Conclusion
What is to be Done?

Richard Appignanesi

There cannot be a 'conclusion' to this Report in the proper light of its spirit. The Report has premised the idea of a new history yet to be made in the conscious realisation of a culturally integrated future. That future is not distant but could actually be realised in the present, here and now, if we began to perceive the art history of Britain differently. We are at the stage where this radical shift of historical perspective still remains a vision for the practical work to be done.

How the *Third Text* Report came to be commissioned is itself a jigsaw piece of that 'history in the making'. Some time at the end of 2008 we received a call from Hassan Mahamdallie, Senior Strategy Officer at the Arts Council England, which resulted in our first meeting with and him and Tony Panayiotou, Director of Diversity, Arts Council England. They expressed their admiration for our work at *Third Text*, first of all, and eventually said that they wanted to re-frame diversity and equality policies in a way that would put them at the centre of the conversations about the arts. Could we examine that possibility and develop a radical alternative to currently existing cultural diversity policy?

Our Report appears at a seemingly unpropitious moment of 'cultural recession' in British history. But perhaps it can be the opportune wake-up call we needed, all of us in the artworld – artists, critics, art theorists, curators, arts administrators, and especially the art institutions – to shed entrenched compartmental habits of suspicion and see with enlightenment what we must do together to form unprecedented partnerships or wither away in dignified blindness. It is up to us to act in concert against the liabilities of public sector arts funding, always, let it be recalled, even in better times, stringent, and now threatening famine.

Our *Third Text* Report has been designed to address a specific problem, the astigmatism of cultural diversity as a state sanctioned policy, and to offer, so to speak, an ophthalmic correction of that distorted cultural perception. This is what we mean by ‘going beyond cultural diversity’, seeing past its obstacle to vision, but not in the sense of supplying a prescription for all the ills besetting cultural endeavours or as a ready-made blueprint of the future. Our recommendations are limited to a primary focus on surpassing cultural diversity and, as a consequence of clearing this terrain, identifying some of the complexities that will arise and require consensus solutions. The following ten-point exploratory programme is an invitation to further scholarly research and a platform for public debate.

1 WRITING THE MISSING HISTORY

We must begin from what Chris Smith has called ‘a missing history’. And what is glaringly missing in the institutions of art and art teaching is a mainstream history that recognises how and why and what the work of Asian, African Caribbean and African artists has contributed to that history. Chris Smith, former Secretary of State for Culture, and now Lord Smith, was concerned about that ‘missing history’ because it disables society from ever defining itself as an integrated whole. It is worth repeating here what Smith also said in 1999: ‘Without a recorded history, nothing else can follow: no celebration of achievement; not development of a common cultural heritage. This results in immigrant populations looking outside these shores for their history and cultural points of reference.’

We presently have two separate histories of white and non-white artists. While the former is institutionally privileged and seen as fundamental to art historical genealogy, the latter is ignored – as if it had nothing to do with British history – or sometimes referred to as a complementary material (as part of ‘cultural diversity’). The institutional priority should now be to bring these two histories together in one integrated narrative in a single book or series of them with a broadly public educational aim in view.

The first to be produced, with an eye to the urgency of this project, must be a scholarly, thoroughly researched volume, and the first of its kind that will give us a fully inclusive account of the achievements gained by the existence of culturally diverse artists in postwar Britain. This book will be a model for ongoing art historical research. Moreover, and crucially, these histories will be aligned to archive-rich research materials, collections of which are already advancing at Tate Britain, other institutions, and indeed including *Third Text*'s own archive.

2 TOWARDS A PUBLIC ART EDUCATION PROGRAMME

We say a series of books, and by this we mean also producing accessible ones for secondary schools across Britain, aimed not only at our many ethnically diverse inner city comprehensives but all of them as equally involved in educating the future members of an integrated society with a shared British heritage. And, of course, not only books but art history workshops should be programmed to acquaint the young with the culturally diverse knowledge production embedded in art history. We cannot stress enough how important it is to begin at the earliest age with a culturally inclusive view of society, with a wide horizon of knowledge, and a basic philosophy that can embrace the world with open-minded wonder. This is not simply 'art appreciation' but a profoundly invested exercise in civic imagination.

We recommend that artists, art historians and educationalists work jointly with the art institutions to coordinate the production of these books and allied programmes for secondary schools, university undergraduates and art students, and that they act in union to secure government funding for this essential enterprise which bears the seeds of a future cultural renaissance.

