The Art of With

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I - The World of To and For

The organisations and culture spawned by industrialisation, mass production and mass consumption in the 20th century inescapably marked arts organisations, even as they stood apart from and often in opposition to it. Put simply industrialisation created a world in which goods and services were delivered to and for people. For shorthand, call it the world of To and For.

Often in the name of doing things *for* people traditional, hierarchical organisations end up doing things *to* people. Companies say they work for consumers but often treat them like targets to be aimed at, wallets to be emptied, desires to be excited and manipulated. The person who calls himself my "personal relationship manager" at a leading high street bank does not know me from Adam but in the cause of trying to sell me some savings products I do not want pretends that we are lifelong friends. In the name of doing something for me, actually he wanted to do something *to* me: relieve me of some money. Many experiences of public services are often little different. Social services departments were created to help people in need. Yet those on the receiving end of services often complain they feel they are being done to, processed by a bureaucratic machine.

Politicians claim they are working for us, on our behalf, representing our views. But most of the time they seem to be spinning messages at us.

Our experience of things being done to us, in our best interests, starts early in life. All too often being at school, especially secondary schools, feels as if you are being done to: instruction is delivered to you, as you listen to your teacher or copy from the blackboard. Secondary education feels like something done to you too much of the time. Even in hospital when doctors attend to you, it can feel as if you are being done to by a system that processes you even as it is responding to your most urgent needs.

 We live with systems that are meant to treat us like consumers or respond empathetically to our needs. All too often those very systems seem impersonal, rigid, inhuman even. Work in many large organisations often feels like an imposition. Too much of management in large organisations feels like it is making people do things they do not really want to do.

Of course we have benefited hugely as consumers from the growth of the To and For world with a vast range of mass produced goods and services delivered to us. These common and

widespread experiences of being done *to* and *for* stem from deeply rooted assumptions. Knowledge and learning flows from experts to people who are dependent or in need. Organisations are hierarchies based on the power and the knowledge to make decisions. Authority is exercised top down. The aim is to define what people lack – what they need or want that they have not got – and then deliver it to them. The world of To and For starts from people as bundles of needs, rather than, say, as bundles of capabilities and potential.

The arts, and the modern avant garde in particular, has stood in opposition to this commodified, regimented world of *to* and *for*. The arts offer a space for contemplation and reflection, challenge and controversy, higher meanings and deeper purpose. Yet in its way the modern art world and modern arts institutions embody the principles of *to* and *for* just as powerfully as the modern factory or school.

II- Art At Us

The modern, iconoclastic avant garde starts from the idea of separation and specialism. To produce good art, artists have to separate themselves off from the society around them – physically, emotionally, morally, socially – the artist as a self-styled resistance fighter pitted against the trivialising distractions of popular culture. The untrammelled imagination of the avant garde artist is one of the last redoubts against bourgeoise, traditional, commodified culture.[i]

Art should resist the familiar, banal and predictable. Good art must take a special, uncompromising vantage point, outside everyday society and refuse to be co-opted. As a result many people find modern art remote and impenetrable, perplexing and disturbing. They are supposed to. Modern art might spark controversy among the public but less often a conversation because art often uses a self-referential language that few people outside the art world understand.

In this account of art the meaning of a work of art is derived from the artist's imagination, embodied in the work and then deposited, in a gallery or on a site, for the audience to withdraw meaning from it. Imagine, make, deposit and let the audience withdraw: that's the model of modern visual arts and its white cube galleries. Good art distinguishes itself from familiar and banal popular culture because it does not make this process of withdrawal easy: it is ambiguous, open to many different interpretations. Art should be unsettling and disturbing. Avant garde art is not designed to please or to soothe but to shock viewers out of complacently received ways of viewing the world. Avant garde art deliberately speaks to and often at people.

Indeed many people feel they are being done *to* on a visit to a modern art gallery: confronted, shocked, disturbed. That's the point. They are not invited or allowed any return path for their ideas and views.

This caricatured story nevertheless provides much of the script that people habitually follow as they enter an arts space. It is a way of seeing our relationship to the gallery, the work and the artistic practice that created it. Implicit in this story is an account of the special training and self-belief that artists must have to maintain a vantage point at odds with mainstream society. The production of their work often involves deploying those special talents in special places. Intermediaries, like curators and galleries, play a critical role in spotting and promoting this talent. The gallery – or for that matter the concert hall – becomes a special zone in which it becomes possible to see the world in a different way, to be raised up or deeply unsettled. The curator assembles the works for the audience, but the process through which that takes place, the knowledge employed, is as specialised and inaccessible as the knowledge of a consultant surgeon. For many people, modern art seems to stand above them, looking down on them. The artist's bravery in standing apart from the world, daring to see it in a different way, may betoken a creative honesty and courage. But it could also be a marketing strategy to attract attention by being outrageous. The artist might have a special insight into the world he stands apart from. But just as often it seems modern artists are self-indulgently talking to a narrow coterie of followers.

