

**Whose art is it anyway?**

## **Context**

This piece was commissioned by Arts Council England. Its central focus was prefigured in Peter Hewitt's *Changing Places* published last year – namely how far do the personalisation and choice agendas shaping other areas of publicly funded activity, such as health and education, have any resonance for the arts.

The ideas here, as appropriate for a piece challenging traditional notions of authorship and production in the arts, were the fruit of a collaborative effort. Many individuals gave generously of their time, and did much to help shape the arguments and insights. All of those people are listed in Appendix One, and I would like to thank all of them for their time and intellectual generosity. Any errors or omissions remain my own.

John Knell  
Intelligence Agency  
March 2006

## **The inevitable personalisation of the arts**

‘Consumers will never be able to tell us the future of art as they do not know the possibilities. But we cannot invent a more viable future for our institutions ... without a deep understanding of how consumers fit art into their lives’<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Unprecedented levels of public investment in the arts since 1997 have helped bolster the arts infrastructure in the UK. However, this injection of funds has not been accompanied by any enhanced clarity or consensus around the *purpose* of public investment in the arts, nor an open, detailed and wide-ranging negotiation of the expected outcomes of such investment. As a consequence we have seen rising angst amongst politicians, arts administrators, cultural leaders and cultural commentators about the precise place, role and value of the arts in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

But at least there is one neglected group that all these protagonists are talking about a little more – the public. Indeed, whilst levels of public attendance and participation in the arts are hardly new concerns, public engagement is the new black in the arts world – or the new old black. The slow train coming has undoubtedly become the runaway train.

As a consequence Arts Council England is now facing unprecedented pressure to deliver tangible outcomes in terms of public reach and participation. The culture minister, David Lammy, recently made government dissatisfaction with the pace of progress crystal clear:

‘It is a great pity that the record sums of public investment we have made in the arts have not led to a higher profile for the arts in the public’s mind.’<sup>2</sup>

More broadly, the general drift towards so-called ‘instrumental’ depictions of the value of the arts and cultural institutions, whether framed in the language of social inclusion, community regeneration, or diversity, has acted as a further

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Brown, *The Shifting Sands of Demand* ([www.alansbrown.com](http://www.alansbrown.com))

<sup>2</sup> David Lammy, Culture Minister, in a speech to the Association of British Orchestras Annual Conference, 30 January 2006 (cf. [www.davidlammy.co.uk](http://www.davidlammy.co.uk))

accelerant to the debate about how our arts organisations can best respond to public needs and aspirations.<sup>3</sup>

For many, these developments are unwelcome. A wide range of think tanks and commentators have questioned the wisdom of framing the debate about the value of art in these ways, fiercely resisting the notion that the cultural and artistic purposes of the arts should play a lesser role than social, economic or educational purposes.<sup>4</sup> The profound weakness of instrumental arguments for the arts – nothing serious, just the complete absence of theoretical and empirical causality - and the dull, shooting ducks in a barrel debate that has ensued<sup>5</sup>, will come in time to be seen as a profound distraction.

In particular they have deflected attention away from a more first order question - what are the accountabilities and responsibilities of publicly funded arts organisations to their public?<sup>6</sup> As such the debate has been focusing on effect, not cause. The effect – crude instrumentalism - has been driven by a lack of clarity around the outcomes that we should be demanding from the arts, all of which has been caused by uncertainties about the accountabilities of publicly funded arts organisations.

As a consequence issues such as the *quality* of public engagement in cultural activities, and how innovation might recast public engagement, have been left unexamined. This in turn has created a distorted debate about the primary accountabilities of the sector.

The starting premise of this report is that this balance needs to be redressed by exploring a number of simple questions. How can the arts best engage the public? How far does the language of personalisation, choice, and co-production aid our understanding of these challenges? What would it mean for arts organisations if they were to become much more responsive to their public?

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<sup>3</sup> For an excellent discussion see Sara Selwood, *Measuring culture*, December 2002, Spiked Online ([www.spiked-online.com/Printable/00000006DBAF.htm](http://www.spiked-online.com/Printable/00000006DBAF.htm))

<sup>4</sup> See Adrian Ellis, *Valuing Culture Demos* (2002); Institute for Ideas ([www.instituteofideas.com](http://www.instituteofideas.com)); John Holden and Robert Hewison *The Right to Art. Making aspirations reality Demos* (2004) Munira Mirza (ed) *Culture Vultures: Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?* Policy Exchange, January 2006

<sup>5</sup> cf. Knell *The Art of Dying*, Mission, Models, Money Provocation Paper, (February 2005) ([www.missionmodelsmoney.org.uk](http://www.missionmodelsmoney.org.uk))

<sup>6</sup> There seems to be an emerging acceptance that the publicly funded arts must address a broad 'public', requiring arts organisations to focus on both current and potential audiences. And measurements of public satisfaction with the arts increasingly define and explore the preferences of individuals as citizens (taxpayers) and direct consumers (paying customers)

What is driving these changes and what can Arts Council England and others do to encourage them?

## 1. Personalisation, co-production and the arts

‘Ask to what extent [the consumer] has been invited to enter into a dialogue with arts producers and presenters? Let’s be honest, the answer is not enough...We’ve put considerable resources (with considerable success) into ‘audience development’ – but this has been more focused on persuading non-attenders to attend than meaningful dialogue between those who provide and those who go.’<sup>7</sup>

Just so, and as such the arts find themselves at odds with the broad thrust of public policy in the UK. Anybody with even a passing interest in the fate of our public services will have grown familiar with the language of choice and personalisation (tailoring services to meet individual need) which have become central to the ongoing reforms of both the NHS and our education system.

The prospect of greater ‘choice’ and personalisation is being used by the Government to drive improvements in public services, partly by raising the expectations of voters and service users for better, faster, personalised services.

Two clear threads run through personalisation – firstly equipping the service user with the ability to tailor and personalise the service experience, and secondly inviting the user to *co-produce* the service by encouraging the individual service user to be an active participant in designing the type of service they receive.

So for example, in the recent Education White Paper<sup>8</sup> the Government states its determination to provide more personalised services for children and their families, noting that:

‘Personalisation means a tailored education for every child and young person, that gives them strength in the basics, stretches their aspirations, and builds their life chances.’<sup>9</sup>

In other words the stress is on the ability of a pupil to make real choices about the type of tuition and curriculum they receive – to be an active participant in designing their educational experience.

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Hewitt (2005.17) *Changing Places*, Arts Council England

<sup>8</sup> Department for Education and Skills (2005) *Higher Standards, Better Schools for All – More choice for parents and pupils*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid* (2005.50)

The NHS has a similar aspiration to ensure that personalised services take root across the whole of the NHS and for all patients.<sup>10</sup> In practical terms for hospital services, this means ‘that there will be a lot more choice for patients about how, when and where they are treated and much better information to support that’<sup>11</sup>

There is also a recognition that users need to be supported if they are to be able to co-produce their own care. In response the NHS has designed the Expert Patients Programme which aims to empower patients to manage their own healthcare, by listening to themselves and their own symptoms, supported by their clinical team.<sup>12</sup>

What are the implications of these developments for the arts?

Firstly, they suggest that arts organisations are going to come under increasing pressure to become responsive, customer focused organisations, which seek to engage customers in more dialogue and collaboration. Thus far the arts are responding weakly to these imperatives, and not enough regularly funded organisation (RFOs) are customer centric organisations by instinct and practice.

Secondly, these developments pose an innovation and public engagement challenge for the arts. The most enthusiastic advocates of personalisation argue that co-production should be seen as a vital source of innovation in all product and service delivery processes, including in the arts, and as a potentially disruptive influence on large companies, institutions and closed professional elites.

In response, the service delivery strategies of many organisations now aim to ‘empower each customer to create something unique, with value built around convenience, flexibility and choice. Against this backdrop, most arts groups offer a preset programme at a fixed time in a single location, and ask you to buy it many months in advance’<sup>13</sup>

So personalisation matters for the arts. But how much does it matter? Are we simply asking arts organisations to sharpen up their act a little in terms of how they reach and manage their relationships with customers? Or is there a much

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Health (2004.1) *The NHS Improvement Plan – Putting People at the Heart of Public Services*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Alan Brown, *The Shifting Sands of Demand* ([www.alansbrown.com](http://www.alansbrown.com))

sharper imperative at work, demanding more root and branch change in their core practices and products?

