Art and the World After This
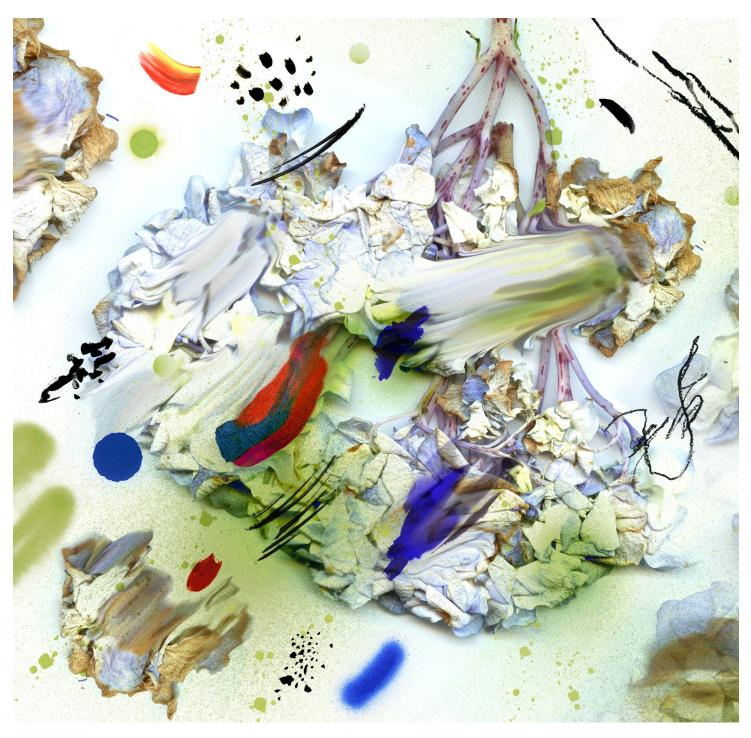
by David Maggs

Metcalf Foundation

The Metcalf Foundation helps Canadians imagine and build a just, healthy, and creative society by supporting dynamic leaders who are strengthening their communities, nurturing innovative approaches to persistent problems, and encouraging dialogue and learning to inform action.

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The purpose of the Metcalf Innovation Fellowship is to give people of vision the opportunity to investigate ideas, models, and practices that have the potential to lead to transformational change.

David Maggs

David Maggs carries on an active career as an interdisciplinary artist, and arts and sustainability researcher. A former student of Jane Coop, André Laplante, and Marc Durand, he is the founder and pianist for Dark by Five, has written works for the stage, and collaborated on large augmented reality projects. David is the artistic director of the rural Canadian interarts organization Gros Morne Summer Music (gmsm.ca), and founder and co-director of the Graham Academy, a youth training academy founded in honour of his teacher and mentor, Dr. Gary Graham. He initiated and co-produced the CBC documentary Channel film *The Country*, exploring the Canadian government's handling of Indigenous identity in Newfoundland.

As a fellow at the University of Toronto's Munk School for Global Affairs, David co-authored *Sustainability in an Imaginary World* (Routledge Press, 2020) with mentor and long-time collaborator John Robinson, which explores the relationship between art and sustainability. David is now a senior fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Sustainability in Potsdam, Germany, working on culture and climate change, and a Metcalf Foundation Innovation Fellow working on disruption and transformation in Canada's non-profit arts sector. David has co-developed national arts gatherings in collaboration with the Banff Centre of Arts and Creativity is a regular collaborator with Mass Culture, and has been a featured speaker at the Canadian Arts Summit, the International Transdisciplinarity Conference, the National Valuing Nature Conference, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, the Sustainability Through Art conference in Geneva, the Narratives of Transformation conference of the International Association for Analytical Psychology (Berlin/Kyoto), and elsewhere.

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FOREWORD

This paper continues a proud tradition at the Metcalf Foundation of offering leading practitioners a platform to address pressing questions in fields relevant to its mandate. It also reflects a cross-disciplinary approach much favoured by the Foundation.

Most writing on the arts falls into three conventions. First there are the artists themselves, the Margaret Atwoods and Ed Burtynskys and Karen Kains of the world who raise people's consciousness about social injustice, or environmental degradation, or the aesthetically sublime. They do this primarily through their respective art forms, not through an all-inclusive sectoral lens.

Then there are the academics, who write about aesthetics and management theory and fundraising and public policy, in traditions well-grounded in the social sciences and humanities. Despite the quality of their work, the results are typically expressed in forms and language that most artists, let alone the general public, find alienating.

And finally, there are the journalists, the most powerful communicators of all, who do excellent research and weave convincing narratives, often publishing significant articles and books with real relevance and broad public readership. In their commitment to facts, journalists almost inevitably find themselves limited to describing what is, or what was, and rarely what could be.

How refreshing, then, at the end of a long and intensive career to discover David Maggs, a composite of all three conventions in a form more superhero than Frankenstein's monster. David was trained as a classical musician but switched gears in university to earn a PhD in environmental sustainability. For several years he has been researching and writing in both Canada and Europe, and today he runs a summer arts festival in one of the most stunning natural environments in the world, Gros Morne. David is obsessed with marrying themes of sustainability and culture.

This paper couldn't be more timely. With the passion of an artist, the rigour of an academic, and the clarity of a journalist, David goes beyond simply documenting the impact of global disruptions on the arts—biological, social, technological, and environmental. He turns the formula around and begs the question of how, by changing our consciousness, the arts have the capacity to boost our response to those very disruptions.

David makes the case for grounding the arts firmly in an active—not passive—voice and challenges each one of us to seize the arts as a powerful means to take the future into our own hands.

Robert Sirman
Board Member, Metcalf Foundation
Former Director and CEO, Canada Council for the Arts

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is about the arts in the world after this. The world after COVID-19, the world after colonialism and globalization, the world after the digitization of society, and the world after climate change. In other words, it is about the arts in the world after the Enlightenment: a time in history when it was assumed we could reduce the world to objective facts, predict the behaviours of natural systems, and intervene in life bit by bit, in ways that would secure the results we desired and eliminate the ones we did not. Today, the world of linear, causal relationships governed by prediction and control is giving way to a world of emergence and inherent unpredictability. What does this have to do with art, you may wonder? More, I believe, than we can begin to imagine, yet just enough to recognize an opportunity, and prepare.

Through the generous support of the Metcalf Foundation, I have spent the past seven months exploring disruption and transformation in Canada's non-profit arts sector. Initially assuming this meant exploring the impacts of a pandemic, I realized quickly that we are not facing the effects of one disruption, but four: **the disruption of activity**, stemming from COVID-19; **the disruption of society**, emerging from rising social unrest; **the disruption of industry**, based on the digital revolution; and **the disruption of world**, rooted in the sustainability crisis.

If our sector had hoped to get out of this with some social distancing and an equity policy, we were mistaken. Deep transformative change is gripping our world and our sector. To respond proactively to our own problems and to contribute meaningfully to challenges in the wider world, a significant portion of our activity needs to shift from a paradigm of 'production and presentation' to one driven by innovation. And yet there is, perhaps, nothing *less* innovative one can possibly do in this moment than call for innovation. It is about as useful as declaring the need for 'problem-solving' in the middle of a plane crash. The challenge, of course, is to identify exactly what kind of innovation we require, and how to cultivate it. These are the questions this report aims to address.

As so many arts leaders in Canada know too well, these disruptions of activity, society, industry, and world threaten to cast us into an endless game of 'whack-a-mole' should we persist in trying to address them one at a time as separate challenges. In this, we find ourselves exhausted by continuous crisis-hopping that serves to exploit our weaknesses as a sector and leave us looking uniquely incapable relative to the rest of society. However, if we can manage to integrate these disruptions into a coherent whole, might that have the opposite effect? Might it play to our strengths and leave us looking uniquely capable instead? If so, what might this integration look like, and could it help clarify the innovation paradigm we need?

As I explore in **Part One** of the report, the disruptions of activity, society, industry, and world carry strong implications of digital innovation, pluralism, social innovation, and uncertainty. Stitch these together and we find ourselves within the emerging realm of *complexity* — a method of understanding the world not through its intrinsic properties and objective facts, but in terms of relationships, intersections, networks, emergence, and systems. In fashioning such an idea into the innovation paradigm that is both begged for by our current disruptions and capable of mobilizing the unique capacities of our sector, we might take inspiration from the creative economy—an innovation paradigm that repositioned the art-society relationship in compelling ways over the past two decades. In seeking the innovation paradigm we need, then, can we ask what the creative economy looks like for Canada, post-pandemic? What, for example, is the creative economy + climate justice + reconciliation with Indigenous communities?

One answer is **the complexity economy**: an integrated conceptual framework that allows us to serve a dual agenda. First, through such a framework we can engage the implications of our layered disruptions synergistically, so that responding to one disruption *increases* our ability to respond to the others; second, we ready ourselves for a role in society that is more essential, applied, and accountable, that is, where adopting a complexity framework converts some of our sector's latent capacities into vital leadership qualities for our encompassing social contexts more broadly. In this regard we adopt a framework that aims to get our own house in order while enhancing our capacity to fix up the neighbourhood at the same time.

To prepare ourselves for this idea of a complexity economy, **Part Two** of this report considers three questions:

What are we doing here anyway? This first question is an attempt to identify an essential value proposition. In other words, as we prepare for processes of deep transformative change, what lies at the heart of what we do? What is it that we cannot afford to lose? How do we ensure both our coming transformation and our sense of social purpose centres itself around a basic capacity of creative practice so we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater in the name of innovation?

Is this an ecosystem or a zoo? The coming shift from a paradigm of 'production and presentation' to one featuring innovation will require us to shift from a sector to a system by adopting a highly integrated systems-approach. Although we constantly refer to ourselves as an ecosystem or an ecology, is it worth asking how strong are the systems dynamics in our sector? How much is this a functioning feature of our sector as it stands? Might we conceive of ourselves in an increasingly systemic form? And what are the implications of doing so? Here, we'll consider how 'rewilding' practices from ecology, used to restore ecosystem health, might be applied to Canada's cultural ecology as well.