This avant-garde, the one that aims to shock us into seeing the world differently is a different version of the world of *to* and *for*. It is art done to us, as us and for us, but not with us.

How will the spread of the web change the context for art, how it is produced, who is involved and how people interact with it?

The web is still in its infancy compared with the organisation and culture of mass industrial production and consumption. We are perhaps a decade into a process of development and propagation that might take another forty or fifty years to fully unfold. The web could develop in several different, if not contradictory ways. People differ over how long and how big an impact it will have: historians of technology warn that it often takes much longer for a technology to change society than enthusiastic advocates assume. [ii]Critics argue the web will corrode much that is valuable in our culture – authority, manners, free thinking, quality, conversation. [iii]Libertarian and free market apostles believe the web will bring a cornucopia of choice and diversity as more and more niche markets open up. [iv]Communitarians and one time leftists hope

the web will finally deliver on oft disappointed hopes for more mutual, collaborative forms of self-organisation. [v]Some sage analysts warn that the web might yet prove to be its own worst enemy. As the viruses, spam and malware of the self-organising web proliferate so more people will opt for closed gardens or even clouds run by large companies like Apple, Facebook or Google where people and privacy will be protected. [vi]

What follows does not explore all these alternatives. Instead the focus is on how the collaborative potential of the web could inflect our culture, alter the way art is made and the roles of arts institutions, such as galleries.

III - The Web: the Logic of With

If the culture that the web is creating were to be reduced to a single, simple design principle it would be the principle of With. The web invites us to think and act *with* people, rather than *for* them, on their behalf or even doing things to them. The web is an invitation to connect with other people with whom we can share, exchange and create new knowledge and ideas through a process of structured lateral, free association of people and ideas. The principle underlying the web is the idea of endless, lateral connection.

The rise of what has become known as Web 2.0 is based on a set of important changes in people's relationship to information and to one another. Barriers to entry into creating media content are falling. It is becoming easier and easier for people to create small packages of content, often by downloading tools available on the web. The web makes it easier for people to publish and distribute this content through a myriad of channels such as YouTube, Facebook and Slideshare. The flow of information is increasingly two way, with people able to comment back to and on what others have posted. It is also increasingly multilateral: the web allows people to make new lateral links to others, to share and connect. At its most impressive, at scale, these aspects of the web can be brought together in a process of highly collaborative, mass creativity in which large groups of people create, share, combine and collate content to create encyclopaedias, open source software programmes, virtual worlds and games. The ethic of the Web 2.0 world is create, connect, combine and collaborate. The underlying principle of doing things *with* people rather than to or for them will breed very different organisations, services and experiences in virtually every field. In the media is it already creating a new sector - call it mutual media - in which large groups of people create content together, from NetMums to Wikipedia, World of Warcraft to The Student Room.

The appeal of the web, however, stems from the way it connects to and amplifies the idea of *with* in other areas of life. The working ethos of open source communities, Wikipedia and the web more generally is a culture in which people work *with* people. In the world of the web the main principle is that you can freely communicate with anyone you need to regardless of title or hierarchy. Even if decisions are made in a hierarchical or structured way, communication is free and lateral: anyone can talk to anyone else. The web is creating a culture of working *with* people not for them. Work is most satisfying and creative when it's work with people rather than for them.

The principle of *with* is at the heart of the most great social enterprises such as the [Grameen Bank](), [Mothers2Mothers](), [Hole in the Wall]() and the [Barefoot College](). Social enterprises identify problems with people and devise solutions with them, building capabilities that allow people to go on and sustain themselves. They have the same peer-to-peer, do-it-yourself spirit as the new organisations being created on the web.

