potential exists to analyse the media and cultural industries through the sectoral systems of innovation approach, more so than national or regional approaches.

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154 It could also be noted that regions could act like sectors in certain circumstances. Again, Silicon Valley serves as an example of this. However, regions still have the implication of borders being involved, whereas sectors do not.



## A2.6 EU Report on Clusters

An EU report has studied the concept of clusters of innovation. The organisation who carried out the study, PRO INNO Europe, ‘aims to become the focal point for innovation policy analysis, learning and development in Europe, with the view to learning from the best and contributing to the development of new and better innovation policies in Europe’ (European Commission 2008). The reports that they produce are called *innobarometers*, and their 2006 report focused on clusters (European Commission 2006).

The 2006 report studied innovation in 25 EU member states, along with four countries applying for membership, and three non-EU states (Norway, Switzerland and Iceland. The report states that it considers clusters to be ‘prominent vehicles of increased innovation and competitiveness, where – due to the concentration of similar and complementary businesses – key factors of development can be produced more economically and competition is above the average’ (European Commission 2006: 3). The report was revealing in terms of its analysis of awareness of the concepts of clusters, understanding of what clusters are and the distribution of clusters in the EU. The study, in what I observe to be possibly precipitated by an understanding of the national systems of innovation framework, also analysed the role of the public institutions and organisations in clusters.

The report found that there is generally a high level of awareness of the concept of clusters in the older EU member states. However, awareness amongst the four candidate states drops, and is lower again for the ten new member states. The European Free Trade Association countries also score quite highly on awareness, but not as highly as the established EU member states, as depicted thus:

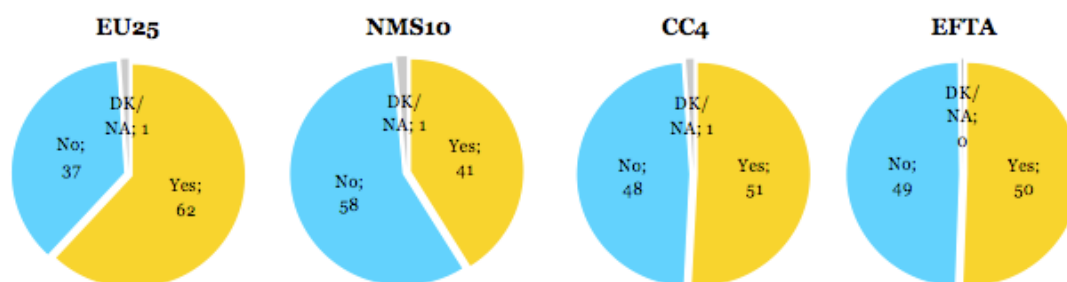
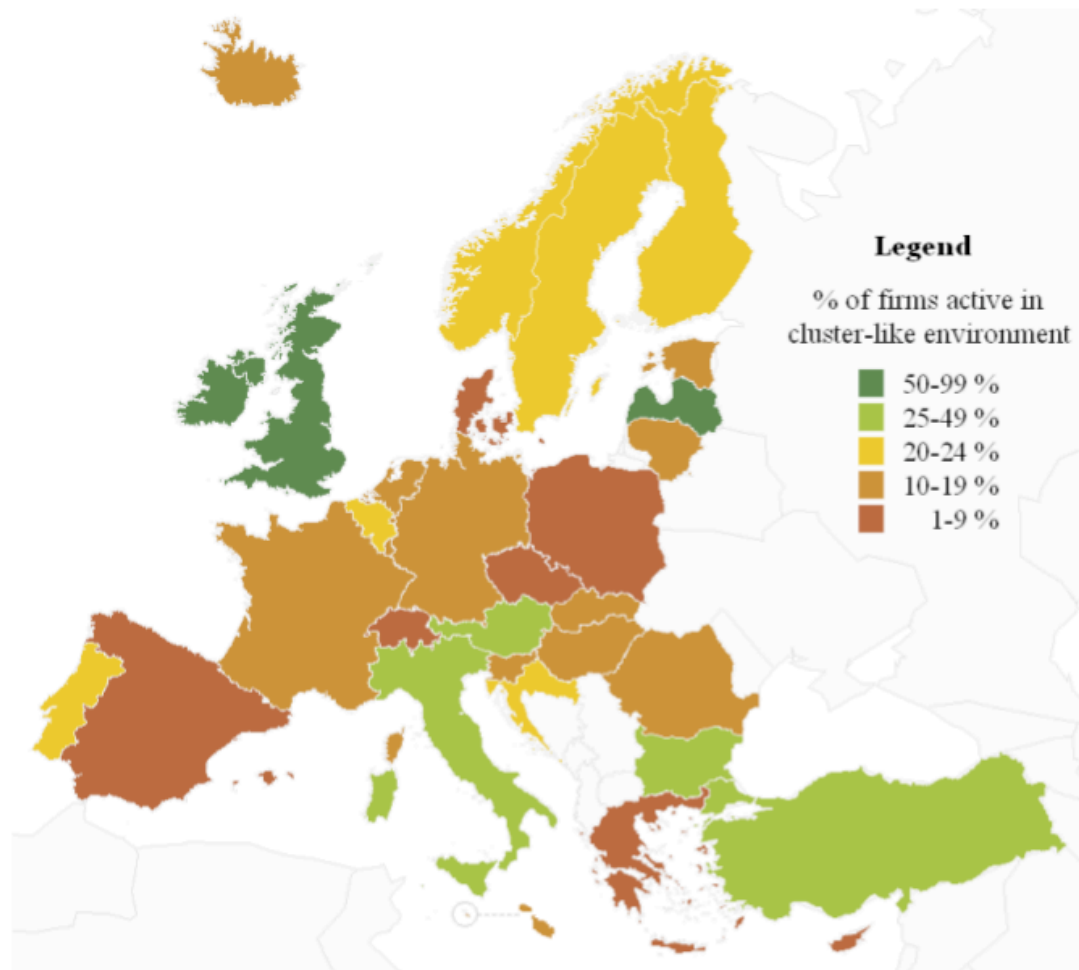


Figure A2: awareness of the concept of clusters

The study proceeds to then analyse the percentage of companies operating in a cluster environment. This shows a great variance throughout the EU, with the UK and Ireland having the highest level of operations in the cluster environment. Again, using a national systems of innovation framework to explain this could prove very effective. For example, in Irelands case we can see how public policy is helping to promote innovation. Again, the Forfás innovation report notes that ‘While enterprises and individuals are the primary sources of innovation, public policy can establish the right framework conditions for innovation to flourish’ (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment 2008: 2). In Irelands case, the EU Innobarometer report shows that approximately 64% of companies operate in a cluster environment. The standings are displayed graphically as follows:



*Figure A3: percentage of firms operating in a cluster environment*

Some of the other findings that have implications for innovation in member countries, in particular Ireland, are also posited:

- \* The survey found that innovative companies operating in a cluster are more innovative than other companies
- \* Companies in clusters are more than twice as likely to outsource R&D to universities, other firms or public labs
- \* Most managers in cluster companies consider the role of government to be very important in supporting the cluster
- \* Ireland has a particularly high level of financial support for clusters at a government level
- \* In Ireland, the company departments that benefit most from the company operating in a cluster are sales, marketing and R&D

## **A2.7 Understanding the Nature of Diffusion: Rogers' Case Studies**

Rogers uses the case study of scurvy in the British navy (Rogers 1966: 7) to show how even obviously beneficial innovations can be diffused very slowly. In this study, Rogers charts the time frame between the first known experiment on scurvy in 1601, showing the benefits of lemon juice in controlling scurvy, and the eventual adoption of citrus fruits as part of sailors' diets in 1795. Rogers points out that the navy adopted technological innovations more rapidly at the same time, so it was not the case that the navy were slow to adopt innovations generally. Rogers cannot fully account for why the navy were so slow to adopt scurvy prevention measures, but he did point out that one of the major experimenters was not a naval medicine expert. Perhaps the perceived lack of authority could have led to skepticism of the experiment's findings? The point from this example is that just because an innovation is beneficial, tested experimentally, cost-effective and easy to implement, it does not necessarily follow through that the innovation will be adopted. This study shows that the psychological dimensions of perception could have been a factor – the perceptions of the navy that a main contributor to this innovation was not an expert in naval medicine.

In the second of Rogers' case studies on diffusions, he uses the well-cited example of the Dvorak typewriter keyboard. Rogers details the design of QWERTY keyboard, noting that the layout of the keys was to prevent the old, mechanical typewriter from jamming. This was achieved by arranging the keys in such a manner that there was a very small probability of adjacent keys appearing together in type. However, by 1900 there was frustration at the layout because the typewriter technology had improved, leading to less of the insidious jamming. This frustration was also due to the increase in touch-typing skills amongst typists, leading to an ability to type faster. The QWERTY layout thus hindered the typist. Around 1932 Professor August Dvorak of Washington University designed a typewriter layout that would afford more efficiency to the user. The new *Dvorak* layout meant that the amount of work done by each finger was in proportion to its strength and dexterity. This had huge advantages to speed and accuracy for typists and was clearly a well-thought out, scientifically-based, empirically researched innovation. Yet the QWERTY layout is still almost exclusively in use. Rogers posits an explanation for this, citing vested interests among typewriter/keyboard manufacturers to not change the layout. Rogers also blames users themselves.

These studies show that diffusion of innovations is a complex concept in itself. It is subject to the quirks and idiosyncracies of human behaviour and perception. An innovation might 'tick all the boxes' in terms of function, efficiency and cost, but the uncertainty and unpredictability that Rogers highlighted earlier in his work are certainly at play in the diffusion process.

## Chapter 3 Addenda

### A3.1 The Six Facets of the Production Nexus

#### *Technology*

The first facet of the production nexus is identified as technology. The authors claim that ‘technology provides the tools with which people and institutions augment their abilities to communicate, and changes in communication technology profoundly destabilize and create new opportunities in art and culture’ (Peterson and Anand 2004: 314). The authors cite several examples that enforce this view, starting with the technology of the printing press, which evidently precipitated the evolution in western society from the medieval to a Renaissance era. The authors then cite several studies relating to the composer Ludwig van Beethoven and the development of the pianoforte. One study claims that ‘the structure of a vast amount of orchestral music owes its shape to the mind set of the piano’ (Goodall 2000: 175 cited in Peterson and Anand 2004: 314). This claim, referring to the *structure* of orchestral music, is linked to Beethoven’s emergence as a composer, with the authors citing a 1995 study by DeNora in which it is claimed that ‘were it not for the advent of this technology, Beethoven would have remained a provincial musician on the streets of Vienna, and the world would not have his magnificent body of work’ (Peterson and Anand 2004: 314). In keeping with the musical theme, the authors then draw on more research, all claiming that improvements in recording and transmission of sound ‘radically altered music in the twentieth century’ (ibid.).

However, this particular viewpoint of technology is somewhat problematic in that it is quite determinist. From a social shaping of technology perspective, technology alone cannot be responsible for the emergence of a new social era, nor can it alone be responsible for the emergence of a genius such as Beethoven. There are many contingent factors involved in the successful adoption of a new technology, many of them social, political and cultural. However, within the six facets of the production nexus, the impact of these factors, particularly the social factors is diminished and lost once technology is over-emphasised.