Can we learn our way out of this? A final question considers the broad issue of our sector's capacity to learn. First, this issue is raised in terms of how we relate to the future. In proposing we shift from standard predictive forecasting to strategic foresight, our relationship to the future grows fundamentally responsive and emergent through a process of learning and evolving. Here, we turn to the future not to determine where we want to go, but rather what we need to become. The second learning strategy explored here, is the emerging relationship between art and research and development (R&D) and its potential to restructure our relationship to ourselves and our society. That is, a framework for reinventing how we operate as a sector and how our sector operates within its encompassing systems.

In considering the practical implications of this research, I am increasingly aware that I am peddling a paradox to the sector. For the relationship between art and society that emerges in what follows, I am seeking ways for us to move ambitiously into more applied and accountable relationships with various kinds of communities (beyond our own). This awakens the dangers of 'instrumentalizing the arts'—turning ourselves into various tools to be applied to economic and social goals, serving political agendas, and, all too often, straying from our core capacities. In resistance to this, the report seeks a conceptual and

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practical clarity regarding how we can remain thoroughly anchored in our core capacities, such that we might increase our ability to serve a more applied and accountable role in society, but *as artists making art,* working with the aesthetic, while growing adept at identifying the arts-shaped holes in our worlds and the methods by which we meaningfully engage them.

The goal of this report is to move quickly and synthetically, pulling together diverse themes in order to recognize opportunities, illustrate significance, and prepare ourselves in haste. More sketch than blueprint, the aim is not to arrive at a conclusive list of 'to-dos' but rather open a way of thinking in hopes of awakening an emergent, experimental dynamic that plays out across interested actors. Through this, I hope we will discover that we are surprisingly capable of tackling the issues that have been crippling us long before a pandemic hit, while demonstrating a unique and expanding value to a society struggling with its own challenges of complexity—climate change, poverty gaps, cultural pluralism, collapsing civic society, etc. Here, rather than discovering ourselves as an arts sector down on its luck hoping public funding will carry us into the unforeseeable future despite our unsustainable form, we might find ourselves boldly optimistic instead, standing on the edge of an art-society relationship teeming with unprecedented strength, breadth, and necessity in a post-pandemic world.

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INTRODUCTION

Who pushed the button?

We currently find ourselves in what is arguably the most consequential century in our history. On an industrialized planet of almost eight billion people, challenges of social justice and climate justice—that is, the problems of 'getting along' and 'cleaning up after ourselves' with which my five-year-old struggles— have become existential threats. Planetary degradation and persistent systems of oppression amidst growing global integration are carrying us to the brink of self-destruction. Add a pandemic, and shadows of end-times haunt even the more sedate imaginations.

Of all the things we need to fix to find our way out of this, the relationship between art and society may not top many lists. The aim of this report, however, is to explore why it *should*, albeit not in its present form. Through a deep reconsideration of art's role, purpose, and capacity, and following a coordinated turn towards innovation and learning, I hope to envision how the relationship between art and society can thrive at this historical juncture and uniquely serve our growing urgencies.

Perhaps one good thing to come of this past year is an unmistakeable appetite for change within Canada's non-profit arts sector. When interviewing artists, arts leaders, and arts researchers for this report, I asked the following question:

> *The year is 2031. You have stumbled into an applied quantum physics laboratory and found a button you can press and the pandemic of 2020 will never have occurred. Should you press it?*

Who pushed the button? Nobody. Despite the agony of the past twelve months, zero respondents said yes. This is neither representative nor statistically significant. Nor is it dismissive of the suffering around us. It simply illustrates a growing realization: we are here for a reason. The model is broken. Things must change massively, and massive change is coming.

This report has been driven by a sense of both urgency and optimism. Optimism, in that there is an unprecedented opportunity for the arts to grow more involved in the fate of our worlds; urgency, in that there is an immediate need to recognize this and restructure accordingly. Normally, good research generates lots of data on limited topics to support careful consideration of a narrow focus. Here, the aim is to move quickly and synthetically instead, pulling together diverse themes in order to recognize opportunities, illustrate

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significance, and prepare ourselves in haste. I offer this report as a sketch in advance of more careful blueprints to come.

Background and context

Unexpectedly, I have felt three biographical elements surface while developing this report. First, I grew up in Newfoundland during the cod moratorium, one of the more dramatic socio-ecological-economic collapses in recent history. This had a profound impact on my sense of what is possible in life. Worlds come and go. Change can be comprehensive and non-negotiable. Years later, as a classical musician in Toronto, a more personal collapse came when CBC Radio 2 cancelled its classical programming. While this meant a considerable decline in my immediate career prospects, my folk music friends were elated to be on CBC finally. Crisis and opportunity came hand in hand: first, this change made room for artists who had not been reflected in our country's idea of culture; second, it did not impoverish my creative horizons, but had the opposite effect. Navigating the increasingly barren classical industry meant facing a long overdue crisis of relevance. Ultimately, this led to a more imaginative, personal, and rewarding engagement with its repertoire than anything I would have produced within the confines of a healthier status quo. Losing the familiar does not always lead to things getting worse.

Finally, following doctoral studies, I ended up with a dual life as artist and researcher interested in art and sustainability. Sustainability is about transformation; it is fixated on deep, structural change. As the pandemic has made clear, the viability of our non-profit cultural sector seems predicated on the opposite, on things not changing at all. In this regard, I find it useful to consider this period of disruption from both within and from outside the perspective of Canada's non-profit arts sector.

Within the sector, I am the artistic director of Gros Morne Summer Music, an interdisciplinary arts company in Western Newfoundland, focused on creation, presentation, training, and innovation. Like most cultural organizations, we spent the past year trying to figure out our fate in this disrupted world. Summer performances became summer camps, digital art classes built virtual worlds for us to work inside, creative workshops turned into partnerships with regional health authorities, academic institutions, and others. How these activities settle into a business model remains to be seen, but in our case the pandemic came as both imposition and permission. It eliminated and enabled.

From outside the sector, I have tried to consider the current predicament of the cultural sector through the lens of sustainability and challenges such as climate change. This is not to enlist the cultural sector in serving sustainability mandates, but more to consider how sustainability informs challenges the arts face. From recent thinking on complexity, ecology, and collective

Sustainability is about transformation; it is fixed on deep, structural change.

transformation, what might be meaningful to the circumstances in which our sector finds itself? How might the world beyond our institutional horizons inspire both the changes we need to make and the challenges we need to serve?

Speaking for the sector

This pandemic has made clear how differentiated Canada's cultural non-profit sector is. While I find myself saying 'the sector' a lot in what follows, I am increasingly aware of how much this does not represent a coherent entity. The risk is in coupling calls to action with a 'we' that may err in two directions at once. We can wrongfully exclude those who lie outside boundaries of access while assuming a consolidated 'we' is ready to go; and we can wrongfully include many in calls to action around equity and inclusion when that has been their everyday reality all along.

Much of our sector is just waking up to how limited our engagement has been with issues of equity, pluralism, and reconciliation and, as a result, how much we are unnecessarily impoverishing ourselves relative to the cultural richness around us. In engaging this topic the last thing I want to do is signal any virtue. I am a student here. I grew up and work in a province where visible minorities comprise less than two percent of our population and I trained as a musician and academic in Western institutions. I am an artefact of a Western, colonialist framework. However, my sustainability work is preoccupied with the decline of Western rationality, and a primary pleasure of this research has been connecting this preoccupation to Indigenous scholarship, in particular, Elwood Jimmy and Vanessa Andreotti's *Towards Braiding*.[1] One hope is that the current dynamics of disruption might clear new—or at least more recognizable—ground for our sector's relationship to pluralism and reconciliation.

However, the idea of suggesting even one thing that might be relevant and useful to the entire cultural sector seems absurd. The needs, priorities, interests, and goals of the highly differentiated actors within this system make it impossible to speak to 'the sector' as a whole. For all the evidence to support claims pursued here, I suspect there is as much or more to contradict them. The ideas in this report are what seem reasonable to me based on the perspective from which I perceive, and the personal experiences that make meaning of those perceptions. I believe the same validity underwrites directly dissenting views. As proponents of pluralism make clear in Chapter 2, the goal here is not to collapse dissent, but to grow stronger through it.

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[1] Elwood Jimmy and Vanessa Andreotti, with Sharon Stein. *Towards Braiding*. Musagetes.ca, 2019. Available online at: https://musagetes.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Braiding_ReaderWeb.pdf

This speaks to the critical intent of this work. I am making an explicit effort to avoid advocacy-based inquiry. We spend too much time in the arts trying to prove what we already believe. The present aim is not to add to research that testifies to the value of art, but to be critical, reflective, and generative, with ourselves as the primary object of attention: What does the world need from the art-society relationship right now? And what do we need to do as a sector to meet that need?

Acknowledgements

This report was written from the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, and Musqueam Nations, who have been stewards of this land for millennia. It began with an instinct and some legwork from my friend and former collaborator Colleen Smith. Shannon Litzenberger and Jeanne LeSage supported the research process as strategic advisors, leading a process of critical engagement with a diverse group of research-interested arts, business, and academic leaders who informed the work at various stages. Litzenberger's depth of reference across multiple areas of inquiry, as well as her ongoing collaboration as an intellectual partner and community liaison, have been invaluable. Equally, LeSage's research support and on-the-ground leadership throughout the pandemic crisis have been essential. Robert Sirman, Diane Ragsdale, Jamie Gamble, and Geoffrey Crossick have been inspiring thinking partners throughout.

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I need to give a shout out to my inspiring colleagues at Gros Morne Summer Music: Mhiran Faraday, Ian Locke, Reg Kachanoski, Michelle Pittman, Chelsea Marks, all our faculty at the Graham Academy and an incredible board of directors. You have all been so creatively and enthusiastically engaged in navigating the past twelve months, I hope the ideas that follow here sound either promising or even familiar to you all back home.

Finally, my thanks to the central champions of this report, the Metcalf Foundation. Michael Trent has been a constant sentinel for this project, combing an emerging horizon for innovative thought and practice that might resonate with its developing arguments while reflecting on the report's content with the sensitivity of a seasoned artist. Sandy Houston has maintained his emboldening paradox throughout, inspiring the most ambitious reaches of the investigation while encouraging the simplest of phrasing wherever possible. Finally, Anne Perdue has worked tirelessly on this manuscript, tidying the language, clarifying the thinking, and pulling the more elusive ideas from their grammatical obscurities. As Houston says of the Metcalf Foundation: "We should be the rare money that opens a door, draws a connection, conjures an opportunity, or creates a pause." In this, they have fulfilled their task, as I now hope to fulfill mine.