## 2. Personalisation in the arts – driving adaptation or revolution?

Personalisation will have a profound impact on the arts – for three reasons:

1. The transformative power of information and communication technology (ICT)
2. The new dynamics of consumer behaviour
3. The publicly funded arts will increasingly have to negotiate their value with the public

### 2.1 Growing up digital – rejecting force fed culture

It has become commonplace to assert that ICT and the internet has transformed the world of business and commerce, in terms of logistics, business models, delivery mechanisms, and as a tool for creativity and collaboration

How are these same forces going to transform the worlds of arts and culture? Most obviously through the radically different behaviours and expectations of current and future generations which have grown up digital.<sup>14</sup> As Lessig has recently argued, to understand the impact of technology on the arts, you need to understand a new distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. As he notes:

‘All of us are ‘us’. We consume culture. The ‘them’ *I want you to focus on are people who consume and create. They are our children. We experience culture as something that we take. It is delivered to us – broadcast. They increasingly understand culture as something they make, or something they remake and remix and remake, something that they get and through the tools of this technology, recreate. Culture for them is not delivered in final form. They use technology where we had no technology and they therefore experience culture in a way we have not seen.*’ (emphasis added)<sup>15</sup>

What Lessig is pointing to here is that younger generations, and even some of us who are a bit older, see creative works as building blocks out of which to create new culture – not as end points – an organic form of art. As Lessig comments

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<sup>14</sup> D Tapscott (1998) *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* McGraw-Hill

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Lessig, *Imagining a Cultural Commons*, LIFT Lecture 2, 27 May 2004, Royal Geographical Society (download from <http://liftfest.org.uk/lectures/lectures.01.htm>)

‘If art could be this – building blocks – that people were free to remix and re-express and recreate then art would be different – it would be mixed tape, it would be modifications of clothes that kids do all the time, it would be the expressions of creativity that we are increasingly seeing’<sup>16</sup>

The implications for the arts are clear. If they don’t embrace personalisation, or offer consumers the chance to tailor their experience and co-produce creative products, they increasingly won’t be seen by a large proportion of their future potential audiences, growing up digital. The traditional arts may be happy to survive on the patronage of an ageing gerontocracy<sup>17</sup>, disaffected audiences will not be.

## **2.2 Playing on the consumer’s turf**

‘The Gürzenich Orchestra in Cologne has installed an iPod docking station in its foyer so that audiences can walk away with a download of the performance that they just heard in the auditorium that evening’<sup>18</sup>

As consumers become accustomed to personalised customer experiences from the public and private sector alike, driven in part by ICT, they will bring a new set of expectations to their exchanges with arts and cultural institutions. The implication is that arts organisations will have to start playing on the consumer’s turf. This is perhaps most easily understood in terms of how technology has transformed the delivery of music – with the growth of MP3 downloads, blogs, band sites, and peer-to-peer networks – allowing musicians and music organisations to reach their audiences in new ways. As a consequence even my sixty eight year old Mum has heard of the Arctic Monkeys, although they’re not on her iPod yet. As John Kieffer has noted:

‘These ‘alternative’ marketing and distribution methods are becoming increasingly attractive as audiences, particularly of the younger generations, demand that artists meet them on their own turf. This marketplace (and, yes, it is a marketplace, even in the nonprofit world), will require musicians and music organisations to develop new skills. Whether a musician chooses the ‘do it yourself’ route or a more traditional career path, it will be a distinct advantage for

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> R Hewison (2000.9) *Towards 2010 – new times – new challenges for the arts*, Arts Council England

<sup>18</sup> John Kieffer *Led by the ear* Platform, Vol 4, No 3 (2005), [www.aeaconsulting.com](http://www.aeaconsulting.com)

them to have a deep understanding of and empathy with their audience that goes far beyond traditional marketing techniques.<sup>19</sup>

### **Deepening engagement and widening audiences**

- In the UK, Pilot Theatre – [www.pilot-theatre.com](http://www.pilot-theatre.com) - offers podcasts hosted by Artistic Director Marcus Romer, offering insight into the company's present programme. The podcasts give a potential audience member some context and some expectations, all of which reduces the barriers to going to the venue for the first time.

- Welsh National Opera are the first European Opera Company to create music and video downloads from recording their live performances. As Carlo Rizzi, WNO's Music Director observes:

'The Flying Dutchman downloads are part of a wider strategy to bring something extra to all our audiences – the regular opera goer who might want a memento of a great evening out in the theatre, or a newcomer who is intrigued to try something new, but wants a taster of what to expect. We are also really interested to see whether this will reach a younger audience<sup>20</sup>.

In the traditional language of marketing and audience development, these developments underline that in the face of more sophisticated consumers, and growing audience fragmentation, arts organisations will need to work much harder to understand their current and potential audiences. This requires them to develop strategies for marketing, customer relationship management and audience development which start with the personalised needs of customers, not the current capabilities and traditional strategies of arts organisations.

Moreover, this requires arts organisations to think of personalisation not as some new form of marketing and customer relationship management, but rather as something which will directly shape the way in which artistic products are developed, produced and brought to market.

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<sup>19</sup> John Kieffer *Led by the ear* Platform, Vol 4, No 3 (2005), [www.aeaconsulting.com](http://www.aeaconsulting.com)

<sup>20</sup> See [www.wno.org.uk](http://www.wno.org.uk) – reported in Arts Professional, Issue 117, 13 March 2006

### **Broadband Beethoven**

Last year the BBC decided to offer listeners the chance to download his symphonies from the Radio 3 website on to their computers or digital audio players (iPods and the like). There was no charge. The response left them reeling. The total number of downloads for all nine Beethoven symphonies was 1,369,893.

The commercial download sites iTunes and Napster began to link up to the Beeb's output, to capitalise on the popularity. However, Chris Kimber, head of BBC Radio Interactive, does not think that this extraordinary response will necessarily lead to any revival in attendance at live performances. As he noted:

'People are unwilling to give up two hours of their lives to sit in a hall these days. It's seen as a white-haired and strait-laced experience. And that's a shame, because the real musical experience is still the live one.'<sup>21</sup>

### **2.3 Negotiating the value of the arts**

'In an increasingly democratic and demanding age, artists have to establish the value of what they do through a conversation with their audiences, peers and stakeholders'<sup>22</sup>

Ongoing conflicts over how best to value the contribution of the arts, and an increasing emphasis on consumer preferences and wants, will inexorably lead to a growing pressure on publicly funded arts organisations to test more rigorously what the public value about their interactions with them, and what they don't.

In other words value is something that will have to be continually tested and negotiated between producer and consumer, and established ideas around public value measurement are helpful here. In simple terms public value is

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<sup>21</sup> *Roll on Beethoven* The Independent, 9 August 2005

<sup>22</sup> C Leadbeater (2005) *Arts organisations in the 21st century: ten challenges*, Arts Council England

determined by citizens' preferences<sup>23</sup>. For something to be of value it is not enough for citizens to say that it is desirable. It is only of value if citizens – either individually or collectively – are willing to give something up in return for it, such as money, time, or by disclosing private information (e.g. in return for more personalised information / services)<sup>24</sup>. The key things which citizens value tend to fall into three, partially overlapping, categories: outcomes, services, and trust.

Clearly user satisfaction is critical to public value. Similarly the degree to which an organisation is perceived to have legitimate purposes, and engages responsively with its various stakeholders, is likely to impact on how much the public trust that organisation.