Innovation invariably comes from a version of *with*: creative collaboration and conversation in which people share and blend their ideas. With should be the guiding principle of politics in liberal communities: politicians working with people to find solutions to shared problems. People want a more gown up, bottom up, conversational politics rather than being spun messages or broadcast to from on high. The spirit of with took Barack Obama to the White House as thousands upon thousands of volunteers organised over the web took to the phones to get out the vote. The logic of *with* mandates a different way of seeing our relationship with our physical environment: creating an economy that works with the environment, recycling resources and minimising waste, rather than wastefully extracting resources from the environment and depositing pollution into it. Thinking *with* reflects the vital importance of relationships to our well-being. The difference between a life that feels rich and full, and one that feels empty and hollow, are the quality of our relationships, whether we feel significantly connected to others. *With* is also a design philosophy for learning. People learn most effectively with other people, not just from them. Learning tends to be more effective when it is more collaborative and interactive, when the learner is an active participant in making sense of what they are learning, developing their knowledge by trying it out. Someone who learns with other people, rather than passively from them, is more likely to be able to learn by themselves.

The underlying principles of the logic of *With* are quite different from those of the world of *To* and *For*. Knowledge and learning can be co-created, come from many sources, often from committed Pro-Ams as well as experts. Organisations will increasingly resemble networks,

partnerships and collaborations not rigid, hierarchies. Authority, even at work, will need to be earned peer-to-peer. There are many more points of where people can take initiative without waiting for permission from on high. A *with* approach to any issue or challenge has to be co-produced and negotiated. That means it cannot be planned out in detail in advance. *With* style campaigns and organisations have to emerge and develop.

The web is creating a culture more inclined to thinking, working, acting *with* providing an alternative to the dominant principle of To and For. The principle of *with* can apply to art and culture as much as work, politics and learning. It would draw on a very different tradition of the avant-garde, one that has privileged participation and collaboration as the principles at the heart of modern art rather than shock and separation.

IV- Art With People

The 20th century avant garde was built on the principle: separate and shock. The avant garde of the century to come will have as its principle: combine and connect. The web will encourage a culture in which art creates relationships and promotes interaction, encourages people to be a part of the work, if only in a small way.

This "participatory" avant-garde will not emerged from thin air. It will be fed by the way the web gives new energy to participatory approaches to art, a digital version of a folk culture in which authorship is shared and cumulative rather than individualistic.[vii] The modern culture of post-production, in which artists assemble their work using ingredients taken from other works, draws on this current. The artist becomes more like a DJ or a programmer, assembling a work from modules already available. [viii]Umberto Eco long ago declared that works of art were open to multiple interpretations; the reader was as active in creating meanings as the writer. [ix]Writing in the 1930s Walter Benjamin praised art that invited participation: art was better the more it encouraged people to leave behind their passive role as spectator.[x] In the 1960s Guy Debord and the Situationist railed against the society of the spectacle, the empire of passive culture and in favour of art that activated its audience. [xi]Allan Kaprow became one of the best known practitioners of this philosophy with 1960s happenings – forerunners of flashmobs and alternate reality games - which were designed to bring art to life, to break down the barriers between the artist and the audience, art and the everyday.[xii] Public and community arts initiatives also have this aim.

What does this "participatory" avant garde stand for?

Art is essentially inter-subjective and dialogic, and not just in the way an audience might receive and interpret a work but in its constitution. Collaboration and participation is fundamental to the creation of the art not just its presentation and reception.[xiii]

The "participatory" avant-garde sees art as a kind of conversation, rather than a shock to the system. Art is not embodied in an object but lies in the encounter between the art and the audience, and among the audience themselves. Art is not simply the result of self-expression by the artists of a preconceived idea but the result of communication with the audience and other partners in the process. The artist's role is not just to proclaim but to listen, interpret, incorporate ideas and adjust. [xiv]

The audience does not come to a gallery just to withdraw meaning from the art deposited there but to be part of the art, so that their movements and reactions change what is going on. The art wraps them in. It is not just the artist's ideas and knowledge that are on display but those of the participating audience as well.

For the participatory avant-garde a work of art becomes more valuable the more it encourages people to join a conversation around it and to do something creative themselves. Participatory art is based on constant feedback and interaction, people talking, arguing, debating around the art and their views having some impact.

In this view of art, the role of the gallery or venue is not as a kind of artistic bank vault into which the work rich in meaning is deposited for safe keeping. An arts venue is a place that provides the setting for creative interaction and communication. Indeed anywhere that makes that kind of creative interaction possible can become the site for a work of art. Art should not be sequestered in special zones, where special people – the artists – deploy their special skills and experience. Kaprow argued art should be grounded in the common experience of every day life. By its nature participatory art cannot be contained in the space demarcated by the artist and the gallery; it must be capable of expanding or dissipating to wherever the participants want to take it. Participatory art cannot be pre-planned in every detail by the artist; otherwise it would be a sham. It has to be free to emerge, adapt and grow wherever the participants want to take it. [xv] Art becomes more powerful the more connections it makes, rather than from standing alone, unyielding and beyond reach. In this world a curator becomes more like a convenor or mixer, creating a space in which the right kinds of conversations can take place.