### *Law and Regulation*

The second facet in the production nexus is identified as law and regulation. The authors note that ‘law and regulation create the groundrules that shape how creative fields develop’ (ibid. 315). They illustrate this by using the example of Griswold’s 1981 study of copyright law in the nineteenth century. Griswold noted that the main themes evident in successful American novels at this time centred around man and his striving endeavours to master the wilds of nature, whereas English novels centred around more domestic concerns. This difference was put down to differences in culture, but Griswold found another explanation - that of copyright. She found that English novels could be sold copyright-free in the US, giving English works (although clearly not the authors themselves) the advantage. In response to this, the American authors needed to increase the saleability of their work by writing more specialised works with themes such as man versus nature. Significantly, she notes that once the copyright laws changed in 1909, the amount of domestic type novels being produced by American writers increased. Therefore, the supposedly cultural difference between England and America regarding taste in novels was in part falsely exaggerated due to copyright law and regulation.

Related to this is the issue of censorship. The authors explain that ‘since the earliest days of printing, when the right to publish books was controlled by the Crown, regulation and censorship of the culture industries have shaped what could be produced’ (ibid.). This has had an effect on the modern culture industry, the authors noting that ‘restriction on multiple ownership of newspapers and of TV and radio stations has fostered competition and diversity in the United States, and deregulation has had serious consequences’ (ibid.). They observe a change in ownership of radio stations over time, in what could be described as a diachronic application of the perspective. According to a 2004 study by Lee, the largest radio company in the US in 1989 owned 20 radio stations, whereas by 2002, the corresponding largest company owned 1225 stations (Lee 2004 cited in Peterson and Anand 2004: 315). The knock-on effect of this is that the decisions as to what music made it to air were made by fewer individuals, with the result that ‘in 2002 just about half as many songs were aired often enough to become popular as indicated by the pop music charts’ (ibid.). This is significant in terms of the quality of material being disseminated by the culture industry.

However, at this point, quality of content is not discussed in relation to such industrial developments.

### *Industry Structure*

Peterson and Anand next observe how industry structure can be a significant part of the production nexus. Citing DiMaggio and Powell's 1991 work, they note how 'industrial fields (Bourdieu 1993) tend to coalesce around new technologies, evolving legal arrangements, and newly conceptualized markets, a process identified as "institutionalization"' (ibid.: 315). According to the authors, this process of institutionalisation can be seen in many areas of cultural production including fine arts, commercial music, country music, photography and the film industry (ibid.). Another aspect to this is 'reinstitutionalisation', in which established organisations restructure according to the same three factors involved in institutionalisation.

Specific to the cultural industries, the authors observe how these industries can be structured in three ways (ibid.: 316), with a large amount of small businesses and diverse offerings, a small amount of large companies offering little diversity or a hybrid, where oligarchical companies are divided into areas that produce content for strategically targeted markets and also products that are targeted at more specialised markets. Within this hybrid, the authors note that 'the former produce the most lucrative products and the latter produce the most innovative' (ibid.). To elucidate this, the authors use the example of commercial music, again applying the production perspective in a diachronic way. They note how 'in the late 1940s, a few large firms dominated the field and bland homogenous music predominated. In the 1954-1968 period, many small record companies prospered, and the music became highly diverse and innovative, but by the late 1980s, the oligarchic firms were able to dominate by buying or building niche market divisions and making diverse music that generally was not innovative' (ibid.). While this could be perceived as a mild critique of the lack of innovation that results from such culture industries, it by no means critiques the culture industries in terms of the regression of listening that Adorno attributed to the culture industry decades previously.



### *Organisational Structure*

According to the authors, there are three types of organisations in the culture industry. The first type identified is a bureaucratic type of organisation, consisting of distinct roles and an organised hierarchical system of authority. This type of organisation is suited to gaining access to markets and distribution channels. The second type is an entrepreneurial organisation where there is not as distinct a division in roles nor in authority. This type tends to be more innovative, allowing for less structure and more creativity. The third type is somewhat of a composite between the two, it being a large organisation that adopts the bureaucratic organisational structure, but which also leverages for a creative and entrepreneurial spirit through employing services on a short term, contractual basis.

To elucidate this, the authors cite several synchronic studies, including a 2002 one by Thornton on the publishing industry. She found that once the ‘multidivisional’ organisational structure was adopted in the industry, standardisation became a key factor in such organisations (Thornton 2002 cited in Peterson and Anand 2004: 316). This was applicable not only to the publishing industry where ‘routines are designed to sort the unfamiliar into the familiar at every step of the decision chain’ (ibid.) but also applied to the music industry where ‘music label executives, for example, seek to tailor the sound of new bands in the mold of accepted genres’ (ibid.).

### *Occupational Careers*

As the authors explain, ‘culture is produced through sustained collective activity, so each cultural field develops a career system’ (ibid.: 317). For example, in the field of writing, Bourdieu and Anheier see the career system ‘as both vertically stratified as “elite” and “peripheral” and horizontally differentiated as “literary” or “light” works’ (ibid.). In order to distinguish between these literary or light works, a system of cultural gatekeeping is necessary. The individuals involved in the gatekeeping ‘selectively favor a subset of producers over others, thereby magnifying distortions in age, gender, and other demographic characteristics’ (ibid.). The authors cite a 1976 study by Crane in which she considers reward systems in art, science and religion, and investigates how variations

in such reward systems either foster or inhibit innovation. This study will also be considered later in this paper.

### *Market*

The final facet in the production nexus is the market. As the authors note, ‘markets are constructed by producers to render the welter of consumer tastes comprehensible’ (ibid.). They also explain that ‘markets result from the actions of cliques of producers who interact with and observe each others’ attempts to satisfy consumer tastes’ (ibid.). This can bring about a continual reshaping of markets, for example the once titled ‘hillbilly’ music became reconceptualised as ‘country’ music in the 1950s (ibid.). As the authors observe in relation to this reconceptualisation, ‘once consumer tastes are reified as a market, those in the field tailor their actions to create cultural goods like those that are currently most popular as represented by the accepted measurement tools’ (ibid.), for example the *Billboard* music charts. If, for example, the *Billboard* charts are recompiled to show a different emphasis on musical genres, that could have the knock-on effect of changing the way in which genres are viewed by the market, ‘consequently changing the allocation of resources to them’ (ibid.).

### **A3.2 Six Facets of Production Nexus Mapped to Hesmondhalgh**

#### *Technology*

As we saw previously, Peterson and Anand's document implies that technology itself was responsible for the exposition of Beethoven's genius, and that it precipitated the transformation from medieval to Renaissance society. This stance is widely known as technological determinism. In considering the role technology, Hesmondhalgh warns against any sort of reductionism, while also acknowledging that technology can have effects. He explains that he would rather use the term *reductionism* to determinism because 'the problem is not that technology is given a determining role but this determining role is overemphasised, thus reducing complexity to simplicity' (Hesmondhalgh 2007: 80). He later cautions that 'we need to be particularly cautious in addressing technology as a causal factor, for technologies are themselves the effects of choices, decisions, contingencies and coincidences in the realms of economics, politics and culture. Therefore, in the context of a complex production nexus, technology can be assigned a significant role, but favouring such a stance should not be at the expense of considering other factors. In this regard, the production of culture perspective provides a framework to highlight the role of technology, yet frame that role within a complex nexus.

#### *Law and Regulation*

Hesmondhalgh addresses issues of law and regulation through analysing the implications of copyright in the cultural industries. He explains that copyright is one aspect of a tripartite nexus that also includes patents and trademarks (ibid.: 149). That tripartite nexus is termed intellectual property. He explains how copyright could be understood as a form of protection for the creators, and also an incentive to create. However, he also notes how copyright 'is better understood as an attempt to regulate one of the distinctive problems facing the cultural industries, which is that cultural commodities often tend to act like public goods, in that the act of consuming them does not diminish their value' (ibid.: 150). This regulation of such goods in the form of limiting the copying of them has the effect of 'making cultural goods scarcer than they might otherwise be' (ibid.).

In the light of Peterson and Anand's work, this observation is valid. As they noted, in changing copyright law, the type of themes present in nineteenth century US novels changed once the law ensured equanimity between American and English writers.

### *Industry structure*

Peterson and Anand distinguished three types of structure in the cultural industries. They noted the presence of small firms, something also acknowledged by Hesmondhalgh. He explains reasons for the small firms being still operational in what could be considered a hostile oligarchical environment, noting a growth of 'independent-friendly' industries through the emergence of new technologies (ibid.: 174). He also considers the cultural producers in the wider sociological context, observing that 'there has been increasing emphasis since the 1970s on the value of "going it alone", working separately from large bureaucratic organisations' (ibid.). Third, Hesmondhalgh cites the availability of venture capital. Fourth, he notes that 'dominant vertically integrated companies have seen some disintegration' (ibid.: 175), thus allowing scope for smaller independent companies to provide services. Lastly, he cites an increasing interest in marketing as being an area that small independent firms can benefit from in terms of interest from other companies who value the creative work involved in an enhanced marketing strategy.

On the large, corporate scale, which Peterson and Anand termed 'vertically integrated' and 'oligarchal', Hesmondhalgh echoes this, citing two features at this scale; conglomeration and vertical integration (ibid.: 164). He defines a conglomerate as 'a corporation that consists of a group of businesses dealing in different products or services' (ibid.: 310). He explains the impact of such oligarchical firms, noting that 'conglomeration clearly entails an increase in the scope and power of individual cultural industry corporations, in that the same corporation can have stakes in many different forms of communication' (ibid.: 167).

### *Organisational Structure*

In a similar analysis to his broad one of the industry, Hesmondhalgh evaluates the organisational structures within the cultural industries. He notes that since the 1960s, there has been a tendency towards conglomeration (ibid.: 68), which would in some cases approximate to the first type of structure defined by Peterson and Anand, in which the large bureaucratic firm offers a clear division of labour and a hierarchical authority system. In line with Peterson and Anand's typology, Hesmondhalgh also notes that the smaller, more entrepreneurial firms also explains how the 'complex professional' period from about the 1950s also allowed for these firms to exist. He notes how 'as small companies proliferated, more and more importance was attached to them as sites of creative independence, which reflects anxieties about the negative effects of big, bureaucratic organisations on cultural production' (ibid.: 59).

### *Occupational Careers*

In terms of occupational careers, Hesmondhalgh provides what could be considered to be a complement to Peterson and Anand's work, detailing what Bill Ryan termed a 'project team' (ibid.: 64). According to Hesmondhalgh, the team consists firstly of '*primary creative personnel* such as musicians, screenwriters and directors, magazine journalists, and authors' (ibid.). These fall in to the category of what Hesmondhalgh describes as 'symbol creators' and are involved in generating creative ideas. Next in the team are the *technical workers*, highly skilled individuals who perform specific tasks, such as sound engineering, camera operation and typesetters. Whilst these individuals are also involved in the process of creativity, they do not usually generate creative ideas themselves, and are thus akin to artisans rather than artists. Third in the team are *creative managers* who 'act as brokers or mediators between, on the one hand, the interests of owners and executives, who have to be primarily interested in profit (or, at the very least, prestige), and those of creative personnel, who will want to achieve success and/or build their reputation by producing original, innovative and/or accomplished works. Such individuals include A&R teams in the music industry, producers and editors. Next in the team are the *marketing personnel* whose aim it is 'to match the work of primary creative personnel to audiences' (ibid.: 65). The final members in a project team are the *owners and executives* who direct the organisation, are responsible for staff contracts but

who do not have significant creative input, and the *unskilled and semi-skilled labour* who may work in the packaging and distribution of the cultural product.