If one accepts the need for arts organisations to be genuinely committed to user engagement and participation, it would be perverse if this did not lead to a more concerted effort to measure their impact, and user satisfaction, through a public value approach. Crucially, uncoupled from crude instrumentalism, and short-term assessments driven by funding rounds<sup>25</sup>, this approach might actually allow us to get closer to a real, diverse understanding of what the arts 'do to people, and what people can 'do' to the arts'<sup>26</sup>

As Belfiore comments:

'A more realistic vision of how the public interacts with the art forms that are currently funded through taxpayers' money is certainly needed, together with the sobering realization that one cultural event cannot have all sorts of social impacts on all of its audiences / participants, and that the workings of the arts on people's psyche are not something that you can always plan and direct in advance.'<sup>27</sup>

## 2.4 A personalisation revolution

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<sup>23</sup> cf. M H Moore (1995) *Creating Public Value*, Harvard University Press; G Kelly, G Mulgan and S Muers (2002) *Creating Public Value: An Analytical Framework for Public Service Reform* The Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office; R Hewison and J Holden (2004) *The Right to Art. Making aspirations a reality* Demos; BBC (2004) *Building Public Value, Renewing the BBC for a digital world* BBC

<sup>24</sup> G Kelly et al (2002.4) *Creating Public Value: An Analytical Framework for Public Service Reform* The Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office

<sup>25</sup> S Selwood (2006.51) 'Unreliable evidence' in M. Mirza (ed) (2006) *Culture Vultures. Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?* Policy Exchange

<sup>26</sup> E Belfiore (2006.36) *The social impacts of the arts – myth or reality?* in M Mirza (ed) (2006) *Culture Vultures. Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?* Policy Exchange

<sup>27</sup> E Belfiore (2006.35) *The social impacts of the arts – myth or reality?* in M Mirza (ed) (2006) *Culture Vultures. Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?* Policy Exchange

Arts organisations cannot meet these challenges by slightly adapting their existing customer engagement practices, whilst leaving their core strategies and practices untouched.

Over the next ten years arts organisations need to completely rethink how they engage and inspire the public, rearticulated in their missions and models of delivery. What might this mean in practice and how can we best conceive of a spectrum of personalisation activities?

### **3. Towards a definition of personalisation for the arts**

'... By focusing on arts production, the Arts Council and its partners have given less consideration than they might to the demand side, that is the consumer or member of the public.'<sup>28</sup>

Personalisation is already taking place within the arts – it is not some abstract theoretical possibility. As a consequence the narrow empirical concerns of this study were to begin to develop some inductive definitions of what personalisation might mean. These have been generated by working with a wide range of expert practitioners<sup>29</sup>, artists, producers, organisational leaders, and independent thinkers drawn widely from across the sector.

What quickly became apparent is that there are already a spectrum of 'soft' (consumer centric marketing, customer relationship management and delivery) and 'hard' (consumer as producer) personalisation outcomes in the sector. Harder, leading edge practice is largely concentrated within particular art forms (music, contemporary visual art, media art) and where such practice occurs it is resulting from the creative decisions of artists, not shifts in the mission or purposes of art organisations.

This in part reflects the reality that some newer art forms lend themselves more naturally to these new forms of co-production. Equally however, this does not mean that traditional arts forms cannot innovate at both ends of the personalisation spectrum, not least because co-production is not a new idea in the arts. Indeed, one of the key insights of the study is that the scope for innovation across the whole sector, encompassing both the established arts infrastructure and the new, is enormous.

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Hewitt (2005.16) *Changing Places*, Arts Council England

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix One for a list of some of those who contributed to the study and I would like to thank all of the Arts Council England staff who offered advice and input

Let's explore the findings in a little more detail.

### 3.1 A 'soft P' definition of personalisation

'... it is hard to object to the view that people who use a publicly funded facility or service should have the chance to express opinions about it and be heard. But I do not see this much in the arts. The supplier knows best seems to be the dominant attitude.'<sup>30</sup>

The research revealed that a significant number of arts organisations understand very clearly the need to create new customer experiences by using new channels to reach audiences (websites and webcasting) and by using new technology (concert master handheld devices) to encourage audience interactivity and to capture their feedback. The emphasis is on improving and personalising the overall customer experience, whether live or online, and less frequently about offering opportunities for co-production (see boxed example below – Watershed).

#### **Watershed**

Watershed ([www.watershed.co.uk](http://www.watershed.co.uk)) is Britain's first dedicated media centre, which opened in 1982. It is housed in former industrial premises (Grade II listed) on Bristol's waterfront. Watershed is committed to developing new skills and content by working in collaboration with artists, filmmakers, media companies, media groups and schools. This work is exhibited both on-site and on-line, with Watershed acting as a facilitator and a broker of new partnerships.

Watershed promotes creativity, collaboration, innovation and participation from cultural, commercial and community sectors. It regards itself as a facilitator, a hub, and a catalyst for the creative industries.

Watershed is already clear about the power of ICT to help it reach a wider audience. In 2005 Watershed developed an audience of 400,000 that came through its doors. But Watershed also achieved 1.4 million visits (sessions) to their web resources from over 100 countries with a total of 1.9TB of data served. The most visited part of the site was <http://www.dshed.net> – a hub for creative collaboration and interaction with creative digital and artistic content.<sup>31</sup> This web

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Hewitt (2005.17) *Changing Places*, Arts Council England

<sup>31</sup> I am grateful to Dick Penny of Watershed for this data

and digital content strategy allowed a huge audience to experience art and Watershed outwith the venue.

The leading edge of this 'soft P' end of the personalisation spectrum doesn't discriminate between traditional and new art forms, perhaps unsurprisingly, in that practitioners see these activities as a narrow agenda about delivery, communication, and customer management. In other words those organisations who are already making artistic products and venues more accessible, and are improving their use of ICT to understand their audience and manage their customer relationships – regard this work as primarily about delivery and access channels rather than the work or artists themselves.

Figure One below captures the limits of these activities. The arts organisation is not embracing the consumer as a co-producer. Rather, it is deploying more sophisticated ways of engaging the customer, involving predominantly push type marketing strategies, but also by creating some limited pull type opportunities for the customer.<sup>32</sup>

### **Online initiation**

In terms of building customer relationships, there is a rich vein of research on audience development and connection. Some of the most interesting examples of new practice involve the use of online tools as the next example from the Louisiana Philharmonic reveals:

The Louisiana Philharmonic, in partnership with Carrollton Technology Partners of New Orleans, is working on new software for its web site that facilitates the process of inviting others to concerts. The new application allows people to send a customised invitation to a list of friends' e-mail addresses, similar to an online greeting card. The initiator may elect to buy everyone else's tickets or opt for the pay-if-you-go alternative. Response tracking is automated. The LPO also plans to use the new programme for fulfilling ticket orders generated through group sales.

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<sup>32</sup> Push marketing uses information that is directly delivered to the consumer e.g. direct mail or e-mail. A web-site is an example of pull information, for anyone to view as they wish by browsing the address, with the consumer in control of the pull.

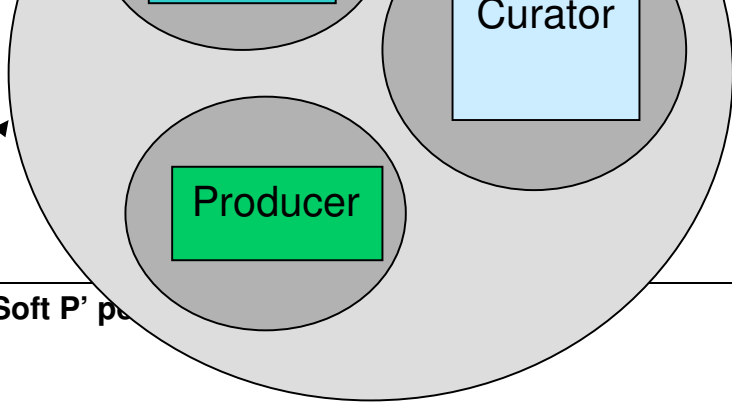
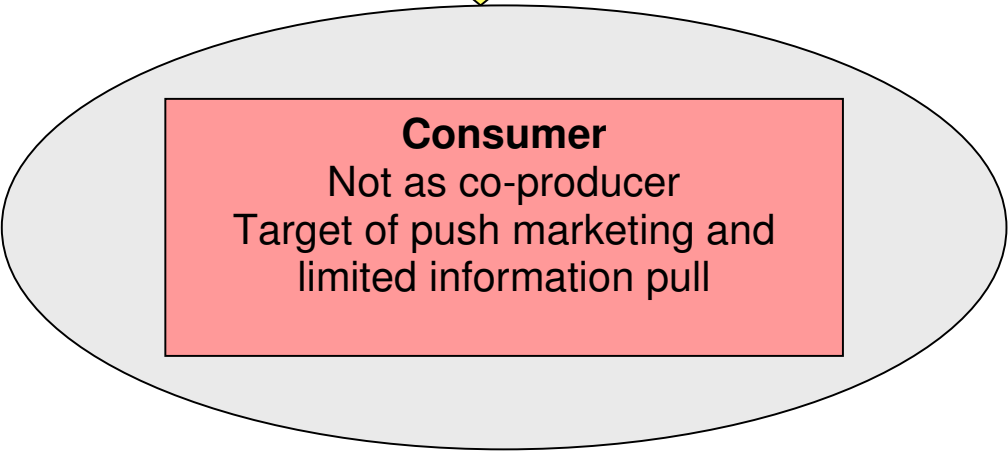
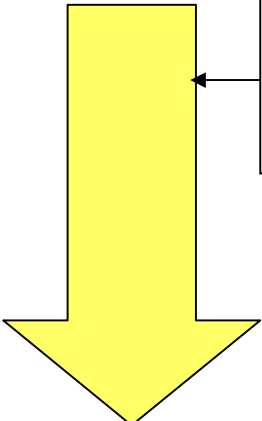