V- The Two Avant Gardes

These two stereotyped versions of what it means to be a modern, avant garde artist – the iconoclastic and the participatory - can easily be seen as at odds with one another, two antagonistic poles.

The iconoclastic, 20th century avant-garde aims to make people think about the world in new ways by shocking them out of their established ways of seeing and thinking. The participatory 21st century avant-garde wants to achieve the same aim but through questioning and conversations, that make people acknowledge other vantage points, values, points of view.

One privileges the special role of the artist standing outside society as the source of new and potentially emancipatory insights and ideas that will appear shocking and disturbing. The other sees the salvation through communication and collaboration, art that unlocks our capacity for understanding one another, sharing ideas, finding communion through art. As a result participatory and collaborative art may be more pragmatic because it is about establishing and creating shared meanings rather than asserting a striking and controversial point of view from on high.

As Allan Kaprow put it long before the web emerged:

"The root message of all artlike art is separateness and specialness; and the corresponding one of all lifelike art is connectedness and wide angle awareness. Artlike art's message is appropriately conveyed by the separate, bound "work"; the message of lifelike art is appropriately conveyed by a process of events that has no definite outline. ..Artlike art sends its message on a one-way street: from the artist to us. Lifelike art's message is sent on a feedback loop: from the artist to us and around again to the artist. You cannot talk back to and thus change an artlike artwork; but conversation is the very means of lifelike art, which is always changing."[xvi]

Those who favour a more participatory and collaborative approach might dismiss the iconoclastic and individualistic avant-garde as superior, self-serving and aloof. Art is an oddly truncated form of communications if it does not allow for feedback or reciprocity. Too often modern art seems to be self-concerned. Participatory art prides itself on breaking down the mystique and aura around art as a separate zone of activity and experience from life. [xvii]

Yet participatory art is open to the charge that collaborative culture is just a recipe for consensus and compromise. Collaborative working practices are increasingly common in the commercial sphere; transplanting them into the world of art is not radical but simply mimics in art galleries what has been going on in the offices of companies such as Google for years. Our culture is becoming so soaked in the idea of collaboration that standing out against it might be more radical than embracing the new conventional wisdom. Privileging collaboration at all costs risks endorsing a fundamentalism about method. Good art can come from many different sources and practices; collaboration is just one amongst many. If the point of art is to provide the setting for conversation then Starbucks could claim to be the world's leading art business.[xviii]

Both these approaches might give a role to new technology and the web.

The traditional, iconoclastic avant-garde might see the web mainly as a tool to provide a different kind of interaction with the audience. The web might allow more people to gain more access to the work, find out more about it. Video and other work might be distributed over the web. The audience might be able to comment on work. The gallery or arts space would still be like a bank vault into which the work would be deposited, but the bank would acquire a web interface for customers to use. [xix] Many arts organisations are developing more sophisticated websites, with customer relationship management systems and using the web to distribute content in new ways. [New York's Metropolitan Opera](), for example, has begun to stream performances to digital cinemas across Europe.

The participatory avant-garde could make a far more powerful connection with the web's collaborative and open source spirit. The web might open up who can contribute to the process of artistic creation, widen the definition of who is an artist. Some galleries have already begun to experiment with content submitted by amateurs and outsiders. Open source approaches would go even further, making the source code to work available – the notation – so anyone could use and reuse it. Art would be designed for adaptation and re-use. It would never be the finished item because someone might be adapting in some new way. Collaborative art of this kind would have to be broken down into reusable modules, like Lego bricks, that users could play with. Online communities, like that those that have grown around [Linux]() and [Wikipedia](), might play a new role in selecting art and deciding what should be shown. This kind of collaborative art might take place in many different settings, online and offline, mimicking the hacklabs, meet ups and bar camps that have become the meeting places for the open source software movement.[xx] In this world, the gallery would become more like a babbling souk or a forum, the setting for cultural collaboration and conversation on a scale so large that it cannot be planned out in

advance.