### *Market*

The questions of the cultural market, its concentration and its relationship with the consumer are complex. Hesmondhalgh attempts to address some of these questions throughout his 2007 work. As we saw previously, Peterson and Anand considered markets to be constructed by cliques of producers. Issues of quality and standards arise from this, along with issues of diversity. However, Hesmondhalgh cautions against inferring from studies attesting to increasing market concentration, stating that ‘even in the rare cases where decreasing diversity is clear, it is very difficult to show that concentration *causes* homogenisation’ (ibid.: 76).

On the other hand, Hesmondhalgh asks ‘how can we possibly speak of a lack of diversity?’ when shops are ‘awash with products and nearly everyone in the developed world can receive more radio and television stations than ever before’ (ibid.). However, as Hesmondhalgh notes ‘one political economy writer (Mosco 1995: 258) has responded to this criticism by making a distinction between multiplicity - the sheer number of voices - and diversity - whether or not these voices are actually saying anything different from each other’ (ibid.). Hirsch also echoed this in terms of television and newspaper media, positing that ‘as the level of concentration increases across these media, an interesting empirical and researchable question will be whether the diversity of what becomes available is diminished’ (Hirsch 2000: 357).

### **A3.3 Bourdieu's Methodology**

Perhaps because of a rigorous engagement with the combined intellectual practices of theory and empirical research, Bourdieu contributed a powerful sense of introspection and reflexivity to his work. This has been significant in the field of social research, with Bourdieu positing that sociologists themselves are socially situated and therefore there can be 'no such thing as "disinterested" academic work' (Jenkins 2002: xi). The significance of this, according to Jenkins, is that 'epistemological questions about the nature of adequate sociological knowledge and the conditions under which it is possible are central to his project' (ibid.: 10). Jenkins elaborates this further by analysing Bourdieu's epistemology and philosophy, observing that 'rather than attempting to pronounce on "the big questions" - "the meaning of life" - Bourdieu is more interested in how those questions become possible and the manner in which that meaning is practically accomplished as a social phenomenon' (ibid.:16).

A further dichotomy that Bourdieu explored was that of the individual and society. Jenkins posits that Bourdieu was influenced by two dichotomous movements in the form of existentialism, epitomised by Sartre, and structuralism, epitomised by Lévi-Strauss (ibid.: 18). Jenkins claims that within that exploration 'lie the roots of Bourdieu's attempt to overcome the "absurd opposition between individual and society", the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism' (ibid.). According to Jenkins, Bourdieu considered that opposition to be 'the key and the ultimate dualistic category which structures and organises social science and, at the need of the day, the root of social science's inadequacies' (ibid.). Garnham and Williams also attest to in Bourdieu's exploration of the opposing discourses of Subjectivism and Objectivism. They assert that 'while Subjectivism cannot recognize the social determinants in human action', the Objectivists fail 'to recognize in the idealization of the structure and its logic an expression of their failure to recognize the social conditions of their own practice by failing to recognize the socially and historically specific conditions determining all human practice' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 119). Thus, Bourdieu reveals a necessary step in order to resolve these dichotomies, which is that any sociological investigation must consider the historical dimension to the issue 'by specifying the social conditions under which the structure will be reproduced or conversely will be more or less rapidly transformed' (ibid.). However, Bourdieu also provides a caveat to this, because he recognises that there is an arrow of time, and that human action takes place

in a unidirectional way, thereby adding a sense of unpredictability into sociological matters. Thus humans, acting in society, perform actions in a way that is guided by an uncertainty as to the outcome of those actions. This leads to a sense of potential opposition, because their actions can be interfered with by other actors, which in turn leads to the issue of unpredictability for the sociologist. Bourdieu suggests that a way to investigate this 'is to specify the mechanism by which unbeknownst in principle to the actors (for if they knew they would alter their strategy to take account of this knowledge) these strategies of improvisation are objectively co-ordinated' (ibid.). Bourdieu terms this regulating mechanism the habitus, which will be analysed later, along with his field theory and his research on capital.

Thus, it is evident that Bourdieu wished to not only explore the inadequacies of social science, but to attempt a redress of these inadequacies by example. In his 2003 Huxley Memorial lecture, he detailed some of these inadequacies, positing that 'I have little sympathy with what Clifford Geertz calls, after Roland Barthes, "the diary disease", an explosion of narcissism sometimes verging on exhibitionism, which came in the wake of, and in reaction to, long years of positivist repression' (Bourdieu 2003: 282). For Bourdieu therefore, the reaction to positivism in the social sciences was in a problematic form of reflexivity that promoted extreme subjectivity and a narcissism that lacked a relative objectivity that empirical research could offer the discipline. However, he explored some possibilities for the field of social science research, positing that 'one does not have to choose between participant observation, a necessarily fictitious immersion in a foreign milieu, and the objectivism of the "gaze from afar" of an observer who remains as remote from himself as from his object' (ibid.).

The alternative that Bourdieu considered as a viable alternative was one he termed 'participant objectivation', which he explained as 'the objectivation of the subject of objectivation, of the analysing subject - in short, of the researcher herself' (ibid.). As Jenkins describes this process, it is 'the objectification of the relationship that the researcher as subject - in this case Bourdieu himself - has to the field in which he or she participates, but which is also the object of the research' (Jenkins 2002: xvi). This raises consciousness of how the researcher themselves is situated within their field, within class structures, within the educational sphere and their relation to various forms of capital.



While this is a challenging epistemology to adhere to, Bourdieu believed that the practice of reflexive sociology ‘possesses the unique potential to objectify intellectual production and, in the process, to objectify itself’ (ibid.: xvii). Therefore, the contribution to academic discourse is significant, as it provides the academic field of sociology with a discernment of both the subjects that it is engaged with, and with a reflexivity that allows it to self-critique as a discipline. It allows for a scientific form of sociology, grounded in empirical research and objectivity whilst also adhering to the valuable contributions of subjective reasoning and introspection. As Karakayali notes, ‘it is this “double gesture” - break with objectivism but not science and epistemology - which gives Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology its distinctive characteristics’ (Karakayali 2004: 355).

### **A3.4 Pierre Bourdieu: The Social and the Cultural**

#### *A3.4.1 Bourdieu and Cultural Studies*

Bourdieu's writings have been greeted with mixed reactions within cultural studies<sup>155</sup>, with an initial review of his work *Distinction* by Garnham and Williams welcoming the work, whilst also offering critiques of it. They observe the relative lack of adoption of Bourdieu's work into Anglo-Saxon cultural studies literature, noting that 'neglect of this aspect of Bourdieu's work [on the history and sociology of culture] is not only damaging in its own right within cultural studies, but this fragmentary and partial absorption of what is a rich and unified body of theory and related empirical work ... can lead to a danger of seriously misreading the theory' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 116). Garnham and Williams as two prominent cultural theorists, aimed to provide an overview of Bourdieu's work on culture, and also investigate how Bourdieu's work could contribute to traditional cultural studies discourses.

Garnham and Williams posit that the discipline of cultural studies has developed in two stages, both of which, they observe, can be explained by Bourdieu's theory of cultural production (ibid.). The authors identify these two stages of development as 'cultural Marxism' and 'theoreticist Marxism'. They explain that the first stage was 'in opposition to both the subjectivism of Leavisite literary criticism and to that empirical, ahistorical sociology of mass-communication and popular culture' (ibid.). The second stage 'directed consideration of the problem of ideology away from economic and class determinants' (ibid.). They note that this second stage privileged the text itself as the site for the theoreticist's 'relatively autonomous signifying practice', but that this development has been disputed, amidst calls for a need to value empirical research and consideration of 'economic and class determinants' (ibid: 117).

The authors explain that Bourdieu's work assists in synthesising these two stages, observing that Bourdieu 'develops a theory of ideology based upon both concrete historical research and upon the use of the classical techniques of empirical sociology such as the statistical analysis of survey data' (ibid.). In addition to this, Bourdieu at

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once also critiques theoreticism ‘by specifying with accompanying empirical evidence the historical roots and economic and class determinants of the relative autonomy of intellectual practice’ (ibid.). Thus, Bourdieu in his practice attempts to harmonise a seemingly dichotomous tension between theory, (which Garnham and Williams have identified as being problematic for its subjectivity) with an intellectual practice that is grounded in empiricism and backed up by empirical evidence from quantitative research techniques. In the case of *Distinction*, Bourdieu posits that there is a twofold interest in appropriating a particular ideology, the interest of the ‘specialists’ who are ‘competing for the monopoly of the competences in question’ but also the interest of the ‘non-specialists’ (Bourdieu, 1977 in Garnham 1986). Bourdieu refers to this twofold interest as ‘doubly determined’. The result of this, according to the authors is a work that is ‘a frontal assault upon all essentialist theories of cultural appropriation (taste) and cultural production (creativity)’ (ibid.). Thus, it places cultural production within a complex political, economic and social nexus, refuting the essentialist notion of absolute taste or absolute autonomous creativity, along with a challenge to the notion that cultural elites are removed from the shaping forces of economics and politics. This in turn challenges the prescriptiveness of an ‘absolute’ culture, instead positing that these notions of absolute cultural values are ideologies ‘that the intelligentsia has constructed in defence of its material and symbolic interests as the “dominated fraction of the dominant class”’ (ibid.).

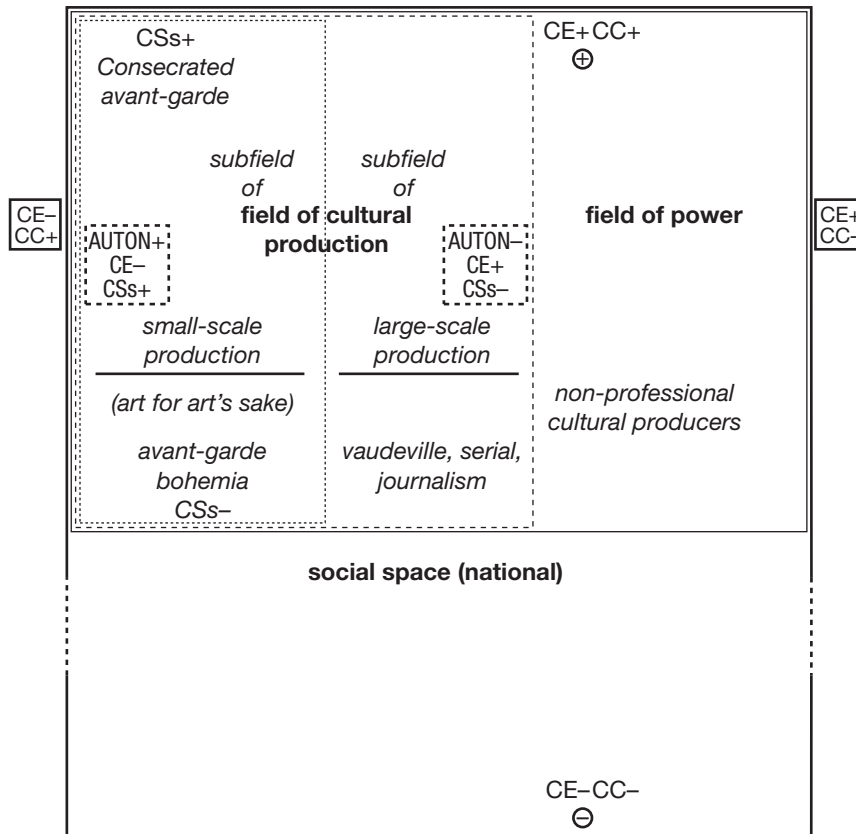
The authors then proceed to analyse what they consider to be a fundamental issue with historical materialism, which is that of reproduction (ibid.). They consider this issue to exist at two levels, the material and symbolic, with society being organised as to perpetuate the current material conditions (which they term ‘the problem of the mode of production’), but also how society is symbolically organised in such a way as to prevent conflict about this structure (which they term ‘the problem of the mode of domination’), thus legitimising the existing status quo. They posit that this problem is addressed by Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice, and that Bourdieu addresses the second problem of the mode of domination with an analysis of ‘the exercise of symbolic power’, whilst also investigating the material, economic aspect, thus interrogating the first problem of the mode of production. They also note that Bourdieu’s work, being in the form of a critique, has broader implications for intellectual work and advise against appropriating his work just for a particular sub-discipline such as cultural studies. They posit that Bourdieu’s analysis ‘lies at the very heart of his wider general theory ...