Figure One: 'Soft P' ps

Arts organisation /  
virtual delivery  
network

ICT enabled marketing,  
audience development,  
and personalisation of  
customer experience



### **'It's not just the product stupid'**

'Soft P' personalisation can also be advanced by unpacking the social contexts which support artistic consumption and participation. The emerging *'playlist culture'* is crucial here, driving consumer interaction with the preferences of others and their cultural lives.

As a consequence, the preferences of our friends, performers, and fellow enthusiasts are becoming interactive products that help fuel the enjoyment and exploration of different art forms – whether through software generated bespoke preference lists (your iPod, your Amazon), or through being able to access the preferences of others.

These developments will continue to infect the way in which arts organisations and performers relate to the customer. In the future all performing companies / organisations will systematically foster online and face to face communities, encouraging friendship groups that meet monthly, much like book clubs, to listen and watch performances, and to meet with performers and hear about their preferences and recommendations.

### **'Use and Re-use'**

Part of the 'soft P' personalisation agenda will be driven by the growing expectation that all cultural organisations within the UK, large and small, make their work and collections available in a digital form for everyone to see and *re-use* creatively.

As David Lammy recently commented, when launching the new Digitalisation Action Plan for Europe, we are already beginning to see:

'a new engagement and interaction between providers (i.e. cultural institutions) and audiences that counter the notion that our cultural institutions 'know best' and are there to deliver information to grateful recipients. In today's digital world of broadband, blogs and mobile devices, the citizens of Europe are no longer the passive recipients of information, but creators and publishers of content in their own right'

The vision here is of porous cultural institutions doing all they can to help facilitate independent, personalised enjoyment and authorship (see the Creative Archive Licence Group example below). So in the language of personalisation

and co-production, soft P personalisation activities create the possibility for arts consumers to:

- Tailor, adjust, and time shift their arts consumption
- Experience more interactive venues and environments, including more immersive and interesting physical spaces
- Experience rich online environments with the opportunity to personalise
- Take part in social networking opportunities hosted through the arts institution
- Participate in heightened dialogue, engagement and feedback
- Use and Re-Use Creative Products
- Rip, Mix, Burn and Share their creative outputs

**'Find it. Rip it. Mix it. Share it. Come and get it'**

The title above comes from *The Creative Archive Licence Group* website, which was set up by the BBC, the British Film Institute, Channel 4 and the Open University to make their content available for download under the terms of the Creative Archive Licence. ( <http://creativearchive.bbc.co.uk/>)

The initiative is designed to pioneer a new approach to public access rights in the digital age – based on the Creative Commons model already working in the United States ([www.creativecommons.org](http://www.creativecommons.org)), which proposes a middle way to rights management, rather than the extremes of the pure public domain model or the reservation of rights.

Currently, an individual abiding by the terms of Creative Archive Licence Group, can for example download clips of BBC factual programmes from [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) for non-commercial use, keep them on their PCs, manipulate and share them, so making the BBC's archives more accessible to a whole range of end users and so called digital creatives including artists and film-makers.

### **3.2 Embedding 'soft P' personalisation across the arts**

'Perhaps it should always (rather than occasionally) be the case that someone leaving an arts event or experience has the opportunity to record and leave his / her opinion. Maybe artists and arts organisations could make more use of focus groups and consumer councils, audience reviews and ratings as part of their

ongoing self-assessment... Most importantly, the arts community needs to use the web as a place for open discussion about their work with and amongst their public.<sup>33</sup>

The answer to the propositions above is yes, yes, yes, and artists and arts organisations should be doing these things already. Our research revealed that practitioners did not regard the 'soft P' personalisation agenda as contentious – but rather as an inevitable phase of development which all arts organisations need to pass through, and quickly. Responding adequately to this soft P agenda would only move the arts to a form of steady state survival – it does not represent a step change in innovation.

Embedding it across the arts is therefore less about advocacy and more about the faster propagation of leading edge practice that is already occurring across parts of the sector.

The clear implication for Arts Council England is that 'soft P' personalisation should become a base line performance expectation – a hygiene factor – amongst all RFOs, who should be expected to display these minimum levels of customer centricity as healthy, responsive, publicly accountable organisations.

Unfortunately for the majority of arts organisations these 'soft P' activities currently represent an aspiration, not business as usual, posing serious challenges to the capability of arts organisations in terms of their ICT infrastructure and expertise, and in terms of their willingness to genuinely embrace customer centricity and interactivity, and to explore new channels for emerging markets and consumers.

As Arts Magnet (see below) has argued, the arts and cultural sector are dangerously behind in their attitude to digital content, digital marketing and e-commerce. As a consequence they face the danger of losing 21st century audiences, and missing out on a host of potential strategic alliances with other creative industries and related commercial opportunities.

For example, the BBC is actively developing new approaches to commissioning and is increasingly working with communities to co-produce / create new content. The BBC is looking to the arts and cultural sector as potential partners in this work to ensure that the community output is imaginative and creative. The sad

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Hewitt (2005.18) *Changing Places*, Arts Council England

reality is that not enough arts organisations are fit for purpose in terms of their IT capability or understanding of digital content possibilities to engage in these sorts of partnership.

### **Arts Magnet**

Manchester-based Arts Magnet ([www.arts-mag.net](http://www.arts-mag.net)), the digital development agency for the arts sector in the North West, is committed to building greater understanding about how interactivity, enabled through new digital channels and devices, is at heart of what arts and culture are all about.

To do this it encourages individuals to get involved with arts and culture in new ways, often mediated by ICT. More broadly, Arts Magnet tries to achieve its mission by helping arts and cultural organisations to recognise that ICT capability, and digital content creation is important to them. As part of that push, Arts Magnet has just completed an audit of current IT and digital content practices across the region, supported by Arts Council England, North West:

‘The ‘always on’ society has led to expectations of ‘personalised’ experiences and immediate access. Arts Council England, North West believes there are exciting opportunities for the arts to harness ICT and create digital content.’  
(Michael Eakin, Executive Director, Arts Council England, North West)

### **Arts organisations and ICT – barely surviving, not thriving**

It is clear that the ICT strategy and capability of arts organisation, and better information technology systems, are vital if the sector is to grasp the opportunities offered by personalisation. Unfortunately the overall picture of ICT strategy and capability across the sector is weak – in part the inevitable consequence of historic under-capitalisation – although there is an urgent need for more detailed evidence on the state of play across the sector.

The uncomfortable implication for Arts Council England is that they may face hard choices about redirecting investment quickly to those organisations that can run with this agenda, stopping their support for those that can’t, and transitioning those in between. As Charles Leadbeater notes:

‘The Arts Council needs to strike a balance between funding established arts organisation to draw in new audiences and shifting funding to where new audiences are emerging. The lessons from public libraries are instructive:

libraries built in the 19th century now find themselves in the wrong places, with the wrong buildings and services for 21st century consumers. No amount of marketing will make good those structural weaknesses. The Arts Council's strategic responsibility is to make sure that does not happen for the arts.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. A 'hard P' definition of personalisation

'Rather than expecting artists in the community to stamp out crime and illiteracy – we can expect artists in the community to increase cultural literacy, visual literacy and share insights into the process of an artist. Additionally, these collaborations can question established ideas of authorship and commodity – focusing inevitably on process not product – or at least highlighting the tension.'<sup>35</sup>

'Hard P' definitions of personalisation put the accent on co-production, with proponents amongst artists and producers drawing upon open source principles<sup>36</sup> to emphasise that personalisation:

- Is about directly challenging current conceptions of how art is commissioned and produced
- Is about changing the core product by blurring the line between user and producer<sup>37</sup>
- Is about 'inter-authorship'<sup>38</sup>
- Is about combining creativity and consumption
- Is neither consumer nor producer led
- Is about creating a framework for creative public consumption – combining the acts of creating and consuming<sup>39</sup>.