It is easy to see how elements of both these approaches might make sense for arts institutions. It is also easy to see how each could quickly lead to a dead end. In the first the web would be little more than a different interface to a largely unchanged experience. In the second collaboration could all too easily become an end in itself rather than art. A more productive route will be to explore a mix of the two. The starting point for that, as far as arts venues are concerned if not artists, should be the experiences that people are looking for.

VI - **Enjoy, Talk, Do**

People are after a mix of three different experiences when they engage with media and culture.

Some of the time people want to enjoy being entertained and served, to listen to a great concert, follow an intriguing lecture, watch a great film, read a good book, be inspired or unsettled by great art. For the sake of short hand call these Enjoy experiences. At their best they are engaging, intense and involving. They make people think and feel strongly. They are passive only in the sense that people do not do much themselves other than watch, read listen. People do not push buttons or make their own contributions. But inside the audience's head, imaginatively and intellectually, these enjoy experiences can be intensely engaging.

Then there are experiences in which the content provides a focal point for socialising. The value of the content is amplified by the talking that goes on around. I watch football perhaps 90 minutes a week but talk to people about it for at least twice that amount of time. Let's call these Talk experiences: the value lies in part in the talk the content sets off.

Finally, some people also want experiences that allow them to be creative. They want to get involved, have a go, do their bit. This does not have to be high tech. My youngest son does this with a pen and paper on the kitchen floor. But he also uses Garage Band to make podcasts. Call these Do experiences.

Most media and culture is a mix of Enjoy, Talk or Do. Galleries and museums provide a mix of Enjoy, Talk and Do. The experiences cannot be separated easily. People talk about films that they enjoy watching. The best trips to museums for young people involve searching and doing. For adults these trips often involve a trip to the café for a chat. Online mass computer games

such as [World of Warcraft](#) are all about socialising and in social networking sites such as [Facebook](#), socialising is the content. The lines between Enjoy, Talk and Do are not rigid.

The web matters, however, because it is shifting the mix of Enjoy, Talk and Do available to most people, especially the young. For my parents' generation most media experiences were in the Enjoy category, with a limited amount of Talk and a tiny bit of Create. In their lifetime the main innovations improved the quality of Enjoy – for example through the advent of colour and digital television. Till now, the main agenda for most media companies, museums and galleries included, has been to improve enjoy experiences and make them available when and where people want them.

My nine year old son is looking for a completely different mix. He likes Enjoy experiences that are engaging: the [Simpsons](#), [Harry Potter](#), [Michael Morpurgo](#), [Traces at Sadler's Wells](#), But if the television, film or book he is looking at does not engage him then he is unforgiving. He is off to do something more interesting that generally involves talking to his friends – in person, online, through [Club Penguin](#), telephoning. Or he does something which can range from painting a picture to making an animation or playing a game, in the garden or on [Miniclip](#).

For my parents Enjoy was the point of culture and it took up about 90% of their cultural experience. For Ned and his generation Enjoy will be at most a third of their cultural life. Talk and Do will loom larger than it did for older generations. Ned's generation are completely pragmatic about the kind of media they use to achieve their ends. They regard the fierce debates over the relationships between new and old, industrial and digital media as theological. Ned is very happy using very old media: he enjoys reading a good book; likes talking to his best friend who lives across the road; likes doing and creating, mostly by drawing with pencil and paper. Ned is as at home using these very old media as he is using very new media of the web: he enjoys watching video on YouTube; likes socialising on Club Penguin or [Bebo](#); creates content using Garage Band. And he is not averse to using industrial era media – television, the telephone, photographs.

The web's significance is not just that it allows new channels for people to download Enjoy experiences – the [BBC iPlayer](#) phenomenon. The real significance is that it encourages people to adopt new habits and roles, as collaborators, distributors, editors and creators of content. They want to connect with other people and do stuff together, at least some of them do, some of the time. Talk and Do will be much more intimately connected to Enjoy. Different sources of Enjoy experiences – book, theatre, television, video online – are in competition with one another

as well as complementing one another. People watch the film of the book and then play the computer game. Different types of talk experiences – face-to-face, telephone, social media, tend to reinforce and complement one another, even more powerfully.

The table below maps out the cultural and media space that Ned and his ilk graze through everyday.