3 THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION ARTS DEGREES, VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS SCHOOLS

What are art schools and colleges for? Is it simply for producing more artists? A dubious answer, since it is now seems likely that contemporary Britain has over-produced under-educated art

graduates, often technically unaccomplished, ignorant of the basic art historical vocabulary, and at the mercy of a cynical global art market in which the commodification of art prevails. The same criticism may be levelled at performing arts courses with the lesser equivalent of the commercial arts market being the pull of television and Hollywood. There is an evident sense of crisis in our art schools today which stems from their loss of historical direction and resultant lack of credible answer to the question, 'What is an art student being educated for?'

Thierry de Duve, historian, art theorist and curator, has some interesting thoughts on the shape of contemporary art schools. He begins by asking:

> How is art in a given society transmitted from one generation to another? Art schools have not always existed, and nothing says that they must always exist. In a way, they already no longer exist. Their proliferation is perhaps a trompe l'oeil, masking the fact that the transmission of art today from artist to artist is very far from occurring directly in schools. On the contrary, it travels through extremely complex channels that end up implicating the collective as a whole.[1]

The art school, he remarks, 'is a professional school in a very paradoxical sense, since it specifically addresses the young men and women whose vocation destines them to address everyone'. Art, in his view, aims for the 'specific transfer of universal address' to plural publics. And we would agree with his idea: 'Addressing the Other is what distinguishes a work of art.'[2]

It is not the immediate task of this Report to pronounce on the future planning of art schools – or foresee them dismantled in some as yet unimagined re-direction of their goals. But, for certain, a radical change in their vision must come. Our recommendation is that a change of vision in art schools should begin with an integrated language of art and performance history. Art education in Britain, as in other European countries and in America, is still based on the primacy of Eurocentric art and performance history that exclusively celebrates the achievements of white artists. The congruence of cultural diversity in art practice and art history, such as we propose, will restructure our ideas both of the *transmission* of art from one set of artists to another across the generations and

the *dissemination* of that knowledge – that ‘social capital’ as it has been called – to the various publics that compose an integrated collective.

4 CHANGING INSTITUTIONAL ATTITUDES AND HABITS

It is a mere truism that institutions are a composite of the attitudes, habits, skills and career aspiration of the individuals who function hierarchically within them. It is also a truism that institutions tend to reform, for better or worse, from within. No doubt they are subject to change by exogenous pressures – hard knocks from the outside – but, like the civil service, that supreme model of all institutions, they seem to aim principally at their own conservative longevity, and they change ‘not so you’d notice’.

Institutions have the well-known effect of institutionalising their personnel and of making the individual corporate. We have noted Andrea Fraser’s melancholy insight that, for professionals trapped in the institutional field, ‘the institution is inside you, and we can’t get outside of ourselves’.

Is institutional change therefore unlikely, unrealistic or downright impossible?

Our Report has achieved at least this glimpse of genuine desire for change, and a serious intent to promote change, from within the institutions. *Third Text* did not embark alone on this Report. It was commissioned by senior officers of the Arts Council, it includes their written contributions and the participation of a Tate official, several academics and a heritage consultant – all of then institutional professionals who would not deny their commitment to career aspirations. What matters is not the apparent few recruits from the institutions present in these pages but the clue they give to the concord of many more such professionals seeking a change of air in their various institutions, and we could indeed say there is a reckoning wind of change now circulating further up the hierarchical ladder.

Our specific contribution at *Third Text* has always been the understanding that positive change is impossible if those in a position to implement it are not in possession of a critical perspective, a

philosophy that springs from reflections on genuine knowledge, of a globally inclusive vision of history. The point of this Report is to arm the institutional reformers with a vision of a properly integrated narrative of modern art in Britain, to have it institutionally recognised and disseminated as the true history of British achievement in art. This would provide a foundation, both materially and conceptually, for the prerequisite fundamental change in the current art institutional perceptions and structures.

5 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF CURATORSHIP IN CULTURAL DIVERSITY?