because it provides the very conditions of its own potential scientificity' (ibid.: 118). They elucidate this by explaining the ramifications for an intellectual practice, positing that 'Bourdieu sees sociology as by definition the science of the social conditions determining human practices and thus the sociology of symbolic power is the science of the social conditions determining intellectual practice' (ibid.). However, these conditions are culturally, politically and historically situated. Thus, a critique of these conditions can bring about a progression from ideology to practice, and in doing so, 'the historically defined limits of available truth' can be revealed. They note that this movement is also inherently political 'because it is the misrecognition of these conditions and limits that is the condition for the exercise of symbolic power to reinforce the tendency to reproduce the existing structure of class relations' (ibid.).

#### *A3.4.2 Annotating the Social Space*

Bourdieu annotated his complex field theory in his work *The Rules of Art* (Bourdieu 1996: 124). This annotation is reproduced below. Hesmondhalgh explains that 'Bourdieu sees the field of power as characterized by high levels of economic capital and low levels of cultural capital (indicated by CE+ and CC- at the top right of the figure). The field of cultural production, meanwhile, is constituted by low levels of economic capital and high levels of cultural capital (indicated by CE- and CC+ at the top left of the diagram)' (Hesmondhalgh 2006: 214). However, there are specific forms of symbolic capital also shaping this field, annotated by CSs+ and CSs-, with the top left of the figure showing a high degree of symbolic, specific capital towards the 'consecrated avant-garde' area, and a much lower degree of symbolic, specific capital in the areas of avant-garde, bohemia, vaudeville, serial and journalism.

Within this field of cultural production are two sub-fields, those of small-scale production and large-scale production. What distinguishes these two fields are levels of capital and autonomy. According to Bourdieu's annotation, the small-scale production field is characterised by high levels of autonomy (AUTON+), high levels of symbolic, specific capital (CSs+) but low levels of economic capital (CE-). This area includes 'art for art's sake'. In the field of large-scale production however, there is a low level of autonomy (AUTON-), high levels of economic capital (CE+) and low levels of symbolic, specific capital (CSs-).



Key

— Social space	CE Capital – economic
— Field of power	CC Capital – cultural
--- Field of cultural production]	CSs Capital – symbolic, specific
..... Subfield of small-scale production]	AUTON+ High degree of autonomy
	AUTON- Low degree of autonomy

figure A4: the social space (Bourdieu 1996, reproduced in Hesmondhalgh 2006)

### A3.4.3 Cultural Consumption

Bourdieu considers that the ‘consumption’ of cultural goods is just one aspect of the field of cultural production. While he acknowledges that class-based distribution of access to cultural goods is important, the underlying class distinctions are also of great significance. Bourdieu therefore wishes not only to highlight the question of access to cultural goods, but to explore ‘in terms of the legitimation function of cultural practice the ways in which these objective class distinctions are internalized within the habitus as differing dispositions, differing attitudes towards culture and differing abilities to utilize cultural practices’ (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 124). Therefore, Bourdieu is concerned with how class fractions, through their habitus, either adopt or reject cultural goods, and in doing so contribute unwittingly to maintaining the existing class relations.

Garnham and Williams posit that ‘the cultural field serves as a marker and thus a reinforcer of class relations’ (ibid.). As Bourdieu himself posits ‘that is why art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences’ (Bourdieu 1993: 7). Garnham and Williams elaborate on this by describing Bourdieu’s exploration of cultural production in the form of art. They posit that there are two reasons that the cultural field acts as both marker and reinforcer of class relations, firstly because cultural production and specifically art, has a rejection of use-value and therefore is marked itself by difference, and secondly because art has been only possible historically in the realm of the bourgeoisie who could afford to devote time to pursuits that were not overtly connected to an appropriation of economic capital. For Bourdieu, a work of art historically was characterised by ‘its difference from and distance from everyday material reality and indeed its superiority to it, together with its matching ideology, namely the post-Kantian aesthetics of “pure” form and “disinterestedness”’ (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 124). Therefore, an appropriation of a work of art involved the ability to distance oneself from the class struggle of the accumulation of economic capital, but it also required knowledge of the codes of art and the skills of decoding and competencies of reception and production that are acquired through the habitus.

Bourdieu therefore posits that ‘distinct patterns of cultural consumption are associated with these different modes of acquisition of cultural competence’ (ibid.). He posits that those groups that appropriate their cultural competencies through schooling go through insecurities that may make them more likely to conform and not question the cultural hierarchy that they have learned. Jenkins remarks on this that in this area of uncertainty the key to the game is “cultural goodwill” and what is at stake is their *knowledge* of Culture rather than their *acknowledgement* of it’ (Jenkins 2002: 144). On the other hand, he posits, ‘the children of the bourgeoisie can express the assurance of their natural taste in a contempt for such hierarchies and by legitimizing new forms of cultural practice such as cinema and jazz’ (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 125).

Bourdieu also posits that the control of cultural capital and its subsequent conversion to economic capital is class-based because of access to free time. For Bourdieu, this means economic access to education can be very much mitigated by class fraction. This in turn links educational level with the hierarchy of cultural appropriation. However, Bourdieu

posits that in the case of art, 'it has been characteristic of the development of cultural practice in the narrowly artistic sense to maximize the complexity of coding' (ibid.), which in turn requires a significant amount of free time in order to successfully decode and appropriate the cultural product. Thus, because of the different amounts of free consumption time between classes, the class distinctions are reinforced and also legitimised 'by labelling those excluded from the cultural discourse as stupid, philistine, etc' (ibid.).

However, consumption time is not just a factor in this. Bourdieu considers that what class fractions *do* with their consumption times is governed by the beliefs appropriated in the habitus. Therefore, the choice that is made by an individual as to how to spend their consumption time is mitigated by what they have appropriated in the habitus as being a 'valuable' way to spend their time. For Bourdieu, 'the specific competence (in classical music or jazz, theatre or film etc.) depends on the chances which the different markets, domestic, scholastic or occupational, together offer for accumulating, applying and exploiting it, i.e., the degree to which they encourage acquisition of this competence by promising or guaranteeing it profits which will reinforce it and induce new investments' (Bourdieu 1993: 86). Thus, Bourdieu posits, that the decisions that the agent makes as to how to spend their consumption time 'will depend upon the cultural and economic endowments with which he or she enters the social field, the fields objectively and realistically open for investment given the position of class origin from which he or she starts, and the relative weight of various fields' (Garnham & Williams in Collins 1986: 125). Thus, agents entering a field with large amounts of both cultural and economic capital will fare better than those agents at a deficit of one or both of those forms of capital. Bourdieu considers the dominant class to consist of agents with large amounts of both capitals. The dominated class consists of those agents who possess little amounts of both forms of capital.

## Chapter 4 Addenda

### A4.1 Modernity and the separation of ‘economy’ and ‘culture’

The emergence and meaning of the category of ‘culture’ can only be understood in the historical context of this ‘Great Transformation’ of modernity, as characterised by Polanyi (1994). For, this transformation involved much more than the deepening divisions of labour which classical theorists, notably Adam Smith, viewed as key to the growing ‘Wealth of Nations’. It involved the structural separation of activities and spheres that were previously interwoven. In Polanyi’s account, a key element of this transformation is centred round the separation of the economic from the social and cultural systems. Polanyi’s analysis emphasises that, prior to the eighteenth century, ‘the economic system was absorbed in the social system’. For him, regulation and markets had grown up together and the self-regulating market was unknown before this time. Thus for Polanyi, the emergence of the very idea of self-regulation represented ‘a complete reversal of the trend of development’. In this particular great transformation, nothing must be allowed to inhibit the formation of markets. The only legitimate policies now become those which help to ensure the self-regulation of the market, not least by creating conditions which make the market the only organizing power in the economic sphere.

Such features of the ‘economic’ and its characteristics had profound implications for those of ‘culture’. Firstly, the great transformation saw a separation of the three faculties of practical reason, judgement and theoretical reason, as first identified by Kant. By the end of the eighteenth century, these ‘spheres of knowledge’, appeared to be differentiated from one another institutionally as the ‘spheres of science, morality, and art’. Secondly, the culture domain acquired a specific social role distinct from its prior religious associations and ritual roles. Its remit shifted to the aesthetic, transcendent and ‘sublime’ and it began to increasingly embrace secular characteristics and concerns. Thirdly, the culture realm embraced a new social and political role in relation to the construction of the early modern cultural ‘public sphere’. This cultural dimension of the public sphere addressed the quest for new modes of expression and exchange of ideas inaugurated by other aspects of modernity’s ‘great transformation’, not least its new modes of subjectivity, self-consciousness and its ‘self-referentiality of a



knowing subject' (Habermas, 2001: 133). Fourthly, the shift from patronage to the market became an increasingly important sponsor of certain forms of cultural production.

## **A4.2 The Neo-Liberal Turn**

The neo-liberal framework suggests that the 'content neutral' invisible hand of the market ensures diversity of cultural artefacts, and freedom of choice for the consumer. Private ownership in a capitalist market framework provides the consumer with the best choice of media 'products'. In contrast to this, critical cultural theory suggests that commodified cultural 'products' determine the meanings and content of the media, that private ownership of media entities predisposes the content to be in line with capitalist ideology and that media organisations function as sites of profit. Thus, in terms of ownership of media, neo-liberal ideology sees large media corporations as driven towards market share and thus will offer a diverse range of cultural products in order to maximise market share across a spectrum of audiences. However, the suggestion from critical cultural theory is that such a distribution of a few large media organisations promotes a concentrated ideological and political power amongst the small pool of corporate elites. The nature of cultural artefacts emanating from such organisations therefore, is commodified for profit.