PART ONE

FOUR DISRUPTIONS

When first considering a report on disruption and transformation facing
Canada's non-profit arts sector back in the early spring of 2020, it was easy to
assume this meant investigating the pandemic. It didn't take long to realize,
however, that the sector is not facing one disruption but four: **the disruption
of activity**, stemming from COVID-19; **the disruption of society**, emerging
from deepening priorities of social justice; **the disruption of industry**, based
on rapid technological expansion and the ongoing digital revolution; and **the
disruption of world**, rooted in challenges such as climate change and the
larger imperatives of sustainability. If we hope to get through this with some
social distancing and an equity policy, we are mistaken.

While each disruption merits volumes of inquiry in its own right, what follows
is an attempt to connect a bare handful of themes. In other words, what
elements from these disruptions inform a larger pattern of possibility? How
might this give shape to the emerging opportunity and urgency surrounding the
relationship of art to society? It is important to note that what follows is not an
attempt to explore the pandemic, social justice, the digital revolution, or climate
change in extensive fashion, but to glean from these events a series of connected
implications for art and the world after. This effort comes together in Chapter 5,
The complexity economy, in an attempt to integrate these implications to
illustrate what this emerging opportunity might look like.

Chapter 1

The Disruption of Activity

The pandemic and the flood

During the early months of the pandemic, we witnessed a flood of free online content from arts organizations around the world. Local philharmonics that could once boast to be the best orchestra in town now had to compete with the Berlin Philharmonic for the best orchestra in the living room. Worse still, few organizations were capable of presenting themselves online in a compelling way, for either financial, artistic, or technical reasons. Thus, despite efforts to maintain enthusiasm for this lifeline between artists and audiences, it tailed off rather abruptly. Even a highly sympathetic press grew tired of the exercise, in one instance characterizing the affair as a "regrettable poverty of imagination and ingenuity" (albeit, while including highlights that contrasted this fatigue).[2]

Neil Middleton of the Vancouver Symphony offered helpful context to these events, reminding us that "we've spent centuries perfecting the delivery of live presentations, and about a year figuring out how to make it work online."[3] The fact that we could not convert centuries-old artistic genres and practices into snappy online media content overnight may not be something we need to worry about. However, the question of how we learned from the experience, what we learned, and how subsequent activity can draw from it, very much is. As far as I can tell, very little structured exploration and documentation seems to have followed this experimentation in getting ourselves online. A wealth of relevant data floated away uncaptured just as organizations across the country had to plan entire seasons of online delivery. Such an eventuality offers important context for a preoccupation of this report: our sector's capacity to learn.

While fresh in our minds, how might we re-engage participants (audiences and artists alike) and glean what we can from our year of streaming? What are we learning about digital opportunities? What formats were explored—podcasts, livestreams, posted content, teaser videos, full presentations, sizzle reels, interactive Q&As? What kind of content did they carry—concerts, plays, readings, and other 'live formats' in filmed form, artist portraits, in-depth engagement with particular works, and so on? How did these intersections between form and content play out? And finally, what *did* we learn about money? What do we know about the intersection between content, format, catchment, audience base, and monetization? What did we learn about price

> A wealth of relevant data floated away uncaptured just as organizations across the country had to plan entire seasons of online delivery.

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[2] https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/article-the-globe-and-mails-canadian-arts-heroes-of-2020/
[3] Business / Arts "Is Digital Here to Stay?" Webinar held March 24, 2021.

points? Dynamic pricing? Experience perks? And point of sale strategies? Researchable questions are yet to be asked, and crucial findings yet to be shared. Furthermore, gathering this information at scale, that is, amassing and collating data from across the sector, offers crucially different insight than any individual organization's findings, whether they be empirical or anecdotal.

Our sector's shotgun marriage to the internet over the past year has produced a predictably strained relationship, with many of us desperate for the vitality of live encounters. However, even assuming a joyful rebound of live performance across the country, no one with whom I have spoken imagines our future will be less digital than our past. For the sake of our business models, our access to audiences, and the shifting norms of consumption, our online existence must remain a major focus of innovation.

Town halls and new social networks

By contrast, our sector did show its strength in response to the pandemic through the emergence of enhanced dialogue and connectivity. Formally, this took the shape of a proliferation of town halls—online presentation and discussion formats—typically hosted by arts service organizations and funding councils, and themed around specific topics. They provided helpful information and kept the sector coordinated and up-to-date on rapidly changing circumstances. Accompanying these events was a reported increase in informal networks that gathered and shared information, provided support, and developed strategies for survival. While data is scant, understanding and stabilizing these new social networks will prove vital to the coming challenges of innovation.

Another useful exercise in backtracking is to study the emergence, structure, and activity of these networks. Who talked to whom, how frequently, about what? Were these fluid or static groupings? Did they emerge along disciplinary lines? Were they peer-driven? Topic-driven? How much diversity arose in terms of disciplines, roles, age, experience, race, ideas, and beliefs? What benefits did they provide? How did they emerge? Were they bottom-up participant driven, or were structural features such as art-service organizations central to their existence? Did they replace the advantages of live work environments? Did new benefits emerge? Are these networks persisting? If so, what determines their value and durability? We need a clearer picture here, as increased connectivity will be critical to the innovation challenges we are about to face.

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Always right, always wronged?

A persistent theme through the pandemic was our sector's relationship to advocacy—an effort to remind Canadians of the value of the non-profit arts, and the need for extended support. Some of the claims being made on our behalf were surprising, such as those in the article "Artists Are Getting Us Through COVID-19. Never Doubt Their Value Again."[4] By what accounting was this the case? Perhaps Canada's consumption of cultural content increased during the pandemic, but what percentage of this was supplied by the non-profit arts? Given widespread shutdowns across the sector, increased time at home, and rising major U.S. online streaming options, I suspect the answer is, much less than imagined. Perhaps more honest reflection is in order. Rather than demonstrating some essential presence in the lives of Canadians, didn't the pandemic instead reveal how thin and vulnerable that presence actually is?

As with any industry, advocacy is essential to viability. Yet there seems to be an important difference between advocacy that grows the sector, and advocacy that deflects from the realities we ought to face to remain viable and relevant. As Tara Mazurk from Global Public Affairs put it, "Advocacy is not always about trying to get a public to want us more, but about designing policy supports that adapt with our industry and expand our ability to look inward, transform, and create. Advocacy is not possible without asking important questions of ourselves." Yet she notes, these qualities can be forgotten amidst what she describes as reactionary or defensive responses.[5]

The distinction we might make, then, is between the advocacy Mazurk describes, and the more defensive responses that render us less reflexive, less adaptive, and ultimately less resilient. Without this distinction, we burn up too much capacity extoling our goodness to the point where we are either too tired, too broke, or too convinced of our own unflagging virtue to engage in critical self-exploration. Advocacy, uncritically deployed, depletes both our capacity and willingness to ask hard questions. As Jimmy and Andreotti illustrate in *Towards Braiding*, "In order for generative responses to crisis to be possible, we will need to have a self-implicating systemic analysis."[6]

Advocacy, uncritically deployed, depletes both our capacity and willingness to ask hard questions.

[4] https://www.cbc.ca/arts/artists-are-getting-us-through-covid-19-never-question-their-value-again-1.5519840
[5] Tara Mazurk, email response, December 26, 2020.
[6] Jimmy and Andreotti, 2019. 60.

Roots of defensiveness

In questioning this instinct, it is essential to consider the roots of such defensiveness. Art, in a Western context, has spent the past few centuries inside Enlightenment rationality. That is, in a world that divides primary and secondary properties, the quantifiable from the qualitative, where the former tell us true things about the real world, and the latter, ultimately, is dismissible as subjectivity and sentiment. One is the means of progress; the other, cosmetic.

In a variety of important ways, Enlightenment societies such as ours have maintained a persistently dismissive relationship with the arts for centuries. While something like a pandemic might leave us feeling especially threatened, it is important to realize this typical defensiveness in how art relates to society has deep roots—an estimation of art as secondary and dismissible. Renewing the relationship between art and society may require more than simply promoting the value of the status quo as insistently as we can. Instead, it may be more useful to haul up this relationship by its roots and replant something far more reflective of the social and planetary realities in which this relationship now occurs.

Chapter 2

The Disruption of Society

The promise of pluralism

For many in Canada's non-profit arts community, the global pandemic was not the most significant disruption of 2020. Ballooning social unrest following the murder of George Floyd in the U.S. had a huge impact on our sector, as we grappled with our own role in perpetuating systemic discrimination. Our vulnerability was largely borne of the persistent misalignment between a national identity defined by diversity (at least in English Canada), and a non-profit cultural landscape reflective of the 1950s. Tradition and longevity are undoubtedly virtues. But if our efforts to be more inclusive remain limited to gestures, such virtues feel unhelpful as our sector is left looking complicit in legacies of systemic harm.

The growing body of writing on social equity has a powerful breadth and depth of implications for our society and our sector. The aim here is to identify just one of its current themes such that it can help shape the larger opportunity I hope to plot. This is not meant to reduce the disruption of society to a single issue, but rather carry one of its more acute dimensions into the heart of a reconsidered relationship between art and society.

charles c. smith is a Toronto-based poet, and director of Cultural Pluralism in the Arts Movement Ontario (CPAMO). I asked him, with so much of the world pursuing equity, why the focus of pluralism?

> I'm a champion of equity as well. But does it solve class? No. Does it solve hunger? Poverty? Homelessness? No. Clarence Thomas on the Supreme Court after Thurgood Marshall? Amy [Coney] Barrett replacing Ruth Bader Ginsburg? It's two women, it's two black guys, yet the shift in values is dramatic. That's where equity falls down. Pluralism requires a transformative process.[7]

smith identifies the risk of achieving equity without shifting values: "We need to do this in a way that we become enriched by learning from others, based upon their values, their traditions, their practices, and then reciprocate in that way." Pluralism offers an orientation that moves from minimizing the challenges diversity presents to society, to realizing its opportunities instead. Pluralism aims to activate substantial difference, and not merely meet equity targets in ways that, ironically enough, might serve to avoid deeper changes in society.