'It is now widely accepted that the art history of the second half of the twentieth century is no longer a history of artworks, but a history of exhibitions.'[3] This is an astonishing statement. One would like to ask who 'widely accepts' it as true? And what does it assume is true of contemporary art? It must have some weight of acceptance, because, if we can refer to Thierry de Duve again, he communicates the apparent consensus that we are living in a society in which

> the diffusion of living art is shared in more or less equal parts between museums and centers of contemporary art in the public sector, along with art galleries and foundations that are products of the private sector but make art accessible to all.[4]

And what he also believes true of contemporary art is that the 'aesthetic aspects of artistic apprenticeship' have been taken over by museums, art centres and galleries. What does this mean?

It means two things with interrelated consequences: first, that curatorship, as an authorial practice, has itself become a form of art; second, that contemporary art is literally being instituted by the curatorial programmes of museums and other exhibition centres devised for entertaining the public in the guise of art historical education. Visitors to exhibition spectacles nowadays are likely to feel muddled by the mix-and-match influence of past 'world art', often designating culturally diverse ethnic artefacts, and the latest fad in neo-avant-garde contemporary art. We are witness to a

recycling of history at once backwards to the vestiges of cultural expression, whether of pre-modern Europe or of so-called native peoples of non-European origins, and fast forward to our present consumerist condition. The effect of it is the reverse of what one might expect: the present is exoticised and history comes to a standstill as one more stimulus to contemporary novelty.

If the claims made for curatorship are true, and there is clearly much supporting evidence in operation, then it is equally clear that curators, whether as independent exhibition entrepreneurs, or as museum functionaries, or as artists who now frequently take on the role of curator, bear a heavy educational responsibility. Our task in this Report is to put openly in view the underpinning ideological assumptions by which the artworld institutions structure the public perception of history. The word itself exhibition, deriving from the Latin, *ex-habere*, 'to hold forth', tells us what should be made manifest, seen, and given to satisfy knowledge. The first small step we recommend is in reality a big one towards 'holding forth' the truth of cultural diversity in the history of art practices. Exhibitions that shift perceptions away from whites-only Eurocentrality to a complete picture of modernism's history in Britain and elsewhere will have a radical effect on the whole artworld and particularly on the public sector of museums and art galleries. The world no longer comprises isolated nation states, incommunicably distant from each other, but is in constant vital dialogue that produces art within a common history. Exhibitions reflective of that contemporary state of affairs will show us what Britain has already achieved as a multiracial society and also lead the way as an inclusive historical model for other countries to follow.

6 ARTS FUNDING IN RECESSIONARY TIMES

It was an ecological disaster waiting to happen. And it did, 20 April 2010. An explosion on BP's Deepwater Horizon drilling rig released a massive, unstoppable oil spillage into the Gulf of Mexico.

Tate Britain's glamorous summer party, celebrating twenty years of BP sponsorship on the Monday evening of 28 June 2010, was disrupted by a small number of artist-activists. Guests

arriving at the Tate entrance were harangued by ‘Art Not Oil’ protesters and five gallons of molasses – resembling a crude oil spill – mixed with feathers were poured down the gallery steps.[5]

The irony or paradox is that these artist-activists have been recipients of Arts Council funding. And why had it taken them twenty years to notice BP’s sponsorship of Tate Britain? Or is it because BP and all other corporate sponsors of art are finally seen as involved in some alternative form of money laundering, so to speak, in attempts to ‘green’ themselves? Is it the real deep water moral issue that art must strive to produce a vision of reality uncontaminated by corporate or state patronage? But that would be called naive. Art has been subsidised under questionable conditions for thousands of years, since Babylon, Egypt, ancient Greece and Rome, right up to the present.

There is no ‘moral fact’ that can support the uncontaminated autonomy of art. Nor are realistic means at hand to replace subsidy. The trouble is, realism stands perilously close to resignation that can tip over into cynicism, and especially now that our government is introducing us to a ‘belt-tightening’ regimen. ‘Arts told to adopt US-style funding’, proclaims the headline to a front page article in the *Financial Times*, 10 July 2010.

> […a Treasury spokesman said] Most departments have been asked to plan on the basis of 25 to 40 per cent real reductions in spending over a 4-year period…
>
> George Osborne, the chancellor, and Jeremy Hunt, the culture secretary, met leading figures from institutions such as the British Museum, the National Theatre and the National Gallery on Thursday to spell out the consequences of these cuts, although they did not give detailed figures.
>
> One participant said that Mr Hunt told the gathering that the institutions should embrace the US fundraising model which overwhelmingly relies on philanthropic sources and corporate money rather than public funds.