Ned's Media Space: Enjoy, Talk, Do

	Type of Experience		
	Enjoy	Talk	Do
Media Era			
Pre industrial	Book Theatre	Face to face conversation	Draw Paint
Industrial	Television Film	Telephone	Photography
Digital/Web	YouTube video	Social Media	Garage Band

It will be vital for arts venues to get the mix right. Only a small percentage of users of an arts institution will want to be participants – have real Do experiences - and even they will only want to Do some of the time. People need easy to use tools, guidance and help to start contributing. Getting people involved is not always easy: they have to feel motivated; get feedback; find easy to use tools to allow them to take part; find people to do it with. Most collaboration, including online collaboration, builds around a core that has been put in place by a small group who have done some of the heavy lifting. Conversations often start around objects or artefacts or events, rarely out of thin air. One of the reasons material objects are so important in people's lives is that they are reminders and bonds in relationships. Relationships often form around things: one of those things is art. How many people had their first date enjoying some kind of cultural experience together, if only a trip to the pictures? [xxi]Conversation per se cannot be the defining feature of arts organisations. Coffee shops are not art houses. The quality of the conversation that takes place must matter: what it's about, how it is conducted, what questions it poses. The web is often the setting for conversations among people of like mind or raucous arguments among strangers hiding behind the mask of anonymity. Art should provoke open and

challenging conversations, with diverse and surprising contributors. [xxii]Across liberal societies traditional sources of authority are more open to challenge and critique. Authority has to be exercised more openly and transparently. Yet there is still a critical role for skill and expertise to devise and curate engaging experiences. If connection and combination, collaboration and conversation are the watchwords of the new mass culture of the web, then arts institutions must find critical, imaginative, challenging ways to be open and collaborative and ways that produce good art.

Being open and collaborative is not enough. It has to be done in a way that is engaging, challenging exciting, demanding. That means facing some of the dilemmas that come with being more "open".

VII - Is Open Always Better?

Everyone seems interested in the idea of being more open, collaborative, from science to schools, political campaigns to companies, large established organisations to smaller start ups. All sorts of people are interested in models of organisation which have the following characteristics:

- Highly permissive forms of organisation, in which people do not have to ask permission from controllers before they create content or get something done.
- Very decentralised resources so initiative can come from many sources.
- Sharing of information, ideas, peer to peer encouraged.
- Pre planned structure is limited, much of structure emerges in action.

Demand for these kinds of organisational approaches only likely to grow, thanks to shifting values, the spread of technology and the downturn, which will reward stress on low cost models of organisation.

Yet these open models seem quite fragile, especially outside software. There are some excellent examples, principally Linux and Wikipedia. But there are also quite a lot of failed experiments. There is the distinct possibility that these open and collaborative models could be inspiring yet short lived, like so many failed experiments with mutualism and cooperation in the past. Yet even as they remain fragile, open models are being taken up by commercial organisations which want openness in some dimensions of what they do – they are more open

to user generated ideas or to more open source styles of working. But they are not necessarily open to sharing their knowledge, intellectual property, assets or income.

The key question for any organisation in future will be: what kinds of openness really count?

First, who are we open to or with. Is it just a self appointed guild of geeks? The point of open knowledge is that is can be shared more easily. And sharing often spawns communities. But we also know that these communities usually only work if they are structured. They are not a free for all. The kernel of Linux is not open to all to tamper with; it depends on your standing in the community. The kernel is open in the sense that anyone can use it. Openness of use does not imply openness to all potential contributors. Openness may matter only in so far as it is a tool, a means, to achieve something else, which is a new way for people to collaborate. Many of the claims that the web is more open do not stand up to scrutiny.[xxiii]

Second, what does it matter to be open about? An arts institution might for example be open about its:

- communication, using the web to communicate with new audiences in new ways; decision making, using the web to make decisions about what to put on shows about and what to include;
- creativity, allowing more people to contribute to a show;
- Resources, making the gallery and other resources available for those who want to use them creatively.

Openness in one dimension, communication say, may be compatible with closed and hierarchical forms of decision making about what should be shown. Open innovation comes in many different forms. There is open innovation **into** organisations– a wider funnel – so an organisation can pull on more ideas from outside, especially from users and amateur contributors, so called crowdsourcing. And there is open innovation **out** where organisations give out more of their knowledge for others to use and re-use, even if the original source of this knowledge was experts working behind closed doors. Wikipedia and Linux are open in and open out: they build up through open contributions and then make the results of that open collaboration freely available to others. Many corporate open innovation projects are open in: they draw a wide range of ideas into a corporate innovation process that then exploits then in a traditional way. Dell's Ideastorm which has several thousands of participants sits in this

category. Some approaches – say in academia – are closed in the creation of knowledge but open in its publication and access. Closed in, open out.