Our vulnerability was largely borne of the persistent misalignment between a national identity defined by diversity …, and a non-profit cultural landscape reflective of the 1950s.

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[7] charles c. smith, interview, November 26, 2020.

This resonates with a central theme in the reconciliation work outlined in *Towards Braiding*—what Jimmy and Andreotti refer to as the "integrity of difference and dissent."[8] The aim is not to harmonize, but to resist the temptation to collapse difference, regardless of discomfort and disagreement. Below, the authors evoke what a more generative engagement might look like:

> [In a generative mindset] people have a radar for unarticulated dissent and will stop or slow down so the differences can be present in the space (even in inarticulable forms) and honoured (even when they make things more difficult). We don't have to be on the same page, but we are committed to staying in the same wavelength, working together.

Thus, for Jimmy and Andreotti, as for smith, a crucial shift in the disruption of society is to move from one which tries to eliminate difference, to one that creates a healthy, productive, and dynamic relationship to difference. This shift, as we will see, represents crucial capacity for coping with an increasingly complex world and the imperatives of innovation our sector is facing.

The perishing of pluralism?

There is, however, a troubling irony emerging around this priority. Just as society is coming to understand the growing need for pluralist approaches to a complex world, and just as our sector is growing more determined to manifest that pluralism, current discourse may be proving counterproductive. Many BIPOC artists and activists are beginning to identify an unfortunate incongruency between ends and means. Devyani Saltzman, who has held leadership positions at Luminato, Banff Centre, and more recently the Art Gallery of Ontario, described this as the "one step forward, two steps back" approach:

> While we need to maintain a determination for structural change through protest and calling in, I'd like to think people are getting tired of lateral violence. Many BIPOC voices have been scared to speak up for fear of violence from within our own community. Calling out and cancelling has to be balanced with structural change through inclusive means.[9]

The aim is not to harmonize, but to resist the temptation to collapse difference, regardless of discomfort and disagreement.

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8 Jimmy and Andreotti, 2019. 70, 78.
9 Saltzman, interview, January 31, 2020.

Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie identifies the impoverishing effect of this fear: "I often wonder how many people are not saying what they think because they're terrified. And if that's happening, how much are we not learning? How much are we not growing?"[10] Anti-racism worker Chloé Valdary scales the issue to its larger societal consequence: "complexity of ideas, and the ability to hear from people who we disagree with, is critical for a functioning democracy...If you see every single difference of opinion as a threat to your identity, that doesn't bode well in terms of the health of a republic and keeping the social fabric together."[11]

This impoverishing dynamic has been identified recently in Canada's theatre community by the Chilean-Canadian playwright Carmen Aguirre. "It is fashionable in our theatre world to be diverse in identity and cosmology but not in perspective and thought."[12] Thus, through an increasingly determined focus on diversity from an equity perspective, we have become surprisingly un-diverse ideologically. And recall, it is this latter form of diversity that smith evokes. It is diversity of thought that distinguishes Amy Coney Barrett from Ruth Bader Ginsburg, or Clarence Thomas from Thurgood Marshall.

By Aguirre's account, our sector has lost this form of diversity in part through the actions of cancel culture, or what she calls 'the great purge': "a shameful time, a time of cruelty and psychological violence, the opposite of empathy and solidarity."[13] As she says, "If we want uniformity of thought in our theatre world, as opposed to sovereignty of thought, we have no right to claim that we strive to be inclusive and diverse. We have no right to be making art."[14]

Twin toxicities

The aim of this brief chapter has been two-fold. First, to emphasize the role of pluralism as a priority for a genuinely progressive society. Drawing from the ideas of smith, Jimmy and Andreotti, Saltzman, Adichie, Valdary, Aguirre, and others, pluralism is where diversity becomes capacity. Second, to note that, following a growing critique from BIPOC voices, it appears we need to reorient our pursuit of pluralism as society and its many sectors are growing increasingly polarized and weakened by ideological determinations. When epistemic and moral impunity—what is true and what is good—is granted to one side or the

... through an increasingly determined focus on diversity from an equity perspective, we have become surprisingly un-diverse ideologically.

... pluralism is where diversity becomes capacity.

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[10] https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books/article-writers-call-for-a-more-nuanced-alternative-to-cancel-culture/

[11] https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books/article-writers-call-for-a-more-nuanced-alternative-to-cancel-culture/

[12] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pht0zlyQj8w&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=ElectricCompanyTheatre

[13] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pht0zlyQj8w&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=ElectricCompanyTheatre

[14] https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/article-playwright-and-author-carmen-aguirre-calls-for-end-to-cancel-culture/

other as a matter of partisan ideology instead of genuine dialogue, then generative engagement declines.

Neither the persistent hegemony of Western cultural institutions nor the persistent tactics of what Aguirre names the 'identitarian left'—what we might consider as twin toxicities—will yield the results our society needs. However, as artist and educator Makram Ayache illustrates in responding to Aguirre's essay, the unequal division of power in this negotiation is a critical feature of the current standoff. "Those of us emergent in our careers or unable to even begin our careers in the theatre because of supremacy may not have the patience and the wherewithal to *talk through the harm in the commons.*"[15] Should the recent BIPOC critique of cancel culture be taken as an excuse by existing power structures to retain the status quo, then such inaction will be evidence to an identitarian politics that the calling-out did not go far enough.

Throughout this discussion, I am reminded of a framework from sustainability scholar Daniel Fiorino, who distinguishes between normative, instrumental, and substantive motivations for engaging relevant publics.[16] **Normative** motivations are principled: it is the right thing to do. Structural inequities do harm: harm is wrong, therefore we need to stop doing harm. **Instrumental** motivations rest on the effectiveness that engagement offers our processes: working collaboratively produces greater buy-in, reduces resistance and protest, and therefore presents a pragmatic basis for inclusion. **Substantive** motivations produce better results through a diverse engagement with a challenge: considering it from different perspectives provides more textured and rich analyses and opens unanticipated pathways for action.

One hope of this report is that by reframing the art-society relationship, we might reorient ourselves to a virtue of pluralism by moving beyond normative and instrumental motivations towards a strategic or substantive one. That is, from a frustrated and frustrating place of marginal concessions limited to harm reduction, to an essential strategy for producing the goods the arts need in order to thrive within coming challenges of innovation and complexity.

... the unequal division of power in this negotiation is a critical feature of the current standoff.

Substantive motivations produce better results through a diverse engagement with a challenge ...

[15] https://www.makramayache.com/post/an-equitable-model-of-the-commons-a-response-to-carmen-aguirre-s-video-essay-on-cancel-culture
[16] Daniel Fiorino. "Environmental Risk and Democratic Process: A Critical Review." Columbia Journal of Environmental Law, 1989. 14:501-47.

Chapter 3

The Disruption of Industry

Curtains: The non-profit business model in the digital age

The next disruption is, once again, all too familiar to anyone working in the cultural, non-profit sector: the disruption of industry and the basic viability of our business models. In discussing the source of this disruption with *ArtsJournal* blogger Doug McLennan, he had no hesitation. According to McLennan, the digital revolution undermines the industry model in three ways: the production, consumption, and value of cultural content in a digital society.

In **production**, McLennan contrasts open-source development—central to technology's pace and scale in recent decades—with our 19th century model of Western arts practice. Trying to produce value within a society that moves at the pace of emergent, fluid digital production leaves us highly constrained. In their *Manifesto for the Creative Economy*, Bakhshi, Hargreaves, and Mateos-Garcia illustrate this difference by comparing Wikipedia—an open-source platform, with Encyclopedia Britannica—a closed one.[17] Where Wikipedia can move at the pace of contemporary knowledge production, Encylopedia Britannica is left behind as editorial teams meet to review, revise, and approve changes in advance of new editions.

In **consumption**, the dynamic is familiar. "As soon as we started moving into the digital world there was a decoupling of accessing a product and paying for it."[18] Here the crisis of our business model emerges in the rising costs of production, unprecedented access, and a declining willingness-to-pay. The irony, as McLennan points out, is particularly cruel: "The music industry in 2000 was the biggest it ever was at $22 billion. Today it's $11 billion, while people are consuming more music than ever." Concordia University's Bart Simon raises the critical need for online art to re-platform away from predatory capitalism to avenues such as co-op formats and boutique brand development. Simon points to a recent shift in the Indie Games business model for encouragement, yet identifies the comprehensive shift in how content is conceived of and developed. This is not a challenge to simply relocate standard activities to favourable platforms, but to accept the influence of platforms on production as well.[19]

... the digital revolution undermines the industry model in three ways: the production, consumption, and value of cultural content in a digital society.

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[17] Hasan Bakhshi, Ian Hargreaves, and Juan Mateos-Garcia. "A Manifesto for the Creative Economy." NESTA, 2013. 38

[18] Doug McLennan, interview, October 8, 2020.

[19] Bart Simon, interview, March 18, 2021.

This is particularly evident in McLennan's third issue of **value**. The basic values of techno-capitalism are antithetical to art. "Clicks determine value," says McLennan, "whereas art is trying to get you to be reflective, step outside of yourself, engage the world more thoughtfully. It transcends the dopamine hit necessarily, whereas this is a design feature in digital interfaces." I feel this in my own efforts to consume art online. Things I love as live experiences plod online. My fingers twitch, hankering for more 'rewarding' content. Online we are nervous junkies, ill-disposed to contemplative encounters likely to interfere with the dopamine supply we've been conditioned to expect.

As Bakhshi, Hargreaves, and Mateos-Garcia describe, the impacts of digital technologies are not discrete—swapping out one practice for another while leaving the system intact. Instead, "their pervasiveness is why economists consider them one of a small number of 'general purpose technologies'—like steam power and electricity."[20] In other words, this disruption of industry is driven not just by new ways of producing or consuming, but by new ways of being, as society transforms us fundamentally.

These concerns lead to the basic conclusion Michael M. Kaiser arrived at in *Curtains?: The Future of Art in America* (2015).[21] We are playing a losing hand, taking us deeper into the hole with each passing fiscal. Arguments around the social good of the finer arts have faltered in the face of increasing diversity, increasing utilitarianism, and the increased purchase of popular forms over the public imagination. Cheaper digital formats distribute commercial content at scales and conveniences the likes of which very few non-profits can match. With the collapse of our arts education system and the perennial re-supply of older ticket-buyers set to run dry, a very different society replaces the one we (our insufficiently diverse, proscenium-loving sector) specialize in engaging.