A rejoinder to government policy came from Mark Pemberton, Director, Association of British Orchestras, in the *Financial Times* letters column, 13 July 2010.

> Only massive endowments can form a genuine alternative to public subsidy, and as Mr Hunt admitted in his speech to arts leaders at the Roundhouse in London on May 19, endowments take at least 30 years to build. And recent experience in the US shows the danger of an over-reliance on endowments

in a volatile market, with serious declines in capital values and yields. In addition, gifts to charities are tax deductible in the US, unlike the UK's Gift Aid scheme, which offer modest tax benefits for higher taxpayers only.

Sir Nicholas Serota, Director of the Tate, also joined in the protest against government cuts to the arts subsidies. He reminds the government that: 'Tourism is our fifth biggest industry; at £20 billion, heritage tourism alone is worth more than the car industry.'[6] Museums and theatres feed vitally into this tourism sector; but there is far more at stake in the 'creative and cultural industries'. 'The public sector provides the training, the research and development, and the chance to experiment that make British culture an international export. We put the creative in the creative industries, and together we are as important to this country as the financial sector. Now it seems that we might be about to throw it all away.' Serota ends with a sombre and prophetic turn of phrase: 'Before the election, the Secretary of State for Culture, Jeremy Hunt, said: "It is actually in recessions that people need art the most." Now there is a danger that we shall produce a cultural recession of our own.'

Are we about to plunge into 'cultural recession'? The effects would indeed be devastating to the reserves of social capital built up in British art from the postwar to the present. What can be done now to shore up this social and culturally diverse capital? The works of Aubrey Williams, Uzo Egonu and many other artists of various ethnic origins mentioned in these pages who contributed to modern art in postwar Britain are still available at modest prices. It is our recommendation that the public art institutions, and Tate Britain in particular, should at once purchase all such works at a fair price from the artists' estates and thereby achieve three desiderata: their rescue from neglect or loss, their protection against the vagaries of art market forces, and most important of all to see them finally installed as the British people's heritage.

Funding must be secured for this enterprise, even in our budget-squeezed recession, because this is not an auction-house speculation in art but a cultural investment whose true value can only realised by the long term effects of knowledge production on our society. We are convinced that a

practical plan to schedule the adequate budgetary funding of this project over a number of years is entirely possible, if the art institutions are willing to show foresight and invest themselves in the programme. (See the Supplement at the end of this section for more facts and figures on the proposed cuts.)

7 A MODEST PROPOSAL FOR INFLUENCING GOVERNMENT ARTS POLICY

Can anyone explain this patent absurdity? The Department of Culture, Media and Sport. What sort of barbarism lumps indifferently together 'culture, media and sport'? No mention of art. Does it fit under culture, or media – or perhaps even sport? Or is art the proverbially supernumerary kitchen sink thrown in for good measure somewhere or other?

It would be far better, or at least more honest, to a have a single Department of Culture Industries, since this present Coalition government (and the Labour one before it) clearly views art as a luxury service industry. We have heard its enlightened instruction: 'adopt US-style funding'. Perhaps the arts sector of the cultural industries should adopt another US-style form of leverage, namely the manoeuvres of lobbying as a genuinely potent and fearsome political force. Of course, we know, US lobbies get their enthralling power from the capacity to deliver or withdraw significant blocks of votes that can make or break the party politicians who depend on them not only for re-election and funding but for the everyday routine practices of getting things done. US-style lobbies are *owed* power. What significant power is owed to the arts sector? None at all, generally, and even those performing arts that enjoy corporate patronage and the largest slices of state subvention, the ones best able to account for some profitable inputs to the culture industry and therefore the Treasury, even they are reduced to proffering advice to the DCMS decision- and policy-makers but cannot seriously influence the political process.

If the chief executive officers of our arts institutions have little political lobbying power, what chance do artists stand of forming a lobby able to influence government policy? An artists' lobby is

in any case well nigh unimaginable. Artists do not naturally coalesce, nor are they apt to unionise, and although modern artists seem often to form manifesto groups under some ism or other, or join in a school or movement, these have been ad hoc instances of collectives, political on occasion, such as the Art Workers' Coalition in America, but with a specific target agenda, and usually short-lived.