Third, is how openness is made effective. One answer is that openness is all about knowledge and information, so this is really a question of intellectual property and new open source licensing etc. But often making a body of explicit knowledge, formally available is not enough to make this openness effective, so that a wide range of people can really access it. There is a difference between formal openness – the human genome is formally open to the public and effective openness – people need special skills and tools to make sense of genomic data. Openness that can be effective might depend on providing people with tools so that can take part, contribute, and re-use resources. And they might need support, for example from peers and a close community, to help them use these tools. Often that also means providing a platform for cooperation.

Even in corporate open innovation programmes users play quite different roles, from providing feedback, modifying products, developing new products, with producers or independently. Any arts organisation wanting to engage its audience to become participants and contributors would want to experiment with a similarly wide range of potential roles. Many more are likely to provide feedback, than are likely to have the confidence to modify content, and they in turn will outnumber those who want to create content from scratch.

Fourth, and most importantly is the why question. Why do people contribute to open projects, freely reveal their knowledge and ideas to others and why should an arts organisation seek to be open? When an organisation sets up a more open way of engaging with a community are its motives always the same as those of the outside contributors? One answer, the main one thus far in open source style projects is that people are motivated by a non-monetary passion to commit to a project. Open projects are sustained by a voluntary subsidy from user and developers. It all comes down to love for what they are doing, the ProAm ethic. Participation comes from intrinsic motivations and satisfactions, like the satisfaction of solving a puzzle. A slightly different answer is that there is a currency in these communities but it is not money, the currency is recognition and appreciation. People contribute because they like getting a sense of recognition from a community of peers. It's this external validation and recognition that matters. The motivation is still non-monetary but external. Finally, there are those who argue that money does matter. People need to make a living somehow, even if they are contributing a lot to open projects. They still need to be able to put bread on the table. Some worry that money is a

distortion of the purer motives that seem to underpin open projects. Others take a much more pragmatic view that they understand how to mix making money - for example by adapting open source to particular markets and users – and contributing to open source projects. It's not a matter of principle but a question of tactics.

Openness is a matter of degree, just as participation is. There are many different ways for people to collaborate, in many different kinds of activities, from fundraising, to feedback, to participation in a work. Organisations should engage in a portfolio of experiments each testing different ways to engage participants in different kinds of projects. The space for these projects is set out in the diagram below.

Exploring Open and Participatory Models for Culture

	Type of Experience		
	Enjoy	Talk	Do
Mode of Interaction			
Spectator	Sit/listen	Interval drinks	-
Limited participation/ Individualistic	Sit/Listen	Online feedback	Push button interaction
Open ended participation/ Collaborative	Festival culture	Collective curating Folk	ARGs Digital

VIII - Boulders and Pebbles

Twenty years ago the industries that provided most of our information, entertainment and culture resembled a few very large boulders strewn over an empty beach. These boulders were the big media companies that came into being because media had high fixed costs – print plants for newspapers and studios for television. They were closely regulated and the resources they used, like broadcast spectrum, were scarce. All that created high barriers to entry. These boulders made their money mainly from advertising and by charging consumers for access to their products, which required controlled access and often physical distribution and storage. The public cultural sector had its own equivalents of the boulders, built on scarcity of resources and access. The BBC, the British Library, the national museums, great professional storehouses of

culture and knowledge, are public sector boulders. [xxiv]

Anyone trying to set up a significant new media or cultural business could be seen coming from a long way off. Rolling a new boulder onto the beach took lots of people, money and heavy machinery. In the mid-1980s an entrepreneur called Eddie Shah tried to roll a boulder onto the British beach by setting up a national newspaper based in northern England. That provoked a protracted national strike. In the 1990s lottery funding allows the creation of a new generation of cultural boulders, many of them very attractive and successful. Some - the Sage in Gateshead - had more open operating philosophies than their older brethren. Others simply seemed to put the same cultural experiences in more attractive buildings. Until very recently boulders, both old and new, were the only business in town.

Now imagine the scene on this beach in five years time. A few very big boulders will be still showing. But many will have been drowned by a rising tide of pebbles. Every minute millions of people come to the beach to drop their own little pebble: a blog post, a YouTube video, a picture on Flickr, an update on Twitter. A bewildering array of pebbles in different sizes, shapes and colours are being laid down the whole time, in no particular order, as people feel like it. [xxv]

This dangerously simplified division of the world into boulders and pebbles means there will be three kinds of media and cultural businesses in future.