The creative economy: an ace up our sleeve?

Yet as Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska laid out recently in the U.K., there is growing appreciation for the role of the arts in the modern economy. Citing work from Potts and Cunningham, they identify three ways to describe art's role in the larger economy: the competitive model, the growth model, and the innovation model.

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[20] Bakhshi, Hargreaves, and Mateos-Garcia. 2013. 12
[21] Michael M. Kaiser. *Curtains?: The Future of Art in America.* Brandeis University, 2015.

> In the competitive model, the creative industries are just another sector whose changes in size affect the whole economy…In the growth model, the creative industries are a growth vector, generating externalities that cause variations in the productivity or competitiveness of other sectors. Lastly, the innovation model proposes that the creative industries be seen not as a sector as such, but rather as a structural part of the innovation system of the whole economy.[22]

Given the global priority to 'bounce forward,' identifying the arts' structural role in innovation is an obvious and urgent priority. Yet what links artistic practices to innovation? And how do we make that more explicit to ourselves and to those we must convince?

One of the more explicit and successful linkages between the arts and innovation came under the banner of 'the creative economy.' Emerging in the late 20th century, under Tony Blair's cultural policy, it has proven both remarkably successful in driving cultural policy and funding internationally. At the same time, it remains contentious amidst efforts to define, nurture, and manage. As Bakhshi, Hargreaves, and Mateos-Garcia recount in their *Manifesto for the Creative Economy*, "Early tension between high-level statements of vision and problematic quantification of facts has persisted to the present day."[23]

In seeking clarity on what exactly the creative economy is, and how we might define it in the current moment, I asked Bakhshi directly.

> This is a difficult question to answer because different countries use the term 'creative economy' in different ways, and their economies are very different. I spend a lot of time in my new job speaking to our International Council, a group of about fifteen domain experts, industry, investors, government, social enterprise, but all creative industries or cultural industries domain experts. One thing is apparent: they mean very, very different things [when they use the term 'creative economy']. However, there is one thing that unifies all of us: that we all believe that radically new ideas are needed now if we're going to solve existential threats to our way of living. Everyone believes that. *So, the creative economy is that part of the economy where change is the focus…that is what the creative economy is.* [emphasis added][24]

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[22] Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kaszynska. "Understanding the value of arts & culture." AHRC, 2016. 88.

[23] Bakhshi, Hargreaves, and Mateos-Garcia. 2013. 18.

[24] Bakhshi, interview, December 10, 2020.

... the creative economy is looking to prioritize, cultivate, and scale activities that can transform what we think things are, how we see the world, how we understand ourselves, ...

By this account, the creative economy is, at its essence, driven by the recognition that business-as-usual is over, that massive change is necessary, that innovation must sit at the heart of our purpose, and that human creativity is the essential driver of this orientation.

In one sense, this is bad news. By this definition, not enough of what we do as a cultural sector appears to belong inside the creative economy at all. Indeed, if the 2015 Creative Canada cultural policy platform was driven by creative economy thinking, it is ironic how many un-innovating cultural institutions got funding increases on the coattails of this platform. In another sense, the arts could not hope for a more inviting definition, as the creative economy is clearly looking to prioritize, cultivate, and scale activities within our society that can transform what we think things are, how we see the world, how we understand ourselves, where our horizons of possibility come from, and what they are made of. In this regard, the line from art-making to the creative economy gets rather direct, perhaps not to our institutions but certainly to our core capacities.

Here, the effort to lift the relationship between art and society into more applied and accountable form needs to be rooted in our practices. To amplify this capacity, I suggest we need to arrive at a more explicit account of how, exactly, art-making relates to this larger imperative of innovation and change. Second, I suggest it requires us to grow more adept at connecting this capacity to what is sometimes referred to as 'social innovation,' where the arts work in collaboration with ostensibly non-aesthetic elements of society, e.g., health, sustainability, leadership, politics, etc.

Chapter 4

The Disruption of World

Transformation at every turn

If these first three disruptions are relatively familiar, the fourth is less so. Encompassing the disruptions of activity, society, and industry, is a deeper disruption of a more fundamental nature. It is what is often understood as the collapse of Western Modernism, or Enlightenment rationality, and the emergence of the Anthropocene.

Years before COVID-19 shut down society and the death of George Floyd re-ignited it, we were already in the throes of unprecedented social, cultural, technological, and, in particular, *natural* transformation. As sociologist Ulrich Beck put it, we are living in a world that is not just changing but *metamorphosing*.[25] "All institutions are failing: no one and nothing is decisive enough in confronting global climate risk."[26] Climate change is the riddle that has turned the West inside out. As we enter what McConnell Foundation's Jayne Engle refers to as "an age of unknowable risk,"[27] our structures of knowing and being, our institutions and our politics, have come undone. As former Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change lead author John Robinson put it: "There is no future which is not transformative."[28] By now, even 'business-as-usual' is a strategy for transformation, since maintaining the present course is itself producing massive changes in our world.

If this sounds pessimistic, Beck would have us think otherwise. "It is precisely this insistence on failure that is making [this] world the point of reference for a better world."[29] The need is not to hang on, but to let go. As the opening of *Towards Braiding* makes clear, "our story starts with things falling apart."[30] If this feels like a facile gesture towards Indigeneity, I hope to find substantial overlap here, in which the exit strategy of Western Modernism flows into the work of reconciliation explicitly. To reach this intersection, however, we need to understand more precisely what is failing within our current reality.

... even 'business-as-usual' is a strategy for transformation, since maintaining the present course is itself producing massive changes in our world.

... "our story starts with things falling apart."

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[25] Ulrich Beck. *Metamorphosis of the World*. Polity. 2016. 3.
[26] Beck, 2016. 5.
[27] https://medium.com/@JayneEngle/the-emergence-room-82a151ec6737
[28] John Robinson, personal communication.
[29] Beck, 2016. 5.
[30] Jimmy and Andreotti, 2019. 7.

Making and un-making the Western, Modernist world

Banishing the subjective

By 'our current reality,' I mean Western Modernism or Enlightenment rationality:[31] the worldview that emerged in 18th century Europe and extended its global reach through various forms of colonialism—military, cultural, economic, etc. The Enlightenment was built on a crucial set of dichotomies, a separation of facts and values, nature and culture, objects and subjects. This effort to make sense of the world split experience into separate parts: the objective, analytical dimension of natural facts; and the subjective, experiential dimensions of cultural values.[32] By getting subjective experience out of the way, we were able to realize that the sun does not go around the earth, but in fact the opposite; that bad air does not cause malaria, but the Plasmodium parasite does. By banishing the compromising elements of human belief, meaning, and value, we came to know the world as no humans had ever known it before.

Bricklaying

This Western or Enlightenment approach to knowledge is what Jimmy and Andreotti refer to as bricklaying. Here, "The world is experienced through concepts that describe the form of things and place them systematically in ordered, hierarchical structures,"[33] for example the periodic table. "Bricklaying requires that we share the same convictions about reality."[34] I would go further, suggesting that bricklayers even deny that their sense of reality is a 'conviction' at all. Good bricklayers believe their reality is *the* reality, in contrast to other cultures that have 'beliefs' instead. Finally, bricklaying "takes language to be something that describes and indexes the world. Knowledge is something that can be discovered and/or transmitted and accumulated."[35] In this sense, knowledge is critically *not* subject-dependent. Once a bit of knowledge is 'discovered,' it is intrinsic, not relational, and can be built up into a 'stock' of knowledge. Hence, bricks.

[31] While this is not everyone's conceptual reality, due to planetary degradation, there are elements of this reality that reach beyond its conceptual frame. For example, Indigenous people in the north may not operate within a Western Modernist framework conceptually, but they do operate within warming oceans, sea ice depletion, and biodiversity impacts. Thus, I use the term 'our current reality' with an awareness of how unevenly it is distributed, and how complicated this distribution remains.

[32] See Bruno Latour. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Harvard University Press, 1993.

[33] Jimmy and Andreotti, 2019. 13.

[34] Jimmy and Andreotti, 2019. 14.

[35] Jimmy and Andreotti, 2019. 15.

This leads the authors to contrast Western knowledge as 'transcendent' and Indigenous knowledge as 'immanent.' Transcendent knowledge refers to an idea of truth that is true even if we are not there to know that truth or act in accordance with it. For example, the world went around the sun well before Copernicus did the math. Immanent knowledge, by contrast, requires subjective acts of animating its truths, that is, a relational engagement. Post-colonial scholarship is not alone in this critique of Enlightenment rationality. As Goethe lamented centuries ago, "nothing is sadder than to watch the absolute urge for the unconditional in this all together conditional world."[36]

An irony for the ages

Western Modernism or Enlightenment rationality rids itself of subjectivity (human value, perspective, belief, and action) in order to describe the world objectively. That is, to produce facts (or 'bricks'). In this regard, the West is able to scale human agency, first to industrial levels and then to planetary levels, arriving at the current geological age known as the Anthropocene or 'age of humans'—an age in which human activity is a central driver of planetary reality.

The climate, for example, is no longer simply a 'natural object' resulting from atmospheric gases, solar energy, and planetary albedo. Now the climate is a mix of these plus cars, airplanes, energy grids, climate accords, voting patterns, dietary choices, and more. Instead of a bit of nature up there above our heads, the climate is a hopeless entanglement of natural, social, and technological forces.

We might understand this as one of the greatest ironies in human history. The Western, or bricklaying sensibility, masters the planet by banishing subjectivity from our descriptions of material realities, only to lose that mastery by discovering our own subjectivity constituting those realities. We go from brilliantly describing the climate above our heads as a natural object, to poorly managing it in our hands as a cultural artefact. For centuries, the Western Modernist imagination established a reality whereby facts (irreversible truths about the natural world) determined values (cultural beliefs and meanings). Yet as a result of this very strategy, we have produced the opposite condition: a reality in which human values increasingly determine planetary facts. It is a stunning reversal.[37]

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> We go from brilliantly describing the climate above our heads as a natural object, to poorly managing it in our hands ...

> ... we have produced the opposite condition: a reality in which human values increasingly determine planetary facts. It is a stunning reversal.