Art is in the first place an unprotected profession because artistic labour is *sui generis* and unlike that of industrial or other service industry employees who can withdraw theirs from the workplace in a concerted strike action which will have effect on the employer's decisions. Artistic labour does not have a productive price that can be measured by an industrial output of marketable goods with a per unit profit. The artist has no control on the market price of artworks, insanely high for some, little or nothing for others, because artworks are not strictly commodities, and the artist has no wage-bargaining power that unions can use to negotiate with employers. Art has no use value, in Marx's terms, but is a purely imaginary deposit of surplus value realisable only in cultural evolution.

Leonardo could possibly have downed tools and refused to complete the Mona Lisa. His patron would be sorely displeased, but we cannot see any socio-economic consequences to Leonardo's strike action – except to have deprived the future of a masterpiece.

It is here, in this unimaginable gap in the future where the Mona Lisa should have been but isn't because the artist withdrew his labour from its existence, that we can suggest a modest proposal for influencing government arts policy. What is irreparably lost to the future by damaging the public sector, identified by Serota as 'publicly supported activity' which provides 'the training, the research and development, and the chance to experiment', and that we in this Report have emphasised time and again as the knowledge production springing from culturally diverse art practice? It would be gravely irresponsible to sit by and watch our social capital leached away from the future to finance this moment of wilful politically imposed cultural recession. Let us be clear. It is a political decision that commands those cheated by the recession to pay for it. Our government,

Coalition or Labour, seems determined that the dealers in financial chicanery who caused the recession, who preyed on the naive credit hungry public, must be restored to their former unassailable status.

How will art cope with that kind of governing realists?

Our proposal requires farsighted partnership alliances between artists and the executives of art institutions, between those who are the most imaginative, who possess the most advanced knowledge of cultural diversity in art practice on a global scale, the most politically astute who can tirelessly and relentlessly lobby our present or any subsequent government that persists in wearing the emperor's new clothes of recession. Lobby them for what? For sustained public sector investment in the arts.

Is it possible? It is entirely possible.

8 THE FUTURE OF ETHNIC COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

The present government sponsored and Arts Council funded ethnically based community organisations should not be regarded as exclusively specific ethnic cultural sites, but open to the needs of the whole community regardless of ethnic origins, and enabled to share their particular experience of diversity with others from different cultural backgrounds.

The point has been made before and is worth repeating here. Traditional ethnic crafts and cultural expressions are fine as such, and there is room for them in an integrated society, but there must be no policy expectation that they constitute the sole boundaries within which contemporary artists of Asian, Caribbean or African origins are obliged to operate. What is expected of these culturally diverse artists is that they bring their experience to bear on contemporary art but not necessarily to express themselves only within the confines of past traditional means.

9 HEARING THE SILENCED

The ethnic minority communities of Britain have achieved a voice to which the state must pay some heed. It could be argued that an official policy of cultural diversity – mistaken as we see it – would not be in place if the state did not acknowledge and to an extent fear that voice.

But who speaks for the poorest white sector of the British population, by no means an insignificant minority, or even suspect it of any voice worth heeding? Perhaps, God help us, the British National Party? Fortunately not. Britain's deprived whites have confounded any expectation that sheer despairing anger at the chronic neglect of their plight would drive them into the embrace of rightwing extremism. They appear by their resounding silence deaf to the BNP's claims of white supremacy. Is it because deprivation leaves one apathetically disinclined towards politics of any sort? Or do these folk know something that has eluded the BNP and the privileged rest of us? Perhaps the answer is, yes, they do, which is not to confuse race with class antagonism, a wisdom that has apparently gone out of fashion in the other sectors of society. No one to our knowledge has much bothered to research the real whys and wherefores of their views, nor consider their aspirations which they are presumed not to have.

An exclusionist terminology, every bit as pernicious as that inflicted on the ethnic minorities, has been applied to them: 'terminally unemployable', benefit scroungers', 'sink estate denizens', and most injuriously, 'white trash'. Our vote-greedy politicians have been reprehensible in dismissing these citizens as politically weightless – a sort of post-industrial detritus that can be swept out of sight and mind. These residues of the *dis*-employed are not only inner city dwellers but are found in the scatterings of gutted mining and rural communities.

Where is the government funding for community organisations aimed at their needs? What are the measures envisaged for their cultural integration and participation in an equitable society? What, and more to the point, where is their 'heritage' in a society that has no place for them? Our faith in a genuinely integral but diverse British culture expressed in this Report would be mere 'tinkling brass', in the words of St Paul, if this situation is allowed to continue without foreseeable remedy.