Figure Two below captures the territory implied by 'hard P' personalisation. The contrast with the earlier 'soft P' diagram (Figure One) is striking. The consumer and the arts organisation / network are no longer separate, linked by new forms of customer centric marketing and interactivity, but rather the consumer is now part of the commissioning and creative process. Thus 'hard P' personalisation is

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Leadbeater (2005) *Arts organisations in the 21st century: ten challenges*, Arts Council England

<sup>35</sup> Heather James ([http://nearlythere.com/notes/artstechnology/art\\_for\\_arts.php](http://nearlythere.com/notes/artstechnology/art_for_arts.php))

<sup>36</sup> The philosophy associated with the term 'open source' emphasizes collaborative development and authorship

<sup>37</sup> cf. Charles Leadbeater & P Miller (2004) *The Pro-Am Revolution: How enthusiasts are changing our economy and society* Demos

<sup>38</sup> See Centre for Research into Creation in the Performing Arts ([www.mdx.ac.uk](http://www.mdx.ac.uk)), Artist Pages, Ghislaine Boddington

<sup>39</sup> For example see - [www.creativeuser.org](http://www.creativeuser.org)

not about marketing a product to an audience, but about encouraging them to participate and engage in its design and production.<sup>40</sup> Technology (ICT) is seen as a key enabler.

Artists engaged in these forms of personalisation do not believe that traditional arts organisations are leading this debate or forging new practices. Indeed, one artist made the distinction within the arts community between ‘traditional mutators’ (slowly adopting ‘soft P’ approaches) and ‘true innovators’ (hard P innovators).<sup>41</sup> However, binary distinctions between traditional and new art forms, implying that ‘hard P’ personalisation innovations can only occur in the later are unhelpful and inaccurate, as the boxed example below from Contact Theatre reveals.

### **Only Connect**

Contact Theatre<sup>42</sup>, in Manchester, has a fantastic track record of innovation producing shows that have a high level of new technology and digital content within them, partly reflecting the expectations of their 13-30 year old audiences. For example, *Perfect*, a new play by Kate O’Reilly produced at Contact in 2004, had a major new technology element devised and embedded in the play during the rehearsal process. Participants of the Perfectly Unreal workshops were trained in computer generated animation, and their work became part of the set design. A show-specific ‘intrigue website’ was set up to attract audiences. Via a game-like experience, users could design their own computer generated ‘Perfect Partner’ (one of the themes of the show). The website worked as a straight-forward marketing mechanism for the show, but was also available online for a while after the end of the run for audiences to enter into dialogue, feeding back on their experiences.

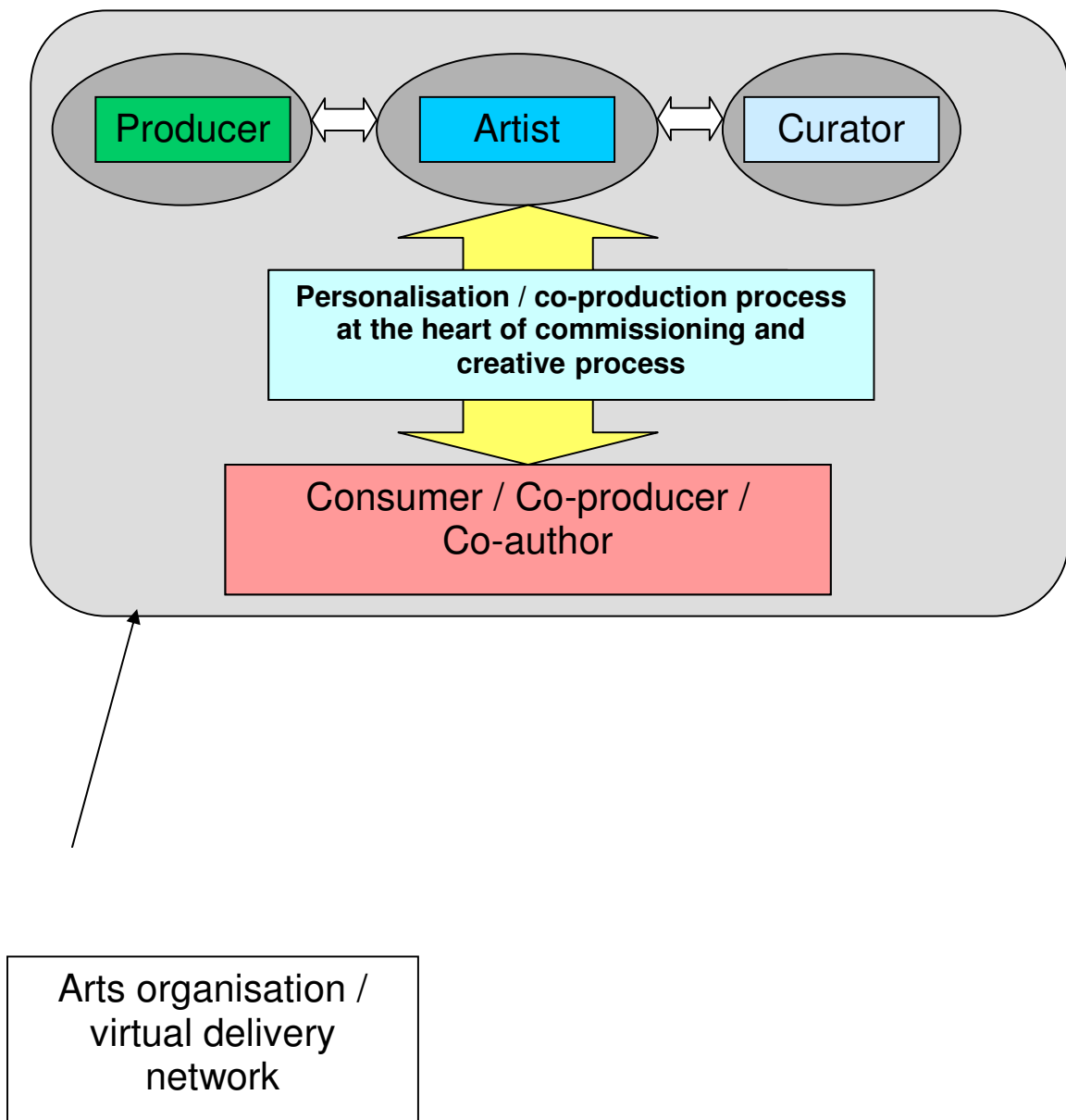
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<sup>40</sup> Hannah Rudman of Arts Magnet believes that ‘hard P’ personalisation is the key to placing audience development and marketing – strategic Cinderellas inside most arts organisations – at the heart of arts organisations core practices – which she believes is a vital first step in creating genuinely customer centric arts organisations.

<sup>41</sup> Ghislaine Boddington (bodydataspace) and Debbi Lander (Future Physical / Creative User Research) have been pioneering work in this area for over a decade, and provided numerous insights for this section of the report.

<sup>42</sup> Contact Theatre ([www.contact-theatre.org](http://www.contact-theatre.org)) – their philosophy on reaching their audience is well captured by their home page, which offers a ‘play’ (interactive contact) portal to explore the site.