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[36] https://theamericanscholar.org/the-uncertainty-principle/
[37] David Maggs and John Robinson. "Recalibrating the Anthropocene." Environmental Philosophy, 2016. 13:2, 175-194.

Art in the Anthropocene

While the shift into the Anthropocene reduces the overall command of the natural sciences, it is an auspicious moment for the arts. Throughout much of the Enlightenment, art has found itself relegated to the poorer quarters of our positivist universe—entertaining while the sciences get on with the real work of describing the real world. In the Enlightenment, the poet goes into the physics lab and comes out with a poem about a particle.

In the entangled realities of the Anthropocene, however, such human subjectivities are no longer merely reflective of planetary realities, but increasingly constitutive of these realities—generative of the world in which we now must make our home. Here, we do not need the poem to reflect the particle, but the particle to reflect the poem. Here, facts follow value, reality follows image. The methodologies by which we collect and conjure the imagery of livable lives, livable futures, the sounds, movements, metaphors, and shapes of collective promise and possibility are no longer merely descriptive.

The means by which we connect existentially to ourselves, each other, our pasts, our futures, and the places we call home, these are highly aesthetic in nature. Yet now, in the midst of the emerging Anthropocene, they are no longer simply a means by which we *know* the world, but a means by which we *make* it, too. The societies of the Modernist West have spent centuries trying to displace human meanings from how we make sense of reality; now we need compelling and stabilizing ways to reinstate them. Here, I suggest, the arts find for themselves a new and sacred task.

... the Modernist ... have spent centuries trying to displace human meanings from how we make sense of reality; now we need compelling and stabilizing ways to reinstate them.

Chapter 5

The Complexity Economy

Integrating the disruptions

Canada's non-profit arts sector is facing four disruptions that cut to the heart of our value, viability, and relevance. While there isn't room to fully characterize each disruption, a central premise of this report is that efforts to address them independently leads to a game of 'whack-a-mole' that sends us hopping endlessly from one crisis to another. As assorted disruptions, they exploit our weaknesses and expose our sector as uniquely *incapable* relative to the rest of society. Integrated into a coherent context of transformation, however, might they have the opposite effect? Might they establish a context of activity that plays to our strengths instead and reveals the ways in which the arts are uniquely *capable*, relative to the rest of society?

One challenge is to articulate what an integrated context of transformation might look like. Certainly, the **disruption of activity** has demonstrated how vulnerable our connection with audience is, relative to the digital networks that link a world rapidly evolving without us. The **disruption of society** has shown us the inadequacy of marginal concessions to diversity, pushing us to move beyond making peace with difference to activating its advantages. The **disruption of industry** has been diminishing the viability of traditional markets for decades, requiring that we find viability in more explicit links between art, creativity, and innovation— capacities that grow particularly important as art cultivates a more explicit role within its societies, working in the realms of heath, social justice, and sustainability, for example.

Yet here, these imperatives already feel as though they are steering the arts back into the clutches of utility; another chance for Enlightenment rationality to insist we prove ourselves on its terms—measurable, reductive, and dismissive to so much of what we live by. While the need to rewrite the relationship between art and society is impossible to ignore, doing so raises a familiar risk of losing the essence of what we do through trying to matter more explicitly to the world around us.

Here, there is good news and bad news. The bad news is, we have little choice. Cornered by these layered disruptions, our only option is to offer ourselves up to a more applied and accountable relationship with society. The good news, however, is that there may be a fundamental difference between this moment and previous attempts of a similar nature.

... the disruption of activity has demonstrated how vulnerable our connection with audience is, ...

The disruption of society has shown us the inadequacy of marginal concessions ...

The disruption of industry has been diminishing the viability of traditional markets for decades ...

This difference lies in **the fourth disruption**, the emergence of the Anthropocene. Here the reductive lens that has always threatened us with its calculating gaze has faltered. So often, enhancing the art-society relationship in the Enlightenment involved *society pushing art* into reducing itself to *objective outputs* (e.g. economic indicators, educational outcomes, social impact metrics). By contrast, the exercise in the Anthropocene involves the opposite: *art pushing society* to better integrate *subjective inputs* (meaning, belief, identity, value). What has, in the past, typically degraded into the 'instrumentalization of art,' here might blossom into its opposite: an aestheticization of the world instead.

The innovation paradigm we need

In this, a very different relationship between art and society hangs in the balance—one requiring significant changes to the status quo. Yet to reach for this renewed viability and relevance, we must shift a significant portion of our sector's activity from its standard paradigm of 'production and presentation' to one focused on innovation instead.

If it is a good idea to integrate our four disruptions into a coherent context of transformation, and doing so implies an innovation paradigm, then next we need to ask, what kind? What shape emerges when integrating the disruptions of activity, society, industry, and world, along with their implications of digital innovation, pluralism, social innovation, and uncertainty? Here, we begin to see the fingerprints of an analytical framework known as 'complexity.' If the 'creative economy' served the innovation imperatives of a pre-pandemic world, what is the equivalent for the world after this? What, in other words, is the creative economy + pluralism + climate change?

This chapter proposes a working idea in answer to that equation: the creative economy + pluralism + climate change = *the complexity economy*: an innovation paradigm characterized by the integration of the disruptions we are facing and designed to respond to the challenges they produce.

Complexity in theory

One of Canada's leading developmental evaluators, Jamie Gamble, works extensively with many leading arts organizations across Canada. Discussing the growing appeal of complexity, he suggests that we have "reached a saturation point for traditional problem-solving. We made good progress on the simple and complicated aspects in areas like health or education. Now," says Gamble, "we face massive diminishing returns on deploying traditional approaches to the problem areas that remain."[38] In other words, where there has been a match between the simple or complicated nature of a problem, and reductive,

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[38] Jamie Gamble, interview, January 5, 2020.

...the exercise in the Anthropocene involves the opposite: art pushing society to better integrate subjective inputs ...

... we must shift a significant portion of our sector's activity from its standard paradigm of 'production and presentation' to one focused on innovation ...

... the creative economy + pluralism + climate change = the complexity economy ...

mechanistic, linear approaches to problem-solving, Enlightenment rationality has been remarkably successful. Where the nature of the problem resists these approaches, things have been less successful, and these problems have become amplified and intractable.

For example, there is an often-belaboured comparison between ozone depletion and climate change. Why could we fix one atmospheric concern and not the other? The Montreal Protocol solved ozone depletion not because we were better at problem-solving back in 1987, but because it wasn't complex. It had a linear cause-effect dynamic that was not beset by deep path dependence. Our society was not inextricable from ozone-depleting products, and could swap them out efficiently and effectively, which was, in itself, sufficient to halt depletion. Rather than recognizing that climate change is not the same kind of problem, we have persisted in trying to apply Montreal Protocol aspirations to climate, while the challenge worsens under our noses. In this, we see the counterproductive results of navigating complexity with strategies built for complicated, but not complex, worlds.

Complexity and the arts

Suggesting the complexity economy as the innovation paradigm we need opens a path towards layered benefits. First, it allows us to stop crisis-hopping by offering a consolidated framework to engage operational, social, commercial, and epistemic challenges and opportunities. The paradigm of the complexity economy creates a synergy between the disruptions, where a shift necessitated by one positively reorients our relationship to another.

Secondly, along the lines explored in the previous chapter, the complexity economy framework situates our core capacity (making art) in ways that encourage the 'world-making' dimensions of art—or art's capacity to reveal alternate ways of being—as a clearer value proposition to society. Rather than trying to justify our existence through 'off-label use' (economic and social impacts) while shelving the larger capacities of art (i.e., instrumentalizing the arts) the complexity economy embeds the fundamental transition from Enlightenment to Anthropocene, thereby inviting an aestheticization of the world, instead. In this regard, we need not fear the transactional relationship to society, as dimensions of application and accountability are ideally shaped by a more idiomatic understanding and valuing of creative practice.

... the complexity economy creates a synergy between the disruptions, where a shift necessitated by one positively reorients our relationship to another.

... the complexity economy framework situates our core capacity ...

... to reveal alternate ways of being—as a clearer value proposition to society.

Third, if we become an early adopter of complexity, our sector might move from lagging behind the innovation curve to driving it. In this regard, we cultivate an innovation paradigm that lends us the capacity to use, animate, and deploy complexity in contexts of social innovation. Just as the arts have been identified as an engine of the creative economy, we might also become an engine of the complexity economy, and perhaps with even more genuine torque on the wheel.

Considering this opportunity, Gamble responded, "Given how the world typically gets downloaded structurally onto the art world, this would be a moment where we say, 'We're going to operate on different norms.'" For as he notes, while the world is awash in complexity challenges, "mostly everything operates within a linear planning model." In this, the capacity we develop in confronting our four disruptions as an integrated context is converted into a transferable value to society, manifesting that coveted shift from the uniquely incapable, to the uniquely capable.

The shift towards the complexity economy—prompted in large part by the disruption of world—will create the potential for a more generative relationship with Indigenous worldviews. In relieving us of many features of the bricklaying paradigm, complexity welcomes a collaborative relationship with Indigenous knowledge systems, what Jimmy and Andreotti characterize as immanent, relational, non-reductive, and dynamic. As Gamble has observed in his own work, "Indigenous ways of knowing are inherently complex, highly relational, and naturally adaptive."

An early example of this is found in conservation ecology, where a greater appreciation of complexity engenders deeper collaboration with Indigenous knowledge. Raychelle Daniel, a Yup'ik scientist and writer from Alaska working on Indigenous worldviews and marine conservation, explains:

> Western leadership and decision-making systems are built with a top-down hierarchy. Indigenous knowledge, on the other hand, recognizes connectivity between different roles and responsibilities within a system. When one tries to integrate a complexly interlinked system into a top-down one, cross-connections and valuable information may be missed or lost entirely.[39]

Here, we begin to see how an integrated context of transformation produces synergistic relationships between disruptions, in this case, where disruption of world turns us towards disruption of society with renewed purpose.

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[39] Raychelle Daniel. "Understanding Our Environment Requires an Indigenous Worldview," Eos, 100, https://doi.org/10.1029/2019EO137482. Published December 5, 2019.