What is to be done? What cannot be done is to speak for them – or even to speak of 'them' in such reductive anonymity as the 'others' in our midst. Our recommendation is in the first place to acknowledge the silenced who are the segregated outcasts within our shores, and then to agree on the practical integrational steps, educational, cultural and social to rectify the injustice.

What we are to do should never tempt us to perceive others as disabled. We must beware of causing affront to non-white and socially disadvantaged people by confusing the issues of cultural diversity and disability. The problems of cultural diversity are not due to the 'disability' of so-called 'ethnic minority' or other communities but of the system itself which sees them in need of help to overcome their 'handicap'. A perception of that kind is tantamount to racism and ought to be considered an institutional disability stemming from the legacy of colonially motivated segregationist thinking.

Change will come when the equality of all people is recognised within a common framework and history. A desirable conclusion, no doubt, but the mere expectation of change will not resolve the issue of disability. For how much longer must the disabled citizens of Britain tolerate their condition of 'disappeared persons' in our midst? We have to act now with the answer, 'not any more!' Such resolution goes beyond the rights or wrongs of diversity and enters the global field of human rights. I cannot do better than repeat what Roshi Naidoo has well said in her essay:

> Though we should take very seriously all critiques of diversity policies, we need to be aware of the political impetus behind some arguments for change. One particular remark in *Boxed In* jumped out at me. Dyer notes: 'There is an equal lazy equation of "blackness" with "disability"…as if blackness were a disability in itself'. Though I understand the broader point about institutions lumping all 'others' together, it is also the case that a political understanding of disability and 'race' have much in common. Disability politics have helped us to understand the ways in which people are made unable to participate in the public sphere, and made invisible in heritage culture, in ways not related to their impairment. The troubling moment in this quote is not just its lack of solidarity, but also the refusal to understand and challenge structural inequalities, in favour of a singular focus on the rights of individual artists.

We have had New Labour and now have the New Conservatives, and, as Naidoo rightly observes, for them 'race politics is simply another interference in our lives, like too many road signs'.

What good is art for this purpose of advancing human rights? Ann Lauterbach, poet, art writer and curator, has expressed very well the cultural effect of art.

> If we understand arts practice as a means to formations of new constituencies of inclusion and belonging that, in [Ralph Waldo] Emerson's great phrase, 'unsettle' our assumptions and realign our relation to the intersecting arcs of our presences, then we will be less vulnerable to the received habits of thought that continue to threaten and curtail our liberties.[7]

10 CULTURAL DIVERSITY, GLOBALISM AND DIGITAL DISSEMINATION

Information is not culture but only a possible conveyance of it. Information and culture have become virtually undifferentiated in the cyberreality transmission that now encircles the world. There is a notion currently cherished that the digital medium of information ineluctably alters the content of culture. Two specific effects of the Web world underpin this claim: intermedial high-density information resources and their deterritorialised dissemination. How do we understand this?

There is no doubt whatever that the advent of the Web has had incalculable impact on all previous media, whether mechanical, electronic or paper-based printed texts. Whosoever is digitally abled can now manipulate all the outputs of information *intermedially*, meaning that every genre of image (moving or still), music, text, 3-D design, database, geological survey, graphic detail, architectural plan, virtual walk-through, and so on, can be manoeuvred into a single digital environment. There is no longer anything like a culturally specific 'original' in these fabulously expanded modes of networked remixings. *Deterritorialisation of data* has released vast hoards of information freely accessible online and this has put intellectual property rights seriously in

question. We can speak of interchangeable or 'fungible authorship' but no categorically individual author.

What does all this digitised intermedial fluidity mean? Some art theorists suggest that the ease of expression via global networks has profoundly altered

> differences of power and influence between center and periphery, urban and rural, and traditionally privileged and newly empowered classes. Small-scale and locally based artisanal practices gain enhanced potential. The virtual world, as an ever-expanding experiential, cognitive, sociocultural and economic domain, moves alongside or into competition with the physical environment.[8]

The experience of web-based 'mixed reality' is spontaneously generating online cultural communities that will replace the isolated traditionally boundaried ones of the past.