Figure Two – ‘Hard P’ personalisation





Some of the most notable examples of new work are taking place in music, the visual arts, and new media (see boxed examples below), although innovations are by no means exclusive to these sectors (see below for the work of Culture Online and the Arts Council England funded ‘Creativity Works’ initiative). In terms of related worlds to the arts, the debate about personalisation in the museum sector is already well advanced with a bottom up approach encouraging users to become co-designers and co-producers of content, and in so doing shifting the axes of curation and creation away from the institution.<sup>43</sup>

### **Future Physical**

Future Physical is a good example of a creative network predicated on co-production principles, and in particular committed to exploring how the creative use of digital technologies can enhance and extend human interaction. Emerging from 90s research and process group shinkansen, the programme transcends crude distinctions between art and technology, and between the virtual and the physical ([www.futurephysical.org](http://www.futurephysical.org))

Future Physical explored what the audience wants and needs from interactive digital art in its Creative User Research Project ([www.creativeuser.org](http://www.creativeuser.org)), supported by NESTA ([www.nesta.org.uk](http://www.nesta.org.uk)), and is as a consequence in uncharted territory. As Debbi Lander of Future Physical comments:

‘When you buy a theatre ticket, you turn up, sit down and watch. The new art is different. The audience has to ‘perform’. But there’s no instruction manual to tell them how to do it.

bodydataspace further evolves the work of shinkansen and Future Physical through a focus on visionary integrations of body, technologies and new environments aimed at extending and evolving the creative inputs of the participant.

## **4.1 An inevitable revolution**

Those artists already working in this way regard ‘hard P’ personalisation as an inevitable revolution – that will over time profoundly influence the way in which

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<sup>43</sup> See Nadia Arbach *Museum On-Line Learning Environments*, MDA conference, September 2004

the public engage and participate with the arts. This view is supported by Robert Hewison, who comments that:

'Within the next 10 years, we will begin to see the emergence of a distinctive e.Culture, which will have absorbed and adapted the present developments in information technology to creative ends...The new technologies extend the possibilities for collaboration and collective working, while eroding the traditional barriers between arts and science, artist and technician. The idea of the artist-auteur will weaken, and the concept of 'inter-authorship' will strengthen'<sup>44</sup>

Importantly, Hewison does not believe that these developments pit new media as a rival form to the traditional arts, but rather that they offer a general expansion of the opportunities for creativity.

### **Blast Theory**

Blast Theory are renowned internationally as one of the most adventurous artists' groups using interactive media. Their portfolio is full of work that uses multimedia performances that invite participation and interactivity. For example, Kidnap (1998) invited members of the public to pay a small fee to be included on a hit list from which Blast Theory would then pick two individuals to abduct and hold before being released without harm – the whole activity captured on film ([www.blasttheory.co.uk](http://www.blasttheory.co.uk)).

### **Culture Online**

Established in 2002, Culture Online commissions a diverse range of interactive projects to extend access to the arts. It works to bring organisations together so they can use technology more effectively to engage new and existing audiences.

An excellent example of its work, is WebPlay Uk ([www.webplay.org](http://www.webplay.org)) , an internet-based project that enables primary schoolchildren from rural and urban areas to work with a professional theatre company and partner school to create and perform short plays.

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<sup>44</sup> R Hewison (2000) *Towards 2010 – new times – new challenges for the arts*, Arts Council England, quote an amalgam of page 14 and page 16

### **Creativity Works**

Creativity Works was a 3 day workshop event to help young people in Leicester Schools, who were participating in Arts Council England's Creative Partnerships initiative, to make decisions about how best to work with their partner artists.

Between 25 and 27 October 2005, 250 young people from the programme's 19 core research and development schools were invited to participate in 56 workshops provided by 28 members of the creative and cultural sector in Leicester.

The whole rationale behind the project was that the school children should be the key commissioners of what happened next in their schools working with the creative practitioners. As one of the school children described, 'it's really good, we get to decide, not the teachers'. By becoming engaged partners in designing the work the school children also learnt new skills in creativity, design and team working.<sup>45</sup>

#### **4.2 'Hard P' personalisation – the root of sustainable participation in the arts?**

Perhaps the most tantalising aspect of 'hard P' personalisation is the extent to which it can play a vital role in building a growing audience for the arts in the future. This is not just in terms of its ability to connect with new generations 'growing up digital', but in terms of its unique ability to tackle some of the social and psychological factors that inhibit attendance and participation in the arts amongst those who regard the arts as 'not for people like us'.

The Henley Centre contribution to Arts Council England's *Towards 2010* report<sup>46</sup> examining future patterns of arts consumption raised some interesting issues with regard to the personalisation debate – and in particular a potentially profound insight as to why hard P personalisation is at the heart of building a sustainable audience for the arts. The Henley team note that participation in the arts, at any level, involves risk: risk in terms of

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<sup>45</sup> 'Creativity Works – Involving Leicester's young people in decision making' DVD – Arts Council England (2005), [www.creative-partnerships.com](http://www.creative-partnerships.com)

<sup>46</sup> *Towards 2010 – new times – new challenges for the arts*, Arts Council England (2000.63)

- money
- time
- emotional confidence
- social confidence
- intellectual confidence
- lack of control

What Henley dub the '*people as player*' mode of future arts consumption, in which audiences move from spectator to participant, actively seeking out new and distinctive interactive experiences, can be seen as a powerful way of overcoming some of the associated risks blocking higher levels of participation in the arts. In other words, hard P personalisation becomes a means of managing risk through

- deeper involvement
- interactivity
- a mindset which accepts (and relishes) the unpredictability of art and creativity
- the risk itself (both in production and consumption) is the experience and the benefit

More recent research which has sought to explore the benefits that consumers derive from co-produced, personalised art engagements would appear to support these arguments. Future Physical's *Creative User* report<sup>47</sup>, which evaluated the experiences of users who participated in interactive art projects, confirmed that these experiences built

- user confidence and knowledge
- user interest and satisfaction
- a sense of exploration and learning
- the desire to be heightened and challenged

The research also confirmed that for some the immersive, totally absorbing character of the experience was a tangible benefit of getting involved. As one participant commented:

'I could not believe the responses I was creating. I felt part of the circus, like I was creating energy and putting it into the environment'

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<sup>47</sup> Future Physical *Creative User – the new market for interactive digital art* (2004) ([www.creativeuser.org](http://www.creativeuser.org))

As the report notes, these benefits connect directly with consumer trends and preferences. The rise in extreme sports and adventure holidays as recreational activities highlights a growing public interest in active participatory recreation and challenge-based pursuits. Participation in interactive art can be seen as part of the same trend in that user participation requires both physical and mental effort with experiences ranging from the peaceful to the exhilarating, and from calming through thought-provoking to fun.<sup>48</sup>

What is clear is that developing a spirit of exploration amongst consumers, and educating them as to whether an experience is going to deliver an instant or immersive experience, are important in expanding the reach of both traditional and new arts forms.

Clearly not all art forms lend themselves to co-production. Few people would pay to see me perform my improvised lumber step version of *Romeo and Juliet* – fine Capulet though I am. But quite a large number would be interested in a collective experience in which I and other audience members influence the shape and flow of a contemporary dance performance in mid performance, in real time.

### **4.3 The public value test for ‘hard P’ personalisation**

The spectrum of personalisation activities that we have described, from ‘soft P’ to ‘hard P’, are going to produce a revolution in how arts organisations engage and attract customers. The sticky question for arts policy makers is to determine the required rate of innovation, and the evidence base on which to make the tough investment decisions that follow.

This study is primarily aimed to provoke discussion and reflection on these issues – it is not, and was not designed to be, a comprehensive empirical audit of the state of personalisation activity across the arts sector of the UK.

Nonetheless, we can say with confidence that ‘hard P’ personalisation forms a very small segment of activity across the sector. If we take the North West as a representative example, only 14% of arts organisations there positively identify themselves as generating this sort of experience.<sup>49</sup> The drivers we identified at

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<sup>48</sup> Future Physical *Creative User – the new market for interactive digital art* (2004.26) ([www.creativeuser.org](http://www.creativeuser.org))

<sup>49</sup> NW’s Regional ICT & Digital Contend Audit, Arts Magnet and Arts Council England, North West (2006)

the beginning of our analysis, and the evaluative evidence we already have on the impact of these new forms of consumer engagement, suggest that imaginative funding solutions are required to drive further innovation in this area (see the recommendations section below).

In the end, however, the degree to which these new areas of innovation should attract increasing levels of investment year on year depend on the value the public derive from them. Proponents claim that they provide rich, powerful experiences, building a sustainable desire amongst participants to continue engaging in the arts. Let sophisticated public value assessments of the best work in this area determine the provenance of those claims.