Complexity in practice

Yet complexity has a problem. For many, it is a source of frustration rather than liberation. As Gamble notes, "People have adopted a very uneven understanding of it. I see it time and again, they identify the situation, saying, 'Well, it's complex,' and throw their hands up." Rather than providing a sense of agency, too often the recognition of complexity has the opposite effect.

Which means, simply, we have work to do. Consider how effective the creative economy has been in generating renewed perception and realization of value for the arts, even without clear consensus on what it is or how it applies. An immediate imperative of this report, therefore, is to follow Bakhshi, Hargreaves, and Mateos-Garcia's *Manifesto for the Creative Economy* with a corresponding document: one containing practical clarity, accessible language, clear value propositions, and illuminating case studies to animate the promise and implications of a complexity economy framework.

A further observation on the challenge to make complexity coherent and accessible is that the entire world has just had a collective soaking in complexity studies through COVID-19. Here, in unusually compressed cycles, we got to watch the way society awaits evidence (or doesn't) in order to determine policy, which then changes behaviour, which shifts transmission patterns, which impacts evidence underlying the initial policy, which then recalibrates policy, leading to further changes in behaviour, transmission, description, policy, behaviour, etc. If there was a need to deepen a global appreciation of complexity imperatives, COVID-19 has delivered.

In this, as Geoffrey Crossick suggests, we can begin to realistically conceive of a context in which "the arts find themselves not as servant, but leader for all the ways they understand, articulate, and live the complexity economy."[40] In this, I hope, we begin to see how the relationship between art and society might grow into the critical capacity our vulnerable futures require.

> ..."the arts find themselves not as servant, but leader for all the ways they understand, articulate, and live the complexity economy."

[40] Geoffrey Crossick, written feedback, March 7, 2021.

PART TWO

THREE QUESTIONS

In advance of a manifesto on the complexity economy, we can still ask what it means for the arts to step into this innovation paradigm. How will our non-profit arts sector ready itself for a context in which art is no longer relegated to peripheral modes of knowledge production, but rather finds itself central to innovation challenges posed by a broad range of urgent problems? How do we prepare ourselves for a context in which a basic value proposition—what we offer—is clear and explicit, and the conditions by which we manifest and maintain such value—how we offer it—are understood? How do we adopt a process of transformation such that we might experiment rapidly enough to keep pace with the world around us? How do we coordinate learning such that experimentation begins to scale? And how do we entertain any of these questions when our own organizational and professional futures feel so desperately uncertain?

Three questions might help us address these challenges: **What are we doing here anyway?** This digs into our essential value proposition. As we prepare for deep transformation what lies at the heart of what we do? What can we not afford to lose? What do we offer that we might articulate and secure within applied contexts of social innovation? In other words, how do we ensure that all of this innovation and transformation remains centred around our creative practice?

Is this an ecosystem or a zoo? If we want to shift from a 'production and presentation' paradigm to an innovation paradigm, we need to adopt a strong, highly integrated systems-approach where knowledge and optimization can scale efficiently and where the growth of individual organizations is secondary to the resilience of the sector and the vibrancy of the art-society relationship more broadly. How much is this a current reality for our sector? How might we begin to conceive of ourselves in increasingly systemic form? How might we activate more systemic forces of regeneration across our sector? And how do we become more accepting of the moments when those forces begin to reshape our beloved sector in novel ways?

Can we learn our way out? Within a context of transformative change fuelled by rapidly expanding innovation pressures, learning for ourselves and learning from each other become central priorities for the sector. An initial offering of strategic foresight reorients our relationship to our uncertain futures by moving us from a dilemma of learning what to do, to an openness around learning what to become. A second opportunity around a closer relationship to research and development (R&D) invites us into a much more structured relationship with ourselves and our contexts, enabling more targeted engagement with our challenges, producing sharable and scalable findings, and articulating a solid, empirical case for the importance of art in the world after this.

Chapter 6

What Are We Doing Here, Anyway?

Finding the baby in the bathwater

In anticipating a period of transformative change in the relationship of art to society, a clearer sense of art's unique value proposition might be in order. What, in other words, does art do better than anything else in the world? Such clarity is useful in two ways. First, in managing our own transformation, so we don't throw the baby out with the bathwater as we undergo a period of disruption and change; and second, in taking on a more explicit presence in society, so we readily resist the reductive elements of an increasingly applied and accountable relationship to our communities.

In recent decades, many of the domains grappling with complexity are turning to art with growing expectation—health, mental health, sustainability, environmental and social justice, community development, addictions treatments, crime, poverty, and leadership, for example. In short order, things have shifted from Steven Pinker dismissing art as a "biologically pointless...pleasure technology,"[41] to Bill McKibben, crying out "What the warming world needs now is art, sweet art. Where are the poems? The plays? The goddamn operas?"[42] In these two statements, separated by a mere eight years, we shift from classic Enlightenment reduction to Anthropocenic urgency.

Such enthusiasm, however, should breed as much caution as audacity. Consider the Mozart Effect. In the 1990s, 'scientific proof' that 'Mozart makes you smarter' inspired books, CDs, and even cultural policy,[43] only to backfire as subsequent research disproved the relationship, earning it a spot in *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology*.[44] Such over-inflated rhetoric around the good that art does in the world will bring only disillusionment and backlash, leaving us worse off than where we started. In this, I see the need to be more precise about what art does and how, not only to protect it from those who would declare art good for nothing, but from those who would declare it good for everything, too. Surely, a more useful truth lies in between, where art is

... we shift from classic Enlightenment reduction to Anthropocenic urgency.

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[41] Steven Pinker. *How the Mind Works*. New York, New York. Norton, 1997. 524. See also Joseph Carroll, "Steven Pinker's Cheesecake for the Mind." Philosophy and Literature 22. 1998. 478-85

[42] Bill McKibben. "What the warming world needs now is art, sweet art," *Grist Magazine*. April 2005. Available online at: http://grist.org/article/mckibben-imagine/

[43] Don Campbell, *The Mozart Effect: Tapping the Power of Music to Heal the Body, Strengthen the Mind, and Unlock the Creative Spirit*. Harper Collins, 1997.

[44] Scott O. Lilienfeld; Steven Jay Lynn; John Ruscio; Barry L. Beyerstein. *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology*. Wiley, 2009.

understood to be good for some things and not others, and we are reasonably clear on which is which.

In seeking a unique value proposition for art, I am aware this language evokes a reductive and transactional paradigm. A paradigm in which art is reduced to an 'off-label' value (economic or social impact, typically) and supported publicly in an exchange for this value. In our understandable resistance to the reductive aspect of a transactional fate we become resistant to the transactional more generally, hiding behind 'art for art's sake' arguments instead. The trouble is, we are already in a transactional paradigm, and have been for decades, leaving us in the unhelpful position of opposing it in principle, while participating in it blindly in practice all the same.

One way out of this contradiction is to continue resisting the transactional in principle, in hopes that we return to a resourcing paradigm committed to supporting the intrinsic value of art. Another way is to ask if a transactional fate is inevitably reductive? What if the transaction between society and art recognizes the core values of creative practices as inseparable from any ancillary benefits such as economic impact or lower rates of recidivism amongst paroled convicts? Again, in the linear framework of Western, Enlightenment rationality, this suggestion would understandably sound naïve. But in the complexity economy of the Anthropocene, could a transactional art-society relationship remain grounded in a unique value proposition that inherently resists such reduction?

This chapter explores the groundwork around this suggestion in three ways: by exploring a relational view of both art and reality in the hopes of understanding the work art does in the world; in summarizing this dynamic in a theory of art that emphasizes its twin powers of attention and expression; and finally, in following this into an exploration of art and social impact in the hopes of preparing us for a relationship to social innovation that is both more explicit and less reductive.

The critical paradox of creative practice

A priority of the complexity economy is to move understanding from intrinsic qualities to relational dynamics. Here, we might explore how art emerges and has 'power' over us by understanding the relational dynamics to creativity more generally. How does a scientist make science? How does a historian make history? How does an artist make art? Philosopher Bruno Latour answers this with three criteria: a **multiplicity** of actors, an **ambiguity** of action, and a proof of **resonance**.

> ... in the complexity economy of the Anthropocene, could a transactional art-society relationship remain grounded in a unique value proposition that inherently resists ... reduction?

> How does an artist make art?
> ... a **multiplicity** of actors, an **ambiguity** of action, and a proof of **resonance**.

Simply put, no creator creates alone, everyone acts on something (multiplicity); in acting on something, that thing, in turn, acts on us (ambiguity); and if any act is to be trusted, if art has power, science insight, or history truth, it requires validation of both multiplicity and ambiguity. Did the subject act upon the poet sufficiently? Did the scientist describe the phenomena with enough participation from the elements in question? Did the events inform the history? How do we know? *Resonance*, argues Latour, a sense of something's rightness rooted in the palpable agreement between creator (poet, scientist, historian), created (subject, phenomena, event), and creation (poem, fact, account).[45]

Here creativity emerges as paradoxical, a relationship to *something* already 'there,' yet a 'something' awaiting its creation nonetheless. In this, the creative gesture, what we often associate with the power to 'make things up' emerges as fundamentally responsive as well. Canadian poet Don McKay captures this sense of both inventing and responding in his image of "poetry returning from the business of naming with listening folded inside of it."[46]

In terms of art, the importance of this paradox (naming-listening, expressing-responding) is emphasized by writer George Steiner. This dual action of attention-expression is what creates a sense of autonomy for 'the other' (the subject) and it is this perception of autonomy, or what Steiner calls 'presence,' that lends art its command over our imaginations. "It is our apprehension of this [presence]…which, indispensably, is the condition of trust. We yield rights of possession precisely to the extent that we too experience the unmastered 'thereness.'"[47]

> The work is not the result of an *expressive* effort alone, but a sufficiently *attentive* one as well.

When art moves us, its capacity to do so is rooted in a recognition that we are encountering more than the imagination of the artist. The work is not the result of an *expressive* effort alone, but a sufficiently *attentive* one as well. Here, art is a negotiation carried out in good faith between artist and world, a negotiation held in the language of the aesthetic—the language of form, and pattern, colour, rhythm, texture, harmony, imagery, shape, size, duration, etc. In this regard, it is a form of attention, contemplation, and expression that is relatively free from the confines of conventional conceptual framings. The autonomy of the world, uniquely witnessed.