Perhaps so, but the apostles of digital utopia are apt to lose sight of the more sinister aspects of networks. Computer engineering got its impetus from developments in war-time military intelligence, code-breaking, cybernetic control systems, and, not to be forgotten, disinformation, all of which still holds true on a sophisticated scale that far outstrips these origins. Nor should we forget that networking is the essential neural system of global capitalism to which, in the words of the philosopher and social activist Antonio Negri, 'there is no outside' at present.[9] Another cause for concern is that with every welcomed increase of information comes extended paranoiac surveillance.

Artists have the option of digital tools, and those who use them best consciously seem to be the activists alerted to the downside of the global digital regime. The question we must bear particularly in mind in our Report is what potential advances in artistic vocabulary these tools herald for culturally diverse contemporary art practice. Nothing appears to us more contemporary than the instantly mobilised contemporaneity of digital usage. We cannot be satisfied with such a ready-made normalised view of the digital regime which risks taking for granted that its structure is neutrally value-free and not inherently ideological. Artists who take up digital tools in their practice must be imaginatively prepared to assess them and proceed with critical caution to resist the

seductions of a phoney electronically commodified universalism by maintaining the specificities of history and the diversities of culture – the most fragile forms of human ecology – that are being eroded to a flat-world level of transmissible information.

We recommend that an advisory council be installed in which artists most adept in 'tactical media'[10] can participate in partnership with administrators, curators and technicians of the art institutions to create programmes that address precisely those 'specificities of history and diversities of culture'. This is anticipated as primarily an art-led research project and not of the conservationist, archival or public educational kind already programmed in many museums and institutional art galleries. We are envisaging once again the future case for creativity in the vast digital territory where there is as yet unimagined scope for institutions awake to the possibilities of forming partnerships with artists engaged in exploring the civil rights issues of surveillance, ecological aesthetics and the avant-garde bio-technology media.

The results of this creative encounter could add a new, entirely unforeseen dimension to what in future we will come to know and share as 'heritage'.

We can foresee the reluctance of activist digital artists to accept the institutional embrace which seems likely to endanger their autonomy. Suspicion of co-option can be overcome by dialogue and by consideration of some models in the past, such as the Art Workers' Coalition in the 1960s, when 'outsider' artists and 'insider' institutional workers realised that they shared similar ideals and goals.[11] Another obstacle, we need hardly say, is funding. But that too is not insuperable if the spirit of partnership is willing to make the necessary effort.

Our view at *Third Text* is that art enjoys a limited, socially indebted but real autonomy that can strive beyond itself to attain new conceptual practices in reality. Are we demanding more of art that it can realistically deliver? Peter Osborne, philosopher and art theorist, has cast the autonomy of art in this light:

> With the decline of independent Left political-intellectual cultures, the artworld remains, for all its intellectual foibles, the main place beyond the institutions of higher education where intellectual and

political aspects of social and cultural practices can be debated, and where these debates can be transformed.[12]

That is a good enough place, for now, not to conclude but to begin engaging actively with the creative case in the public sector.

Supplement
The Proposed Arts Funding Cuts

1 *What does it actually cost the ordinary British taxpayer to subsidise the arts?*

The annual cost of arts subsidisation is 74 pence or roughly .07 per cent of public spending. That is 7 pence in every £100 which equates to seventeen pence per person per week or less than half the cost of a pint of milk. The cost is derisory when compared to the government's rescue spending. According to Mervyn King, the Bank of England governor, the size of the bank bailout is near £1 trillion. How big is a trillion? A million seconds takes 11.5 days; a trillion takes 31,709 years. Some sixty million taxpayers are sharing the cost of the bank bailout. Divided evenly, then, we each shoulder a one-off payment of £16,666.66. At a rate of half-a-pint a week that would buy you milk to last you until the year 4,780.

2 *What does public subsidy of the arts actually deliver?*

Let's consider a few facts and figures. The creative industries are a fast-growing sector. Between 1997 and 2007 they created two million new jobs and £16.6 billion in exports. Culture drives tourism, worth £86 billion in 2007. Heritage sites, equally fearful of cuts, employ another 27,000 and draw in more tourists. Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture brought in fifteen million visitors and made £800 million for the local economy. The return from a tiny government investment is arguably greater in the cultural industries than any other – every pound the Arts Council England puts in generates another two pounds from commercial sources. In the North-east,

an arts consortium, including The Sage and Baltic, recently reported that every pound of state aid generates four pounds locally.