If they deliver greater public value than traditional art forms, will the sector, and the Arts Council, have the courage over a ten to fifteen year period to significantly rebalance their resources and activities to reflect these preferences?

Exemplary personalisation, and a sophisticated approach to public value measurement, will tell us the answer.

## **5. Personalisation in the arts - barriers and enablers**

It is outside the scope of this report to explore all of the inter-connected issues raised by personalisation in the arts, not least because many of them require painstaking empirical inquiry. For example, the personalisation paths for different art forms and cultural products will differ, and need to be rooted in an analysis of where they start from, and in the specificities of their artistic traditions and processes.

But the research has revealed a number of immediate central questions which need to be addressed if personalisation is to be widely supported across the arts.

### **5.1 The necessary debate about the primacy of artistic purposes**

'I am not suggesting that such [producer / consumer] dialogue dictates to detailed programming or artistic decisions but certainly it might usefully contribute to discussion on overall policy, or the organisation's future planning and direction of travel.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Peter Hewitt (2005.18) '*Changing Places*', Arts Council England

As this quote reveals, there is an unease that unfettered personalisation might challenge the primacy of artistic purposes and judgements across the arts. Why should artists be encouraged to co-produce their work? Our expert practitioners revealed both unease and anxiety about how best to frame these debates. As one of the focus group attendees commented:

‘One of the potential problems with personalisation is that it becomes another restrictive box to place art inside – in ways that constrain artistic processes. We therefore need to be clear about artistic aims.’

Just so, but it is surely part of the mission of arts organisations to balance artistic excellence and integrity with audience focus and engagement, and that currently the engagement of the public weighs too little on arts organisations and artists in receipt of public money.

What is at stake here is how we draw the responsibilities of arts organisations and artists in receipt of public funding – an issue that provokes deep conflict within the arts. For example, the majority of the practitioners in our study do not believe that personalisation is a necessary responsibility of an artist, although it may be part of an arts organisation’s mission and purpose. However, a minority of the practitioners took the sharply opposite view, believing that personalisation is at the heart of all artistic processes, and that artists in receipt of public money have a clear responsibility to actively engage the public.

Even here, problems abound. Appleton laments the possible downsides of what she dubs ‘artist led plebiscites’, arguing that they may actually disenfranchise real artists, as ‘this arrangement favours PR types, not serious artists – the kinds of people who can hold smooth workshops and keep everybody on board, while making them feel that their opinions are being valued.’<sup>51</sup>

In the end this debate can only be settled through practice, and by actively negotiating the appropriate responsibilities of arts organisations and artists in receipt of public money. Whilst there cannot be a one size fits all personalisation policy for the arts, this does not mean that the commitment to personalisation, both ‘soft’ and ‘hard P’, cannot be more rigorously pursued across the sector. And as we have already discussed this will require sensitivity to mission and

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<sup>51</sup> Josie Appleton (2006.67) *Who owns public art?* in M. Mirza (ed) *Culture Vultures. Is UK Arts policy damaging the arts?* Policy Exchange.

purpose, and sophisticated evaluation of means, ends and public value. As Ellis notes:

‘Cultural purposes are themselves varied ... It is, for example, the goal of some arts organisations to support and develop a given canon of work, and to act as stewards of that tradition; it is the goal of others to provide opportunities for individual development through the transformational experiences that culture can provide; and of others to provide and build expressive and emotional bonds through communal participation. These are very different ambitions and need different perspectives for assessing the extent to which they are fulfilled by any given organisation.’<sup>52</sup>

The responsibility of Arts Council England is to ensure that this debate, informed by practical experimentation and good evaluative evidence, drawing on public value principles, forms a major part of the national conversation about the value and purpose of the arts. Whatever its difficulties, it cannot produce outcomes more distorted than those being produced by the bogus instrumentalism under which the arts currently labour.

## **5.2 Clarity about the values and components of personalisation in the arts**

Another danger inherent in personalisation is that it comes to be seen as an agenda inscribed with market values, which will produce commodified, ‘public ballot’ art. As a consequence it is important to define with clarity the values of personalisation when applied to the arts, and to outline what it is, and what it is not.

The value base of personalisation is not about the commodification of culture – about placing the consumer wholly in charge. As such, it is not an attack on producer interests in the arts, in terms of expertise and artistic freedoms.

Rather personalisation should be built on the ethos of engagement, dialogue, and partnership – not on the primacy of market forces<sup>53</sup>. It recognises that value in the arts, artistic and public, needs to be negotiated – not asserted or ascribed.

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<sup>52</sup> A Ellis (2003.3) *Valuing Culture*, Demos Discussion Paper

<sup>53</sup> See R Hewison (2000) *Towards 2010 – new times – new challenges for the arts* (Arts Council England) for a related discussion

Similarly, personalisation is not built on the values of individualism, and it is a mistake to conflate personalisation with individualisation. Art remains a uniquely individual and collective experience, and personalisation is as much about individuals creating group experiences and collaborations, as it is about individualised atomised consumption.

As our analysis has revealed, personalisation of the arts has a number of clear components:

- It is about prioritising public engagement and participation
- It is about creating more porous, open, dialogue based arts organisations
- It is about expecting minimum levels of customer centricity / stakeholder responsiveness in our arts organisations
- It is about encouraging greater innovation at both the 'soft P' and 'hard P' ends of the personalisation spectrum
- It is dependent on the rigorous measurement of what the public value and what they don't

### **5.3 Supporting the consumer**

If personalisation is to thrive in the arts, particularly at the 'hard P' end of the spectrum, customers will need to be encouraged and supported. Consumers are often extremely conservative in their tastes, reflecting either narrow preferences or a lack of confidence to try new experiences. Many will need support and expert advice to act as powerful partners in personalised / co-production activities. As in other areas of public service reform, intermediaries and experts can play a key role in filling this gap.

### **5.4 Business models matter**

One of the problems in stimulating innovation in these areas is that these new types of co-production models are inevitably fragile in terms of business models considerations. Our analysis has revealed a definable funding gap for genuinely co-produced art – which will require some innovative responses from Arts Council England and others.

These in turn will need to be based on careful analysis of some key questions and issues:

- How far co-production models make it more difficult for individual artists / organisations to capture and secure value and financial returns
- The extent to which the most innovative forms of personalisation are being led by individuals, entrepreneurial artists and producers, who live outside RFO structures and work in a knowledge asset, rather than a fixed asset, environment
- To identify the organisational / business model principles that support / reinforce leading edge innovation in this area

A recent Henley Centre report<sup>54</sup>, commissioned by Arts Council England, raised some interesting points with regard to these questions. Their analysis suggested that those organisations within the arts most focused on their audiences, with a purpose which might be described as ‘mainstreaming the alternative’ had a number of defining characteristics:

- Few if any fixed assets
- Knowledge and expertise based
- Focused on audience engagement
- A management core which concentrates on making the connections between artists and audiences
- Expertise in promotion and marketing, sometimes of ‘difficult’ work
- A blurred boundary with commercial innovators and entrepreneurs

Our study has confirmed this analysis, and that the most innovative parts of the sector in terms of personalisation are populated by talented individuals, and by virtual, networked, fleet of foot organisations, often linked and held together by key individuals and innovators.

All of which suggests that as the Arts Council continues to review and remodel its RFO portfolio, it needs to think hard about how best to blend traditional organisations with new organisational forms and networks, and talented individuals.

As the Henley authors note:

‘Arts Council England may want to consider how it can invest more in people, as well as investing in organisations. Creative nomads, who move between organisations, in different parts of the art ecology, are likely to have a

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<sup>54</sup> A Curry and D Gunn (2005) *Towards thriving 21st century organisations*, Henley Centre, for Arts Council England

disproportionately positive effect on developing relationships between different organisations.<sup>55</sup>

## 5.5 Producer led infrastructures

Producer led infrastructures are clearly important to personalisation. This group has been under-supported within the publicly funded arts ecology, yet the best producers instinctively know how to engage public attention and involvement – and help the artist to tie a project from its earliest conception into a relationship with its audience'.<sup>56</sup>

The Arts Council and arts organisations need to explore what can be learnt from a new generation of producers, who are much more entrepreneurial and networked, and who are real innovators in terms of their creative and collaborative practices.