In terms of the role of the state, neo-liberal theory is generally in favour of self-regulation of organisations, it backs away from state regulation, sees state-ownership of media corporations as antagonistic to media and individual freedom, ignores inequalities of economic power or takes them as legitimate, and defines social agents in individual and consumer terms with little attention to social or cultural collectivities. Critical cultural theory posits that the funding of state media organisations - with the important caveat that they are independent of direct political control - can provide an important public service function. This view also posits that state subsidies or grants for small media and cultural organisations can promote a diversity of expression, and importantly that intervention at a state level can help to counter the power of economic elites, thus furthering diversity of cultural expression.

In relation to advertising, neo-liberal ideology sees the role of advertising as one that can reduce the cost of media access for consumers, and that sponsorship can be defined as 'commercial free speech'. In contrast to this, critical cultural discourse posits that advertising media play an indirect but important role in the process of capitalist commodity production. Thus, the role of advertising shifts from informing audiences to producing consumers. In terms of the effects of advertising, we also see a difference

between neo-liberal theory and critical cultural discourse. For neo-liberal ideology, advertising informs consumers about products, while encouraging consumers to buy without compelling the 'rational' audience to purchase. Opposing this, critical cultural theory posits that the effects of advertising can reshape the parameters, forms and content of public communication, and that advertising has strategic ideological and social impacts on audiences beyond the promotion of specific products.

### **A4.3 Fredric Jameson**

#### *A4.3.1 Jameson on Adorno*

In his book *Late Marxism*, Fredric Jameson provides detailed readings of some of Adorno's seminal works while foregrounding the ahistorical trends and 'poststructural gossip' of recent cultural turn thought (Jameson 2007: 3). He posits an account of Adorno's work as an alternative to these trends, citing the richness of Adorno's thought which combined the cultural with the social, economic and political domains. While Jameson admits to distancing himself from Adorno in the 1970s, he later came to see how Adorno's prophecies about a 'total system' became complete at this time. Jameson posits that Adorno might in fact be 'the analyst of our own period, which he did not live to see, and in which late capitalism has all but succeeded in eliminating the final loopholes of nature and the Unconscious, of subversion and the aesthetic, of individual and collective praxis alike ....' (ibid: 5).

Jameson also highlights Adorno's academic praxis, in that it brought American empirical research back to German sociological thought, but also brought the dialectic into empiricism (ibid). For Jameson, this is a significant contribution, suggesting that we can now appreciate the form of praxis that Adorno brought. He explains how in his opinion, Anglo-American influences have been hostile to dialectic thought. In fact, he posits that so powerful is Adorno's praxis that the dialectic is a 'methodological timebomb' in the social sciences (ibid: 8).

Significantly for this research however, is Jameson's critique of Adorno's Marxism (Jameson 2007: 9). Jameson considers that Adorno's significant contribution is in the area of the economic system, or the mode of production. Jameson stresses Adorno's 'unique emphasis on the presence of late capitalism as a totality within the very forms of our concepts or of the works of art themselves'. Jameson, as we saw previously, considers that 'no other Marxist theoretician has ever staged this relationship between the universal and the particular, the system and the detail, with this kind of single-minded yet wide-ranging attention'. For Jameson, 'Marxism, like other cultural phenomena, varies according to its socioeconomic context'. Thus, the continuing special relevance of Adorno's Marxism is in that combination of the previously

separated dimensions of art, politics and economics - one which we have seen the cultural turn thesis ignore.

#### *A4.3.2 Jameson on Postmodernism*

Jameson suggests that postmodernist theories are not just cultural, comparing perspectives from postmodernism to those that eulogise a new type of society, most notably the 'post-industrial' society of Daniel Bell, along with the 'information' society<sup>156</sup>. Importantly, Jameson's critique of these theories posits that in eulogising the postmodern world order, these theories wish to show how their processes are beyond economic influences, and how they have transcended the economic laws of capitalism. As Jameson observes 'such theories have the obvious ideological mission of demonstrating, to their own relief, that the new social formation in question no longer obeys the laws of classical capitalism, namely the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle' (Jameson 1984: 55).

However, for Jameson (acknowledging Ernest Mandel's influence on him - Mandel having posited that the 'new' postmodern society represents the purest form of capitalism to date), there is a symbiosis between postmodernism and capitalism, and postmodernism can not be considered without considering multinational capitalism. For Jameson, 'every position on postmodernism in culture - whether apologia or stigmatization - is also at one and the same time, and necessarily, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today' (ibid.).

#### *the deconstruction of expression*

For Jameson, meaning is constructed in a work of art by giving consideration to the context in which the work is produced. In the absence of a context, a work of art is reduced to 'decoration' (ibid.: 58). This is because a work of art is a response to a situation. Jameson takes the example of a Van Gogh painting, *Peasant Shoes* as an example, suggesting that when taken contextually, the shoes point to a difficult life of

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156 I suggest that along with these theories which eulogise the new, we could include the rhetoric of government policy in Ireland around the 'knowledge' society and the 'smart economy'.

manual labour and poverty. Van Gogh's technique is also considered by Jameson - he considers the work to be 'a Utopian gesture' due to the artist's choice of vibrant colours.

Jameson also considers the Heideggerian interpretation of the work, which is that 'the work of art emerges within the gap between Earth and World', or for Jameson 'the meaningless materiality of the body and nature and the meaning-endowment of history and of the social' (ibid.: 59). This means that in the gesture of painting the peasant shoes, Van Gogh is recreating the lived context of the shoes, which is a gesture towards reconnecting them with the earth.

These readings - a Utopian gesture and a reconnection with the earth - are, for Jameson hermeneutical, in that 'the work in its inert, objectal form, is taken as a clue or a symptom for some vaster reality which replaces it as its ultimate truth' (ibid.: 59). To contrast with this, Jameson next asks the reader to consider Andy Warhol's work *Diamond Dust Shoes*, by which Jameson is less enthused. He observes the postmodern characteristic of meaninglessness in the work, stating that the work 'evidently no longer speaks to us with any of the immediacy of Van Gogh's footgear: indeed, I am tempted to say that it does not really speak to us at all' (ibid.). He observes how the viewer has nowhere to go with this painting - the shoes are devoid of context, they are fetishised, dead objects, as plausible to have been painted in the context of Auschwitz or a dance hall.

For Jameson, the result of this is that there is 'no way to complete the hermeneutic gesture, and to restore to these oddments that whole larger lived context' of the collection of shoes. In relation to other work by Warhol such as the infamous Campbell's soup prints, Jameson notes that Warhol's work locates itself within the discourse of commodification that is characteristic of late capitalism. For Jameson, these works therefore should be inherently political, and if they are not, this raises the question of the potential of political art in the period of late capitalism.

Jameson considers the Van Gogh work to be characteristic of the high modernist movement, and the Warhol painting as characteristic of the postmodernist movement. Through the examples of these paintings, Jameson construes that a feature of postmodernism is a depthlessness and a superficiality of representation (ibid.: 60). He considers photographic technology to play a role in the postmodern aesthetic,

attributing the 'deathly quality' and 'x-ray elegance' of the Warhol image to photographic techniques. He observes how the shoes appear as 'debased and contaminated in advance by their assimilation to glossy advertising images' (ibid.), and that the coloured surface of the image 'has been stripped away to reveal the deathly black-and-white substratum of the photographic negative which subtends them' (ibid.). He considers this to be 'the inversion of Van Gogh's Utopian gesture'.

This leads Jameson to posit that a feature of postmodernism is 'the waning of affect' (ibid.: 61). In stripping away the context for the shoes - in removing the situatedness of them, unlike Van Gogh, Warhol is forcing a removal of subjectivity, of narrative and therefore a removal of emotional engagement with the work. He elucidates this point, again by means of a comparison with another work from the high-modernist era, *The Scream* by Edward Munch. Jameson considers *The Scream* to be 'a canonical expression of the great modernist thematics of alienation, anomie, solitude and social fragmentation and isolation', epitomising what he refers to as 'the age of anxiety' (ibid.). Implicit in that reading is that there is a subject who does the expressing of those anxiety-laden emotions. There is a subject-object relationship in which the subject can feel isolation and alienation. However, in postmodern theory there has been a 'criticizing and discrediting this very hermeneutic model of the inside and the outside and of stigmatizing such models as ideological and metaphysical' (ibid.). He considers such hermeneutic models (including other models such as essence/appearance, latent/manifest, authenticity/inauthenticity) to be 'depth models' of analysis. However, for Jameson, a characteristic of postmodern thought is the rejection of these models. He considers that 'depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces' (ibid.: 62).

Further considering *The Scream*, Jameson posits that the painting represents an inexpressible 'atrocious solitude and anxiety' and does so by deconstructing its own aesthetic - it is an expression of a sonorous gesture, executed in a medium (the visual) that cannot convey that gesture (sound). Even the figure in the painting is trapped in this silent world - he has no ears. However, for Jameson, such expressions of terrible alienation and anxiety are no longer appropriate in postmodern expression. He posits that 'the notorious burn-out and self-destruction cases of the ending 1960s' such as Marilyn Monroe or Edie Sedgwick have little to do with the modernist expressions of either Freudian hysteria and neurosis, or Munch's expressions of isolation and alienation. According to Jameson, 'this shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology can

be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject' (ibid.: 63).

This is somewhat equivalent to discourse around the 'death' of the subject - it is a decentering of subjectivity, along with subjective expression and subjective characteristics of style. As Jameson notes, if we are unique subjects as in Munch's painting, we have the pathologies and burdens of that subjectivity. Postmodernist thought removes this difficulty by bringing about the death of subjectivity, of ego. However, Jameson notes that this difficulty is replaced by a new one, which for him is 'the end for example of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brushstroke' (ibid.: 64). There is also an end to emotions, given that there is no subject present to experience or express them. Thus, in postmodern expression, feelings 'are now free-floating and impersonal' (ibid.). For Jameson, the postmodern is also characterised as being concerned with spatial issues, as opposed to the modernist concern with temporal ones. Thus, 'our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of times, as in the preceding period of high modernism proper' (ibid.).

#### *the postmodern and the past*

Jameson next turns to the artistic devices of pastiche and parody, with a deference shown to Adorno's critique of Stravinsky's use of pastiche in his essay *On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*. For Jameson, parody was a modernist trope, a 'systematic mimicry of their deliberate eccentricities' (ibid.:65:). Parody contained the sense of intent in its mimicry. As we have seen however, for Jameson postmodern expression became more about quantity than quality, the depth was removed from expression, and fragmentation of meaning occurred. In this situation, there is no sense of normativity amongst the plurality of voices, and for Jameson this is linked with multinational capitalism. He notes that 'faceless masters continue to inflect the economic strategies which constrain our existences but no longer need to impose their speech' (ibid.). As a result, there is no place for parody. What replaces it is pastiche, which unlike parody 'is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have



momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists' (ibid.). The conclusion that Jameson comes to is that in the effacement of the satirical, subversive motives 'pastiche is thus blank parody' (ibid.).

Jameson notes that with this development, along with the diminution of subjectivity, cultural producers in the era of postmodernism 'have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles' (ibid.). Thus, postmodernism can be characterised by the loss of a pithy parody, to be replaced by a bland, unoriginal pastiche of those - possibly modernist - cultural producers who have gone before. This turn towards the past leads, according to Jameson, to a kind of nostalgia in postmodern culture. He claims that the postmodern 'addiction to the photographic image is itself a tangible symptom of an omnipresent, omnivorous and well-nigh libidinal historicism' (ibid.: 66).