All the new media and cultural organizations, created from now on, will be pebble businesses. Google and other more intelligent search engines offer to help us find just the pebble we are looking for. Google will increasingly offer to organize more and more of the unruly beach. Wikipedia is a vast collection of factual pebbles. YouTube is a collection of video pebbles; Flickr of photographic pebbles. Social networking sites such as Facebook allow us to connect with pebbles who are friends. Twitter, the micro blogging, service allows people to create collections of lots of really tiny little pebbles. Most cultural entrepreneurs seeking to set up a creative new business in future will start among the pebbles and aim to spread.[xxvi]

There will still be lots of activity in the boulder business. Many of the boulders will have to merge and cut costs to withstand the onslaught of the pebbles. Channel 4 might merge with the BBC Worldwide. The regional newspaper industry is already lobbying to make it easier for mergers arguing it is the only way to stave off the industry's collapse. The national newspaper industry is cutting jobs. The cultural sector may well face similar pressures, to merge to cut costs. Only the big will really do well in this game.

The main growth area, however, for the cultural sector, will be in hybrids: boulders that find ways to work with the pebbles or pebble that grow to be boulders. Barack Obama made it to the White House thanks to a campaign which took organizing the pebbles to new heights. Obama's web based campaign rewrote the rules on how to reach voters, raise money, organise supporters, manage the media and wage political attacks. Obama is now a boulder that speaks pebble. There are huge opportunities to create more hybrids like this, as large institutions seek to engage with their communities in new ways and self-organising communities go in the other direction, acquiring scale. A prime example is the way the British Library is trying to keep up with the online revolution going on around it. Many public institutions – the BBC, the NHS – are now entering this space. The web could allow us, at quite low cost, to create an entire new generation of public service media organisations simply by encouraging publicly funded museums and galleries to become multi-media, running their own television channels over the web or finding new ways to engage audiences to become collaborators and contributors.

Those are the strategic choices facing all cultural and media organizations, including those in the publicly funded sector. Start from scratch with the pebbles. Build a bigger, stronger boulder. Build a hybrid that is a mix of boulder and pebble.

Many arts organisations will want to see themselves in the middle ground: retaining their boulder status but finding interesting ways to interact with the pebbles. Most of these will see this task of interacting with the pebbles as mainly about marshalling the web and digital technology to allow them to do the job they already do a bit better: online booking; seeing preview video clips; blogging; building a social media profile; creating new ways for customers to interact with their institution.

None of that is easy nor to be dismissed lightly. Using web technology well to interact with audiences takes time, persistence, money, imagination and skill. However the web's potential to change how we make and experience culture will be fully opened up only if we go further.

It would be naive for an arts organisation to endorse a shift towards collaboration and participation as always and essentially good. It depends how it is done, on what terms, in whose interests. As the web spreads it will slowly yet thoroughly change our sense of ourselves: how we experience and create culture; how we get ourselves organised and get jobs done; how we make decisions and find knowledge. Arts organisations should critically and creatively engage with this culture, exploring, probing, questioning, challenging it, opening up possibilities within it

that commerce will not entertain, provoking people to see it in different lights and ways. In the process artists and the communities they engage will open up new ways of seeing an emergent mass culture which will be as saturated with the idea of collaboration as industrial culture is with the idea of consumption. Many are already exploring this space. [Martin Creed's Work 850 at Tate Britain](#) had members of the public sprinting through the gallery, weaving their way between visitors. [Janet Frere's work Return of the Soul](#) was created with thousands of Palestinian refugees making tiny clay figures. Anthony Gormley is experimenting with structured mass participation in One & Another, his plan to create a living monument on the 4th Plinth in Trafalgar Square, with a cast of 2,400 members of the public occupying the plinth for an hour each over 100 days. Mass participation is a theme in Olafur Eliason's work such as the [Weather Project](#) in Tate Modern in 2003 and has figured in the work of Art Angel, for example, through the mass reconstruction of the siege of [Orgreave](#) during the miner's strike.

If artists can work in the right way to work with these communities they will find new, more collaborative and participatory ways, to make good art. Engaging with the art of *with* is inescapable and unavoidable. But it needs to be done well, intelligently, thoughtfully, testing the limits of collaboration rather than simply celebrating it. Better get on with it.

Footnotes

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[xviii] Claire Bishop Antagonism and Relationship Aesthetics, OCTOBER 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51–79. © 2004 October Magazine, Ltd. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

[xix] Nina Simon's blog Museum 2.0 provides one of the most useful guides to the way museums and galleries are responding to the web. http://www.museumtwo.blogspot.com/site etc

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