More new plays are put on now than ever – 45% of all productions. The arts are regenerators. The New Art Gallery in Walsall, a mini-Bilbao, breathes life into the town, but local council cuts mean shutting on Mondays, with far worse to come. 'Philanthropy in the Black Country? There's no such thing!' says its director.

About 76% of the population will attend some arts event at least once a year. Nor is the arts subsidy irrelevant to education. At the South Bank, in early July 2010, 500 people, many from local schools and youth orchestras, performed Bernstein's *Mass* to rapturous reviews. The Royal Shakespeare Company's campaigning programme has Shakespeare performed by hundreds of schools for the first time. The cuts will deprive schools of working closely with established theatre and music.

3 *But is it value for money?*

The value of the arts cannot be measured solely by pounds and pence. Yet, even in these 'cash value' terms, the arts are earning their keep. Arts Council money is the thin edge of the wedge that prises open further investment. Every pound from the Arts Council buys several more – most of them directly contingent on public subsidy. The arts are unequivocally profitable. In 2008, Arts Council England spent £100 million on theatre – VAT receipts from London theatres alone were worth £75 million.

What is the 'big society' if not arts for everyone? Miniscule grants already stretch far into communities, making music, dancing and art, engaging with history and heritage, drawing people together in shared emotions and experiences. Civic pride, quality of life, pleasure and endeavour, and the sheer exuberant production of art – all of that is cheap for its rich returns. It is not free, but nor is it expensive.

The government should consider this commonsense financial fact. Cutting something that makes money is simply a poor business plan.

4 *Can philanthropy plug the hole left by the subsidy cuts?*

Jeremy Hunt, the Culture Secretary, thinks the arts should be looking to philanthropy to fund the impending shortfall. Is he volunteering as the fourth richest of the twenty-two Cabinet millionaires? Hunt is eager to offer up sacrifices from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and thereby secure a place in the Star Chamber to pass judgement on Cabinet foot-draggers trying to defend their departments from impossible forty per cent cuts. Who will defend the arts?

Margaret Thatcher believed in the 1980s that government could withdraw funds and urge philanthropy and corporate sponsorship to fill the gap. It did not work last time when the arts were crippled by cuts and it will not work this time. Leading multimillion-pound donors wrote to the Prime Minister in mid-July this year warning that philanthropy will not step in to cover the shortfall. Cutting state funding discourages private giving: as the state cuts, so do matched funders in this finely balanced mixed economy.

The savings gained from the proposed cuts are paltry. It is a political gesture and not a financial necessity. Hunt would be better advised to make the business and cultural case for protecting our national arts investment – seed corn for a growth industry.

5 *What are the foreseeable effects of the cuts?*

The prognosis is, in a word, catastrophe. Arts leaders warn that threatened cuts – 25% or more – mean one in four of the 800 Arts Council-funded bodies will close. The Arts Council has already pared down its operating costs to 6.6% – leaner than most private companies. It took an abrupt 5% funding cut this year and lost 17.5% of lottery money to the Olympics. We need to be clear that cuts on the scale of 25–30% will mean an end to the funding of a great many organisations from 2012 onwards.

The cumulative effect of these cuts could threaten closures or partial closures of our major national museums, galleries and theatres, besides the disappearance of valuable arts organisations across the country. This would reverse the gains made since 1992 in the international standing of the UK's cultural organisations, leading to the loss of irreplaceable expertise, and much diminished access to their culture and heritage for a generation of children and young people.

Many leaders of Britain's most prominent arts institutions are deeply concerned that the cultural sector's unique model of mixed funding, admired all over the world, will be severely damaged by the depth and extent of the cuts being discussed.

There is a tipping point to cuts beyond which permanent damage will be done. 25% is impossible. The difference between 15% – which the Arts Council believes it can absorb over four years, though that still means closures – and 25% is just £45 million of grant-in-aid, a small sum and yet all the difference between the sector surviving or failing.

The facts and figures in this Supplement have been culled from news reports, Arts Council statements, twitters, blogs and various ephemeral data available to everyone, as of 10 August 2010. What do they forecast? We shall know when the government implements its draconian cuts across Britain's entire public sectors, save, of course, the financial one, which will go on with business as usual. Is this acceptable to the commonalty? Or are we exceptionally fortunate to have a financial sector that will rescue us from the recession?