#### *the breakdown of the signifying chain*

Jameson equates the ahistoricism and spatial categorisation that are characteristic of postmodernism to a crisis in temporality. With the privileging of the current 'moment' (albeit with its underbelly of nostalgia) and the privileging of space, concerns of time, of temporality, become problematic. For Jameson, if the subject becomes lost in the 'moment' of postmodern thought, he or she can not constitute a sense of the past, present or future and essentially, subjectivity becomes fragmented (ibid.: 71). Jameson expresses his concerns for the production of culture in postmodern society in light of this fragmentation, positing that 'it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but "heaps of fragments" and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory' (ibid.).

Jameson then turns to Lacan's account of schizophrenia to elucidate his concerns. For Lacan, schizophrenia involves 'a breakdown in the signifying chain', where the subject temporarily loses the ability to attach meaning to the events that they are experiencing from moment to moment. Thus, the subject experiences an overwhelming amount of information that they cannot process whilst their schizophrenic episode is in progress. As Jameson observes, 'the schizophrenic is reduced to an experience of pure material Signifiers, or in other words of a series of pure and unrelated presents in time' (ibid.: 72).

Connecting this back to Jameson's hypothesis of a crisis in temporality that postmodernism has wrought, this experience of such an intense present is overwhelming for the subject. The subject can not locate itself temporally, and is thus assuaged by the excesses of stimuli of the present. For Jameson, this breakdown of temporality 'suddenly releases this present of time from all activities and the intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis' (ibid.: 73). This annihilates any possibility for transformation through a temporal process and leads to a sense of intensity, because all the subject has is the experience of a momentary present. Thus, 'that present suddenly engulfs the subject with undescrivable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material - or better still the literal - Signifier in isolation' (ibid.).

Jameson critiques a work of postmodern poetry, *China*, by Bob Perelman. He observes that when the style of writing which he terms 'schizophrenic disjunction' (ibid.: 74) becomes normalised into cultural production, the work 'ceases to entertain a necessary relationship to the morbid content we associate with terms like schizophrenia' and instead becomes a vehicle for the intensity of experience that characterised the postmodern 'moment'. As we previously saw, this intensity displaced and abstracted the more subjective emotions of anxiety, alienation and isolation that were characteristic of modernist works.

However, Jameson also attests to the potential in postmodern works such as those by Nam June Paik to articulate a tension in the notion of differences, (ibid.: 75) and thus help to investigate relationship in a more profound way - through negotiating those tensions. In viewing such postmodernist works with what Jameson terms 'the older aesthetic', the viewer can construct a certain meaning amongst the random elements of the work. However, for the 'postmodern viewer', this is problematic as they attempt to absorb all of the random stimuli at once. For Jameson, 'the vivid perception of radical difference is in and of itself a new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship' (ibid.: 76).

#### *the hysterical sublime*

At this juncture in the essay, Jameson proceeds to describe the 'intensities' of feeling -

those immediacies that he suggested in the previous section - that he believes are characteristic of the postmodern turn. For Jameson, the foregrounding of space in postmodern thought has led to an incompatibility with concepts of the body, calling the cultural turn of postmodernism 'anti-anthropomorphic' (ibid.: 76). With this abstraction of the body comes a fetishisation of the body, seen in such works as those of the sculptor Duane Hanson whose life-like fibreglass figures are for Jameson a 'simulacrum'. For Jameson, the experience of encountering such a realistic representation of a human being causes the viewer to observe the other museum-goers in a similar light - as a representation or illusion.

The point of including this example is that it causes Jameson to ask 'is this now a terrifying or an exhilarating experience?' (ibid.: 77). He suggests that to try and comprehend the intensities of the postmodern experience, we adopt the concept of 'camp' from Susan Sontag, and marry it with the Kantian notion of the sublime, in a hybrid that Jameson terms the 'hysterical sublime'. For Kant, the sublime involved considering a power or force so awesome and otherworldly that it defied representation. What resulted was that 'the object of the sublime is now not only a matter of sheer power and of the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature, but also of the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces' (ibid.).

However, Jameson believes that postmodern thought has attempted to 'eclipse' this disproportionality of the human and Nature by the 'eclipse' of nature itself. For Jameson, nature is annihilated by the commodification and industrialisation of late capitalism. Here, Jameson provides an exegesis of the nexus between technology, postmodern thought and late capitalism. He does not wish to be determinist in his approach to technology, rather positing the Marxist stance that technology is as a result of capital, not a prefiguration of it. He also follows Ernest Mandel's schema of capitalism in which he posited that there have been three periods of technological development under capitalism - steam, combustion and electronic and nuclear (ibid.: 78). These periods correlate with three stages of capitalism - market capitalism, monopoly capitalism, and multinational capital. Therefore, for Jameson, our current age is the third machine age, which brings about issues of aesthetic representation specific to that age. For example, in the previous era of capitalism, which Jameson equates with high modernism, the cultural producers of the time - Marinetti, Le

Corbusier, Picabia and Duchamp - represented their machine aesthetic in Utopian ways, with an excitement about the machine and its potential.

For Jameson, the machines of that day allowed for representation - turbines, smokestacks, grain elevators, pipes, conveyor belts and trains are all included here as examples for the materiality (and representability) of that machine age. However, Jameson asks us to reflect on the materiality of the tools of our postmodern machine age, which for him is represented by the computer. Aesthetically, the computer has no (or little) visual interest, and it serves only to house the inner components of the machine. For Jameson 'such machines are indeed machines of reproduction rather than of production' (ibid.: 79). He posits that they do not demand representation by a cultural producer as the machines of the previous modernist machine age did. He believes that there is accordingly, an aesthetic shift away from thematically representing the age, towards articulating the process of reproduction - which for Jameson is the function of the computer and television. This change in emphasis towards articulating reproduction also encourages the simulacrum.

However, Jameson does not believe that technology is today's equivalent of Kantian sublime Nature - something to be 'othered', something outside our grasp. He feels that it would be deterministic to attribute this 'hysterical sublime' to technology itself. Rather, Jameson posits that our aesthetic relationship with technology is representative of our relationship with multinational capitalism. He observes that 'our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism' (ibid.: 79). He does not believe that our fascination with technology is because the technology itself is so interesting, but that in coming to terms with technology, we can come to terms with the enormity of the penetration of capitalism into hitherto untouched areas of our lives.

### *post-modernism and the city*

This part of the essay is somewhat like a case study in the spatial features of postmodern architecture. Jameson uses the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles as an example. He

reminds us of the populist stance that postmodernism was a reaction against modernist elitism. Therefore a structure such as the Bonaventura hotel should stand as a populist example of this. However, Jameson notes that far from being populist in design (notwithstanding the fact that it is a 'popular' hotel), the hotel is designed in such a way as to minimise the presence of any of the entrances, making it difficult for a potential guest to determine how they should enter the premises. One of the entrances leaves guests on the sixth floor, while another leaves them on the second. For Jameson, this is read as the desire on the architect's part to construe the building as a city in itself - a world that is self-sufficient and hardly in need of entrances at all. Even the reflective exterior glass 'skin' of the hotel suggests to Jameson that it 'repels the city outside' by reflecting back the city to the city, making the hotel almost invisible (ibid.: 82).

Jameson then critiques the use of elevators and escalators in the building, comparing them to a modernist notion of those technologies as a feature in themselves for moving people from place to place. However, not only do the elevators in the hotel 'replace' movement, but they are positioned in such a way as to 'designate themselves as new reflexive signs and emblems of movement proper' (ibid.). The hotel does not allow for the choice to walk of one's own volition.

The lobby of the hotel itself is confusing - it is situated between the four towers of the hotel and until directional signs were added, its uniformity made orientating oneself within it extremely difficult, Jameson terming the sense of the lobby 'milling confusion' (ibid.: 83). Relating back to the critique of movement in the hotel, Jameson also notes that the confusion is 'like the vengeance this space takes on those who still seek to walk through it' (ibid.). Thus, Jameson concludes, the postmodern aesthetic with its preoccupation with space has succeeded in annihilating any sense in which the human being can bodily orientate themselves. For Jameson, this 'postmodern hyperspace' has 'finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world' (ibid.). He suggests that this is symbolic of our inability to map the network of multinational capitalism.

*the abolition of critical distance*

Jameson next proceeds to critique the postmodern ethic, which he sees as that of complacently following the aesthetic that it has wrought. Jameson observes how ‘the logic of the simulacrum’ does not only repeat the logic of late capitalism, but ‘reinforces and intensifies it’ (ibid.: 85). He also observes that for those with political concerns, the current ‘image addiction’ with its nostalgia for the past, is hostile to the formulation of any sense of a collective or coherent vision for the future.

For Jameson, it is an ineffectual exercise to moralise on either the hubris or the nemesis of the postmodern turn. Rather, he looks to Marx, who urged his readers to consider the positive and negative at once, in the exercise of a dialectical thought process. In today’s world that means for Jameson being able to consider the malevolent features of capitalism along with its potential for liberation that no other production system has offered.

In terms of cultural production, this means for Jameson that ‘the subject demands that we make at least some effort to think the cultur (ibid.: 86). He suggests that we need to identify some ‘moment of truth’ amongst what he considers to be the more apparent ‘moments of falsehood’ in the cultural productions of the postmodern turn (ibid.).

Jameson next queries the role of culture in postmodern times. He attests to the ‘semi-autonomy’ of culture which historically was able to make a political stand and act as a mirror to the broader culture. However, he questions if this semi-autonomy has been undermined by postmodern culture. He suggests that this has happened by means of ‘a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life - from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself - can be said to have become “cultural” in some original and as yet untheorized sense’ (ibid.: 87).

This leads Jameson to observe that our presuppositions regarding culture in its radical, transformative, political form had the characteristic of what he terms ‘critical distance’. For Jameson this critical distance enables the cultural producer to critique the norms of society, it enables ‘the possibility of the positioning of the cultural act outside the massive Being of capital, which then serves as an Archimedean point from which to assault this last’ (ibid.: 86). Jameson posits that postmodern culture does not allow for this ‘critical distance’ to exist - our space is structured in such a way as to overwhelm the

physical body, and thus renders us 'incapable of distantiation'.

#### *A4.3.3 Jameson on Cultural Production*

Whilst critiquing the postmodern perspective, Jameson also proposes a model of cultural production that he suggests can incorporate the issues of postmodernism. He observes how in the time of high modernism, leftists allowed themselves to be 'unduly intimidated' by bourgeois disapproval of what Jameson considers to be 'one of the age-old functions of art' - namely the pedagogical and the didactic' (ibid.: 89). Jameson therefore proposes a cultural model that underscores this function, whilst acknowledging that the cultural model has to consider how postmodern thought has changed our notions of spatiality and temporality. Thus, he posits that the aesthetic of the new cultural model will be an aesthetic of 'cognitive mapping' (ibid.). This is in light of the 'alienated city' which 'is above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves' (ibid.). The solution to this sense of an urban alienation for Jameson is a rebordering of personal space within the urban space, a 'practical reconquest of a sense of place'. On a practical, cultural level, this involves producing works that represent a cognitive mapping for the postmodern subject in which the subject can re-orientate itself, or in Jameson's words 'the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories' (ibid.).