Kate Tyndall's recent paper for Arts Council England identifies a number of positive steps that could be taken in these respects, with the emphasis on the sophisticated support of individuals, freed from, or at least not channeled into, existing RFO structures.

Personalisation and innovation in the sector will not be advanced by replacing one set of outmoded organisational forms, with a new set of 'rigid' delivery vehicles. The challenge is to focus more relentlessly on talent, networks, and outcomes. As Tyndall notes:

'At present, the only alternative for producers struggling to establish their financial viability is to aim for RFO status ... an overly heavy and rigid response. [The Arts Council needs to] ... devise more light touch forms of time limited support, over say 5 years, that could back a particular independent producer, covering the costs of the early phases of work to realise ideas. ..To force these individuals to metamorphose into the current full RFO template does not necessarily play to their strengths. New funding models that distinguish between providing some basic core viability and then the additional costs of ideas ...are required.'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> A Curry and D Gunn (2005.16) *Thriving arts organisations for the 21st century* Henley Centre, for Arts Council England

<sup>56</sup> Kate Tyndall (2005.3) *The Producer – The Issues and Opportunities* – commissioned by Arts Council England

<sup>57</sup> K Tyndall (2005) *The Producer - the issues and the opportunities*, for Arts Council England

## **6. Policy recommendations**

We have already identified a number of key challenges and issues that need to be addressed if personalisation is to take firmer root in the arts sector. Many of these require arts organisations and artists to reflect on their practices and responsibilities, and to engage in a public debate about both.

Our argument is that both arts organisations and artists need to embrace more enthusiastically the task of engaging the public. Without strong leadership in these communities personalisation of the arts will be slow.

But the Arts Council also has major responsibilities to discharge in order to accelerate personalisation across the sector. The themes and policies outlined below would offer sensible points of focus:

### **6.1 Creating customer centricity in the arts**

- The Arts Council to specify minimum levels of performance for its RFOs in terms of customer understanding and engagement, linked to a range of ‘soft P’ personalisation indicators and metrics
- The Arts Council to place a requirement on all RFOs that they generate data that allows for a proper evaluation of their customer relationships, the quality of customer engagement, their networks and reach

### **6.2 Transforming the quality, and use, of the sector’s ICT infrastructure**

- The Arts Council to conduct a detailed audit of the ICT capacity of the sector
- The Arts Council to develop an *ICT and Digital Content Strategy* for the arts, in partnership with leading edge organisations within the sector, and regional champions
- The Arts Council to develop and specify benchmarks for ICT / digital literacy for its RFOs, with a sliding scale of expectations based on size and funding levels. The education sector offers a range of possible models [here](#)
- The Arts Council to boost the funding of development agencies focused on ICT capability and content development within the sector, with the aim of creating effective lead agencies in every major UK region.
- The Arts Council to build strategic alliances with major technology partners in the private sector, in order to explore the possibility of leveraging

greater public / private investment into the ICT infrastructure of the arts. This is not as a substitute for initiatives led by individual arts organisations, but to help tackle the lack of good strategic leadership across the sector concerning ICT and digital content strategy. The Arts Council must act to focus the best of existing capability within the sector and bring it to the table with interested private sector partners

- The Arts Council to work with models like Creative Partnerships and Culture Online to capture the lessons and implications of their work for the broader arts sector, including possible tool kits and methodologies

### **6.3 Measure the public value of personalisation**

- The Arts Council to build into its planned public value inquiry an explicit focus on personalisation – testing appetite, demand, and user satisfaction
- If as a result of its public value exercise, strong evidence is generated that the public genuinely value personalisation, over and above other benefits generated by competing investments in the arts, The Arts Council should over time markedly shift the focus of its budget to accelerate personalisation across the sector

### **6.4 Investing in ‘hard P’ personalization**

- The Arts Council needs to leverage and modify its existing funding streams in order to directly support new innovations in ‘hard P’ personalisation. One option would be to develop a venture capital fund for ‘hard P’ innovations, but this may encourage a silo approach to personalisation, when it needs to be seen as a mainstream strand of all funded activities. In the end measures of success will drive funding policy and practice, and an emphasis on personalisation outcomes within existing funding streams and evaluations are essential to drive new practice
- The Arts Council also needs to invest in its own capability to initiate and foster these types of developments. This will require closer strategic partnership with key complimentary institutions, and effective peer review mechanisms and criteria. The immediate challenge for The Arts Council is to judge the best of what is already taking place in terms of ‘hard P’ personalisation, and to ensure that any new investments accelerate the overall rate of innovation

## **6.5 The leadership agenda**

- The Arts Council to work in partnership with the leadership community of the arts to stimulate greater debate and understanding amongst our cultural leaders about how best to pursue the personalisation agenda in terms of mainstreaming these activities within the core practices of arts organisations
- The Arts Council to create senior executive accountability, ultimately residing with the Chief Executive, for embedding personalisation across existing art form departments and units

## **6.6 Map and invest in talent**

- The Arts Council needs to work harder to identify and support key talented individuals. To that end it should commission a network mapping exercise of the key personalisation innovators in the sector, in both new and traditional art forms – producers, artists, and cultural entrepreneurs – working at the cutting edge in terms of innovation
- This work would enable The Arts Council to identify those individuals most likely to create multiplier effects across the sector, in terms of their ability to drive innovation, and connect different networks and organisations together. The Arts Council will need to find new ways to support these key individuals

## **7. Conclusions**

### **Personalisation matters**

The personalisation of the arts matters.

Personalisation requires a rigorous public debate about how best to judge the success of publicly funded arts organisations.

Personalisation raises the bar of public accountability for the arts, by ensuring that arts organisations and artists take their responsibilities to the public seriously.

Personalisation places artistic purpose at the forefront of the debate about how the arts should discharge its public mission, rather than a crude economic or social instrumentalism.

Personalisation demands that customer experience and engagement, and public value, are sensitively measured in ways that will ultimately reshape the pattern of funding and investment in the arts.

Personalisation is about making arts organisations more responsive to the public, but also about reinvigorating the process by which art is produced and commissioned.

Personalisation underlines the importance of decoupling the pursuit of cultural vibrancy from a narrow preoccupation with organisational stability – talent and networks matter rather more than buildings and fixed assets.

Personalisation directly addresses the myriad challenges currently facing the arts: for example, the time poverty of its audiences and the need for time shifted, personalized consumption; and the desire for more sustained and challenging interactions

### **The right type of instrumentalism**

In simple terms, as we have described, personalisation is an inevitable and necessary response to the aspirations and expectations of current and future arts audiences. But it also offers much more than that.

Personalisation underlines that artists and the public are the best arbiters of the value of the arts. More importantly it highlights that the only instrumentalism we should be demanding of our publicly funded arts is that they genuinely connect with and engage the public, and make themselves more accountable and responsive to public preferences.

This requires personalisation, harnessed to a genuine commitment to explore and understand public value, to take centre stage in the stuttering debate about how best to generate cultural excellence and public engagement.

If they do we should be hearing the voice of politicians a lot less, and the voice of the public, confidently mediated by the arts, a lot more.

Given that politicians can't resist meddling with the arts, and the arts are rather distant from the public, that would be a mighty fine thing.

Let's make art personal.

## Appendix One – participants in the study

A wide range of individuals gave up their time and expertise to contribute to the study, and as such the report is very much an exercise in co-production. Everyone listed below made important contributions, but I would particularly like to thank Hannah Rudman from Arts Magnet, and Ghislaine Boddington, Creative Director of bodydataspace, for their insight and support.

Ed Cooper	Screen Dance Producer	South East Dance
Dr Lizbeth Goodman	Director	SMARTlab
Graham Halstead	Deputy Director	Ikon Gallery
Amanda Jones	Executive Director	Rambert Dance Company
Debbi Lander	Development Director	Futurephysical
Jackie McNerney	General Manager	Lyric Hammersmith
Chris Meade	Director	Booktrust
Anne Torreggiani	Chief Executive	Audiences London
Jo Turner	Head of International Arts	DCMS
Alice Walton	Marketing Director	Philharmonia Orchestra

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