I do not believe that Jameson is talking literally about producing works that are akin to maps. Given his exploration of the nexus of postmodernism and multinational capitalism, I believe that the 'cognitive' mapping he refers to is a symbolic gesture by the cultural producer that will once again reclaim subjectivity, identity and individuality back from the abstraction and fragmentation that it underwent through postmodernism. As Jameson elucidates, the new aesthetic of the cognitive map is 'called upon [...] in the narrower framework of daily life in the physical city: to enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of the city's structure as a whole' (ibid.: 90). Given that for Jameson, the postmodern city - along with its impermeable structures and the technology, networks and communications channels that also pervade

the postmodern urban space - is symbolically equivalent to multinational capitalism, the call for cultural producers to represent this space is far more profound than a mere mapping of that physical space. It calls upon the cultural producer to map the networks of multinational capitalism, in order to aid the subject reorientate itself within that system.

In conclusion then, Jameson leaves us with this presupposition, a challenge to political artists that their works 'will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is, to say, to its fundamental object - the world space of multinational capital - at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion' (ibid.: 92). Thus, the political artist gesturing in the face of postmodernism 'will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale' (ibid.).



#### **A4.4 Object and Concept: The Continued Relevance of Frankfurt School Thought**

Whilst the work of the Frankfurt School has been marginalised in cultural turn and postmodern debates, a number of authors have foregrounded the continuing relevance of the School's work. As we have seen, Fredric Jameson has strongly attested to the work of Theodor Adorno. Slater and Tonkiss (2001) also provide a sympathetic reading of Adorno, observing that 'in many respects, the most developed and most influential attempt to use the concept of reification to extrapolate from a theory of market relations to a characterization of modern consciousness and culture is to be found in the work of Theodor Adorno' (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001: 162). They explain how one of the keystones of Adorno's thinking - that of 'negative dialectics', is a methodology whereby the real object is confronted with its concept. Thus, in Adorno's case, his political and aesthetic philosophy was to illuminate 'the formal freedoms of the capitalist market with the concepts or promises of freedom implicit within it, to confront what the object is with what it "would itself like to be" ....'(ibid.: 163).

Where the application of dialectical thought is of significance for us, is in how it reveals the shortcomings of theories of culture that are based on postmodern, neo-liberal or 'cultural turn' thought. As Slater and Tonkiss observe, 'the tragedy of the dialectics of enlightenment is that the same process of subsumption that demythified nature through rationality and empirical observation also reduced it to a meaningless object of domination, replacing all questions of substantive value with pure manipulation' (Slater Tonkiss, 2001: 164). We can map this observation about 'enlightenment' and 'nature' on to those broader concepts of art and culture. Through Adorno's device of dialectical reasoning, it becomes clear that when nature/enlightenment is subsumed under a profit motive, art and culture become just another facet in the production nexus, their substantive or potential transformative value becoming meaningless. As Slater and Tonkiss observe, 'the market is recognized by Adorno as a particular instance of this process of domination, but also a privileged mechanism for accomplishing it' (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001: 164). Thus, in this privileged market economy, the motivation and the means for subsuming 'enlightenment' is total, with catastrophic results for autonomous, critical culture.

According to Slater and Tonkiss, for Adorno, 'a great period of autonomous & critical

art was possible during the bourgeois era, precisely because the artist's ability to support him- or herself through sales allowed a mediated relationship to audiences that contrasted with direct dependence on Church, state or patrons' (Slater and Tonkiss: 166). As we saw from our overview of Adorno's work on the culture industry, the threat to that autonomy came through the monetisation of culture, where culture was produced primarily for exchange value. According to Slater and Tonkiss, Adorno considers that 'the appearance of the culture industry represents a fundamental qualitative shift from liberal bourgeois society into the era of monopoly capitalism ...' (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001: 164). For Adorno, this incursion of the profit motive into culture did not separate out 'high' and 'low' culture, as has been commented of his work. As Slater and Tonkiss observe, 'nor did Adorno's principles permit him 'to take one side or the other of the great divide between autonomous and consumerist culture', but rather that 'the division itself is the truth; of market capitalism (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1979: 6), cited in (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001: 166). For Adorno, neither autonomous nor high art could be simply appreciated in an elitist manner or taken as the last refuge of truth or beauty. Indeed, high art and industrial produced consumer art 'bear the stigmata of capitalism, both contain elements of change. Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however, they do not add up' (Adorno, cited in Bloch et al, 1980: 123; quoted in Slater and Tonkiss, 2001: 166).

## Chapter 6 Addenda

### A6.1 Quantum Physics and qualitative research

As physicist Brian Greene explains, ‘for more than half a century [...] physicists have been quietly aware of a dark cloud looming on a distant horizon’ (Greene 2003: 3). He explains the problem as this. On one hand stands Einstein’s theory of general relativity ‘which provides a theoretical framework for understanding the universe on the largest of scales: stars, galaxies, clusters of galaxies, and beyond to the immense expanse of the universe itself’ (ibid.). On the other hand stands another behemoth of modern science - quantum mechanics, which ‘provides a theoretical framework for understanding the universe on the smallest of scales: molecules, atoms, and all the way down to subatomic particles like electrons and quarks’ (ibid.).

Both these theories are testaments to the centuries of positivist research carried out in the natural sciences, from the discovery of the orbits of the planets, to understanding that the earth is a sphere and not a disc, how we are all kept from hurtling off the planet into space, thanks to gravity, to radiation, x-rays and lasers. Thanks to the positivist research methodology employed and accepted by the natural sciences, ‘physicists have experimentally confirmed to almost unimaginable accuracy virtually all predictions made by each of these theories’ (ibid.).

However, the dark cloud the Greene introduces is this: ‘as they are currently formulated, general relativity and quantum mechanics *cannot both be right*’ (ibid.: 3). This has left physicists groping for alternatives in an attempt to resolve the incompatibilities of the two theories. Some of the searches have started to lead physicists into a decidedly more ‘human’ field of research - that of consciousness. As part of their experiments which have unearthed all of these inconsistencies, physicists have also discovered what Einstein referred to as ‘spooky action at a distance’ (Rosenblum and Kuttner: 9). This ‘spooky action’ pertains to light - sometimes it appears in scientific experiments to behave like a wave, and sometimes it appears like tiny particles. This is known as wave-particle duality. The ‘spooky’ part of the duality however, is that its appearance as a particle or a wave is brought about by *observation*. That is to say, light appears to *know* if it is being

observed as a particle or a wave and it acts accordingly. This is where the positivist paradigm breaks down. It appears that conscious observation affects what can be known about light. As Rosenblum and Kuttner explain, ‘quantum theory tells us that an observation of one object can instantaneously influence the behaviour of another greatly distant object - *even if no physical force connects the two*’ (Rosenblum and Kuttner: 12). Moreover, they note that ‘quantum theory also tells us that observing an object to be someplace *causes* it to be there’ (ibid.).

The issue that Rosenblum and Kuttner have with the physics community is that due to their positivist scientific paradigm, much of the community does not want to engage in a discussion of consciousness. As the authors explain, ‘classical physics, with its mechanical picture of the world, has been taken to deny almost all metaphysics. Quantum physics denies that denial: It hints at the existence of something beyond what we usually consider physics’ (Rosenblum and Kuttner: 154). They call for physicists to accept the consciousness problem, even though it may lead them to a position more aligned with a philosophical or metaphysical explanation to reality, warning that if physicists do not engage with the problem and demystify it, there is the danger of quantum theory being used by new-age mystics to ‘prove’ their world view. In the authors’ view, ‘the antidote for sensationalistic, misleading treatments of the implications of quantum mechanics would be for the physics discipline to be more open to some discussion of the quantum enigma’ (ibid.: 155).

Roger Penrose, the eminent Oxford physicist and mathematician also calls for a new look at science, observing that ‘a scientific world-view which does not profoundly come to terms with the problem of conscious minds can have no serious pretensions of completeness. Consciousness is part of our universe, so any physical theory which makes no proper place for it falls fundamentally short of providing a genuine description of the world’ (Penrose 2004: 8).

Thus, if the scientific community is calling for an enhanced understanding of the world, and if that understanding is enhanced, for Penrose, ‘our philosophical outlook can hardly be other than profoundly altered’ (ibid.: 8).

## A6.2 Kvale's 7 stage interview process applied to current research

1. The interviews were **thematized** by referring to the key questions and drawing on them for the broad interview themes. This meant that the research questions could be turned into interview questions, ensuring that the themes of the key questions followed through to the empirical phase of the research. I formulated a set of questions, thus 'scripting' the interview, taking into account Kvale's concepts of 'thematic' and 'dynamic' questions, where thematic questions further the production of knowledge that is pertinent to the research, whilst the dynamic ones engage the interviewee and keep the interview going in a lively way (Kvale, 2007)<sup>157</sup>.
2. The interviews were next **designed** to 'flow' through the subject themes identified in step one, scheduled according to the overall project timeline and tested through two pilot interviews. This stage also included the selection of the participants, the initial communication with them which involved identifying myself as a researcher and, based on Gillham's work (Gillham, 2000: 12-14) on research interviewing, I considered the ethical dimensions to interviewing, including the purposes of the research and how the participant's personal data would be handled. I also designed a participants guide which aimed to answer preliminary questions that the participant may have about the research, the interview itself and the data. A consent form was also designed<sup>158</sup>.
3. Having scheduled the dates, times, and locations of the interviews themselves, the participants were then **interviewed**. During the research design phase it was decided that the first preference for location of the interview would rest with the participant, whilst also offering them a choice to meet within the university. Again, drawing on Kvale, where 'the first minutes of an interview are decisive' (Kvale, 2007: 55), the interviews were commenced with a 'briefing', where 'the interviewer defines the situation for the subject, briefly tells about the purpose of the interview the use of a tape recorder, and so on, and asks if the subject has any questions before starting the interview' (ibid.). This also provided the opportunity to ask if the participants

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157 The themed areas and how they mapped to interview questions are annotated in appendix B

158 See appendices C and D for these documents

guide had answered the relevant questions, and opened up the themes of the research in a comfortable way. Whilst the interview had been scripted thematically, the interviews themselves were conducted in a semi-structured format, which allowed for some variation on themes, and the running order of the questions, as participants may change themes during the interview and enforcing a schedule would potentially distract them, thus affecting the knowledge production. I also phrased the interview questions in part by drawing on personal experience or observations, as according to King and Horrocks, ‘you can think about your own personal experience of the research area, both first-hand experience and stories and anecdotes told by people you know’ in order to add empathy and rapport during the interview process (King & Horrocks, 2009: 35). As Kvale has also suggested, a ‘debriefing’ took place once the interview had concluded (Kvale, 2007). This was done to avoid feelings of ‘emptiness’ on the part of the participant, as ‘the subject has given much information about his or her life and may not have received anything in return’ (ibid.). Thus, an opportunity was given at the end of each interview for the participant to speak further on any topics outside of those discussed, and to provide comments on their experience of the interview. All interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder, the model<sup>159</sup> chosen for its discreet size, as to not draw attention to its presence during the interview.

4. As each interview took place, they were **transcribed**. Initially this was done by listening back to the interviews and typing what was heard, but due to existing nerve damage to my left hand, the transcription process was then carried out using speech recognition software, which proved accurate (once trained to know my voice and to learn digital media related vocabulary) and faster than traditional typing.
5. The interviews were then physically printed out so that they could be **analysed**. The analysis phase consisted of revisiting the key questions, the themes of the interviews and ascertaining the participants response to the questions. As Kvale observes, ‘no standard method exists, no *via regia*, to arrive at essential meanings and deeper implications of what is said in an interview’. Thus, in broad terms the interviews were ‘coded’ for meaning as opposed to a linguistic analysis of the content. This was done using a physical markup, where themes were colour coded, to allow for

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159 A Sony ICD-UX200S, which transferred MP3s directly to iTunes software, allowing for easy digitization, archival and playback of the material

easy recognition of commonalities across the annotated documents.

6. The interview findings were then drafted into an initial framework of themes, where their validity, pertinence and objectivity could be **verified**. For Kvale, objectivity does not just consist of the dispassionate observer, but can exist as ‘intersubjective consensus, as adequacy to the object and as the object’s ability to object’ (Kvale, 2007: 120). At this stage then, the interview data was checked for areas of intersubjective consensus, where knowledge about a particular question was co-constructed between interviewer and participant, thus lending a ‘voice’ of the interview to emerge. The data was also checked to include the presence of the participant as they themselves theorised and abstracted concepts to arrive at their ‘objective’ opinion on the matter at hand.

Finally, the data was checked to ensure the inclusion of those participants who chose to object to certain questions, subject areas, interview themes or even the interview process itself.

An example of this occurred early into the process, where I had initially proposed that short articles based on the interviews would be published online, with prior review by the participant. Having reached stage 5 with one early interview, I duly set to work at writing the article that would be destined for one of my two websites designed for this research project. When I sent the draft article to the artist on whose interview the article was based, I received not an approval, but a critique of the article. The participant suggested that ‘the difference between speaking and the recounting of this in writing’ was problematic for her, down to matter ‘as basic as deciding to use my first name, rather than surname throughout’ for the online article. For this participant, the framing of the article for online use, with its adoption of a more familiar tone through the use of the first name meant that ‘what was said sits within a quite a loaded / unequivocal frame and has turned our conversation into something unintentionally lopsided or oddly emphatic’.

This critique brought to a head a point on which I had been struggling with in terms of the methodology. On the one hand, the research thesis is situated within a discourse of ‘innovation’, and thus the online portal was an attempt to innovate, as a

complement the traditional written thesis. My attempts to balance the traditional research with a sensitivity to online content needing its own tone, were aimed at making the research material readable and conversational. However, this participants critique revealed that reconfiguring research material for an online space framed the material in a more problematic way, revealing how material designed for academic purposes is not easily ported to other channels. The participant had no difficulty with the written material being used for the research thesis, and gave full consent to be named in the research project, but was nonetheless uncomfortable with the material being ported to an online space.

7. Whilst the difficulties encountered as described above changed my initial methodological approach as to how the data could be **reported**, nonetheless the material had to be processed into a readable format designed for a relevant audience. Again, drawing on Kvale (2007), the data from the interviews was written in such a way as to bring forth the extensive information given in the interview, which the interviewer had full access to, but which is not known to the reader. This included contextualising quotes so that the reader was aware of what prompted the answer, to the layout of the quotes themselves, as both inline to keep the tone readable, and for longer quotes, as block quotes.



**Appendix B:**  
**Subject Areas as Interview Questions**

## Appendix B: Subject Areas as Interview Questions

### Interview questions for gatekeepers in institutions

Research Question	Interview questions
<p>How arts institutions interact with ICTS</p> <p>Technology as art</p>	<p>Tell me a little about what you do.</p> <p>When you think of ‘digital media’ and ‘technology’, do you think these have any special meaning to you in relation to the artistic work that you show in the gallery?</p> <p>Would you say you choose to show digital media art a lot in your gallery?</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>Could you name some examples that really stand out for you?</p>
<p>Technological determinism vs social shaping</p> <p>Gatekeeping - showing digital art</p> <p>Gatekeeping - investing in digital art</p>	<p>I have been reading a lot about technology. Some scholars believe that technology influences us without being influenced itself and we just passively use the technology without much say in it. Other scholars disagree and say that while technology does this up to a point, the users can also shape the technology by finding unexpected ways of using it.</p> <p>Thinking about some of that digital media art that you’ve spoken about, what would you have to say about these ideas about technology?</p> <p>Some galleries can be reluctant to invest in digital media art - there is a perception of having to have technical skills to use it, or there are worries about obsolescence. What do you think about these issues?</p> <p>Are there other perceptions about digital art, say from gallery audiences or from decision makers such as yourself?</p> <p>Do you think it can stop galleries from showing digital media art?</p> <p>In your opinion, are there any other issues around investing in, and showing digital art?</p>

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>
<p>Innovation and creativity as viewed by gatekeepers</p> <p>Creative process</p> <p>Technology as process</p>	<p>Asking you about ‘how an artist might shape the technology’ leads me to ask you about artists and innovation. What to you is being innovative, being creative for an artist looking to gain entry for their work into your gallery?</p> <p>What place has technology in that process?</p> <p>I’ve been reading about the creative process - what makes a person creative. There are lots of ideas about this, from brain chemicals, to personality traits and personality complexity. Then on the other hand, it can be unfashionable to think of a creative person as being in any way special.</p> <p>Thinking about the artists that you see, and how creativity is viewed, what do you think?</p>
<p>Artists and society</p> <p>Role of the artist</p> <p>Function of art</p>	<p>Moving on to look at artists in the community - the artist has to live within a society. I would like to explore this with you a little.</p> <p>Where do you see the place of artists in the wider community?</p> <p>Do they have a set ‘role’?</p> <p>(I’d also like to say that we will be looking at the artist in relation to the state and politics a little later, so in thinking about these questions, could you try to not worry about the political dimension for now).</p> <p>And looking at this in reverse - how do you think the wider society sees artists? Do you think those views are accurate?</p>
<p>Artists and arts institutions - structure and reward systems</p>	<p>Much of the artists’ world involves dealing with arts institutions like yours, for funding, exhibitions, promotion abroad etc.</p> <p>Have you any personal experiences or observations you would like to relate about that relationship between your institution and artists?</p> <p>And have you any comments or thoughts about that chain of interaction between yourself and those artists as a structured relationship?</p>

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Interview questions</b>
Art, state funding and culture industry	<p>Many times, the funding for the arts comes from the state. Other times it comes from private and commercial interests.</p> <p>How do you feel about state funding?</p> <p>And how do you feel about the commercial interests?</p> <p>Theodor Adorno talked about his difficulties with the ‘culture industry’, that is, culture being produced for profit. Yet the arts institutions need funding to do their work. Is this relationship a difficult one for arts institutions?</p> <p>How do you believe the arts should be funded?</p> <p>How do you believe artists should be supported?</p>
Art, Ireland and crisis	<p>Having talked about the arts institutions and their interactions the artistic community, and further along to the state, I’d like to pull this all together to ask you about art at this moment in time, in Ireland.</p> <p>There has been a lot of attention on the arts as a kind of saviour in this crisis - do you have an opinion on that?</p> <p>What is the role of your institution, if any, in this situation?</p>
Vision	<p>What would you like to see happening the arts in Ireland?</p> <p>What would you not like to see happening?</p>

**Appendix C:**  
**Sample Participant Guide**

## **Appendix C: Sample Participant Guide**

### **Sample Guide for Artists:**

This guide will give you a little more detail about the interview process and structure, the topics I would like to talk about, and about the ethical considerations of data collection and privacy. Please feel free to contact me if there is anything you would like further clarification about.

### **The interview:**

I would like to conduct the interview in a semi-structured format. This means that while I have some broad topics (detailed below) that I would like to talk about with you, we have the flexibility to also branch out from these topics if our conversation takes such a turn. Perhaps during our conversation some further questions may arise from what is being talked about, including questions you might have for me. You may also wish to discuss some topics that have not been specifically mentioned in the interview schedule, but that you feel are important to discuss. So the interview, while having a general structure, also allows for our conversation to be fluid and dynamic.

It is my hope that in offering this format for our interview, it will allow you to feel comfortable that your opinions can be fully expressed, while also giving us some focus as to the subjects we will be exploring.

### **Location and duration:**

While I do have access to private meeting rooms in Dublin City University, and can offer this as an interview location, this may not be convenient for you. I would therefore like to give you the choice of where you would like the interview to be conducted, so that it is most comfortable and time-efficient for you.

While the interview is semi-structured and will allow for topics to branch out, I would intend to take up no more than 60 to 90 minutes of your time.

### **Outline of topics:**

How artists interact with technology

Innovation and creativity in art

Interacting with the wider community and society as an artist

Interacting with arts institutions

Art and culture as an industry

Being an artist in Ireland - how the arts are viewed politically, through policy and in the current 'crisis'

**Data collection, privacy and anonymity:**

I would like you to feel as comfortable as possible about speaking to me, so I would like to tell you how I am going to treat the data that I collect from you during the interview process.

So that I can give you my full attention during the interview, and I can be as accurate as possible about what we speak about when I write up my research findings, I would like to record our conversation. This recording will be transcribed by myself. The only other person that may have access to it is my PhD supervisor, and only for analysis of the subject matter that we discussed.

The recording will be digitally stored on my password-protected computer in an office requiring swipe-card access. It will be deleted 12 months after my research project has been completed.

You are kind enough to agree to participate in this interview - I wish to respect that by stating that this is voluntary on your part. You can decline to answer any question, and you can withdraw from the interview at any point during it.

Your personal privacy is also important. I have identified some varying degrees of anonymity that you may be comfortable with. Some people may feel comfortable about speaking more freely if they have a prior assurance that their identity is to be kept private. Others are of the understanding that some identification can help add authenticity and a richness to the research report. Other people prefer to be credited for the time and valuable information they have contributed to the research, and would not wish their voice to be denied by the imposition of anonymity by the part of the researcher. I therefore offer you a choice of the level of anonymity you would be most

comfortable with. Please indicate to me which you would prefer when you sign the consent form:

***Full anonymity:*** you prefer your identity not to be revealed in my final thesis

***Partial anonymity:*** you are referred to by your first name, and the initial of your surname, e.g. 'David P'

***Full credit:*** you prefer to be credited with your full name

**Online content:**

Given that my research is on the topic of digital media, I am hoping to develop an online component to my work. I envisage that this online resource could include some blog type posts that give an overview of some of the topics that we discussed. If you would be willing to have a short article based our interview written by me for the web, please indicate this on the consent form. Before publication I will send the article to you for your approval and nothing will be published in an online format without your consent. At any time before publication you can withdraw your consent and I will not publish the content online.



# **Appendix D:**

# **Consent Form**

## Appendix D: Consent Form

### Sample Consent Form for Gatekeepers

I would like to give my consent to be interviewed by Trish Morgan, PhD researcher (digital media), School of Communications, Dublin City University.

I understand that this interview is part of Trish's ISSP funded research project, titled *Innovation in Digital Media Artistic Production in Ireland*. I agree to it being conducted, recorded, transcribed, archived and destroyed as detailed in the participant's guide.

I agree that I can choose the level of anonymity as detailed in the participants guide, and I declare this by checking one of the boxes below.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### Preference for anonymity:

*Full anonymity*  *Partial anonymity*

*Partial personal anonymity*  *Full credit*

#### Consent for online content (with prior review by you)

*Yes*

*No*