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[45] Bruno Latour. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*. Harvard University Press, 2013. 158-159.

[46] Don McKay. *Vis à Vis: Field Notes on Poetry & Wilderness*. Gaspereau Press, 2001. 66.

[47] George Steiner. *Real Presences*. Faber and Faber, 1986. 215.

The work of art in the world

This relational understanding of art emerges as a unique value proposition once we understand reality in similar fashion. Martin Heidegger was one of the early 20th century philosophers to reject Western materialism; that is, the 'brick' world, free from the relational conditions of knowledge, value, belief, perspective, action, etc. For Heidegger, reality is always a combination of the surfaces we see and act within, and the depths that remain hidden beneath. The Toronto of September, 2020, is a particular city formed by particular perceptions, actions, and beliefs. Yet, beneath this Toronto lie other Torontos which can be activated by different perceptions, actions, and beliefs.

We can find this relational quality of existence most directly within ourselves. Step into the company of an old friend or family member we haven't seen in a while and how often do we find the interaction activating a different version of ourselves? Verbal inflections change, emotional ranges shift, even ideological inclinations gravitate. This helps animate how the worlds we experience and the things we encounter within them (including ourselves) are "never fully visible, definable, or describable."[48] No account is absolute. Like an iceberg, there will always be more waiting beneath the surface.

This brings us to a key premise in *Towards Braiding*, as the authors identify the difference between a transcendent (bricklaying) reality and an immanent (thread-weaving) reality. For Jimmy and Andreotti, as for Heidegger, reality is an immanent phenomenon, something that emerges in relation to the people acting within it, thereby necessitating an "allergy towards essentializations."[49] There is no essence to reality independent of people's involvements and, as Jimmy and Andreotti say, "language can never describe the unknowable wholeness of the world."[50]

What does this have to do with art? For Heidegger, art is our means to connect with these 'possibilities of being' that lurk beneath our realized, essentialized realities. It offers a key to unlocking the 'surface/depth' nature to ourselves and our worlds. He illustrates this by contrasting art with tools. When we make tools, they tend to exist entirely within a given world. They do not evoke a destabilizing presence of hidden depths. They are easy to essentialize as the world of the tool is "determined by its usefulness and serviceability."[51] A hammer's destiny is to pound nails.

There is no essence to reality independent of people's involvements ...

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[48] Graham Harman. *Heidegger Explained*. Open Court Books, 2007. 48.
[49] Jimmy and Andreotti, 2019. 70.
[50] Jimmy and Andreotti, 2019. 16.
[51] Martin Heidegger. *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hopfstader, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1975. 44.

When we make art however, there is a desire for the hidden depths to remain present in the work—a paradoxical ambition to illuminate shadow and obscure light.

> The sculptor uses stone just as the mason uses it, in his own way. But he does not use it up...the poet also uses the word—not, however, like ordinary speakers and writers who have to use them up, but rather in such a way that the word only now becomes and remains truly a word.[52]

'Truly a word,' meaning the word composed of both its stable reference and its layered possibilities—surface and depth, knowable and unknowable—pulling us towards its meaning while sending us out into the uncapturable aspects of its evocation.[53] Art's capacity to expose alternate ways of being is often referred to as the 'world-making' capacity of art. Here, art emerges as resolutely ontological: a capacity to shift our perception of the world around us, the things we encounter in our daily lives, the people we think we know, the persons we assume ourselves to be. Art renders this unstable, allowing newness to surface in our awareness.

Art renders this unstable, allowing newness to surface in our awareness.

Art as the power of attention

Despite any obscurity to this, the conclusion is simple: art is commonly understood as a power of expression, a capacity to produce a compelling output—to sing, to paint, to speak, to move. Typically, this leads society to see the value of art in making statements—expressing ourselves, spreading messages, raising awareness, making bold declarations in the world. Here I hope to shift this sense of art's value through two interrelated points. First, a core capacity of art is to open new perceptions. Its agency is ontological, it unearths possibilities of being. Second, it acquires such capacity not only through its power of expression, but through its power of attention as well. It is in this perception via creative practice—listening with language, hearing with sound, watching with movement—that art offers an ability to witness in ways that transgress the received rationality of a given world. This value proposition offers support to both the professional artist's elite, private act, along with the amateur community-based collaboration. It is the permission and the priority to attend to the world in terms of the aesthetic, to be a source of unique attentive capacity as much as unique expressive voice.

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[52] Heidegger, 1975. 46.

[53] For an extended meditation on this idea see Don McKay. *Vis à Vis: Field Notes on Poetry & Wilderness*. Gaspereau Press, 2001.

As abundant research on the social impacts of art can attest, however, this is not all that art does. I offer this as a unique value, in that many of the other outputs credited to art revolve around elements of social capital and identity. They are vital contributions and need to remain essential in practice and advocacy. Yet they are also virtues of bowling leagues and hair salons, and often to more accessible effect elsewhere. If we optimize around peripheral and generic values, while failing to recognize our unique value proposition, we risk skewing our sector away from our most authentic offering.

The meat or the mast?

Two stories from the ancient world illustrate the relationship between art and social impact. One is of an anonymous and pitiful dog, the other, the most famous hero in Western literature. The dog, as we shall see, winds up outsmarted by its circumstance, whereas Odysseus outsmarts his circumstance instead. Their dilemmas, however, turn out to be the same: wishing to have one's cake and eat it too.

> A dog, crossing a rivulet with a piece of flesh in his mouth, saw his own shadow represented in the clear mirror of the limpet stream; and believing it to be another dog, who was carrying another piece of flesh, he could not forbear catching at it; but was so far from getting anything by this greedy design, that he dropped the piece he had in his mouth, which immediately sunk to the bottom and was irrevocably lost. (Aesop, *The Dog and the Shadow*)[54]

> The Sirens were mythical beings believed to have the power of enchanting and charming, by their song, anyone who heard them. When Odysseus, in his wanderings through the Mediterranean, came near the island on the lovely beach of which the Sirens were sitting, and endeavouring to allure him and his companions, he, on the advice of Circe, stuffed the ears of his companions with wax, and tied himself to the mast of his vessel, until he was so far off that he could no longer hear their song. (Homer, *Odyssey*. xii. 39)[55]

As the arts cross the rivulet into the Anthropocene and sail towards to the Island of Social Impact, both protagonists are useful to keep in mind.

If we optimize … peripheral and generic values, while failing to recognize our unique value proposition, we risk skewing our sector away from our most authentic offering.

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[54] I have paraphrased here from several online public domain translations of Aesop's Fables. "The Dog and the Shadow" is number 133 in the Perry Index.
[55] https://www.theoi.com/Pontios/Seirenes.html

In this moment of an increasing social destiny, we find ourselves in the throes of a classic 'coming of age' tale. We are like the new kid at school. We want everyone to like us, but we need them to like us by being true to ourselves, not by becoming something we are not. Like the dog and its meat, we must learn to recognize the value we possess, though like Odysseus at his mast, a bit of clever thinking might allow such appreciation to come without its usual cost.

The difference between the dog and Odysseus can be expressed as the difference between the 'trade-off' and the 'value-add.' The dog and the Mozart Effect were too willing to accept the trade-off and leap for social impact, regardless of its consequence for the value already in our possession. The fate of a healthy sector, I believe, requires that we approach an enhanced social destiny with the spirit of Odysseus and the determination to have it both ways. This is the paradox that lives at the heart of this report, and, I believe, signals the destiny of a revitalized relationship between art and society. Rather than trading our value for social impact, can we expand it towards greater social relevance? And is this simply a question of finding the right mast against which to fasten ourselves?

Rather than trading our value for social impact, can we expand it towards greater social relevance?

Aesthetic value *or* social value?

Often when art grows to serve a social destiny, it jettisons aesthetic value as bourgeois, unhelpful in producing 'real results.' In *Artificial Hells* (2012), Claire Bishop, tracks this trade-off into art's most determined contexts of social practice, art for social change, and socially-engaged art. Many such practitioners, argues Bishop, "consider the aesthetic to be 'a dangerous word'…art and the aesthetic are denigrated as merely visual, superfluous, academic—less important than concrete outcomes."[56]

Bishop's response is insightful, noting that many artists pursuing these concrete outcomes measure success only against those who do not.

> The point of comparison and reference for participatory projects always returns to contemporary art, *despite the fact that they are perceived to be worthwhile precisely because they are non-artistic.* [emphasis added] The aspiration is always to move beyond art, but never to the point of comparison with comparable projects in the social domain.[57]

An art project on social housing may be eager to compare its social value to pictures in a gallery, but less inclined to compare itself to experienced community organizers in the field.

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[56] Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.* Verso, 2012. 20, 22.
[57] Bishop, 2012, 19.

In my own research, I have studied and developed several disillusioning examples in which, intentionally or inadvertently, the arts drop the very value they represent in order to pursue a concrete social outcome.[58] Much to our frequent disappointment, doing so offers no guarantee of some sudden capacity to accomplish realer things in realer worlds than making art in theatres and galleries. "One of the biggest problems in the discussion around socially engaged art," Bishop says, "is its disavowed relationship to the aesthetic."[59] Years after McKibben's cry for art to save the climate, I asked him about the result. He expressed mild regret, explaining that thereafter his office was inundated with countless works of art he was polite enough to refer to as "well-meaning."[60]

The goal here is not to dismiss the importance of a social destiny, but to understand how best the arts might serve such a thing. If the essence of the arts is rooted in composite powers of attention and expression, then the aesthetic priority—the means by which it integrates these powers— sits at the heart of its social capacity. Infringing on this in the service of linear social agendas has what Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse argues are "devastating consequences for aesthetics"[61] and "completely misunderstands the role of art in social change."[62] For Marcuse, the social agency of art was clear:

> The political potential of art lies only in its own aesthetic dimension. Its relation to praxis is inexorably indirect, mediated, and frustrating. The more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical transcendent goals of change. In this respect, there may be more subversive potential in the poetry of Baudelaire and Rimbaud than in the didactic plays of Brecht.[63]

If art is to offer revolution, it is through the aesthetic. This is the mast to which we must fasten ourselves before our vessel veers too near a reductive social destiny. *The capacity of art is to engage the world in terms of the aesthetic.* If we are clear on the value this represents ('world-making' capacity), and the means by which it arises (powers of attention and expression), then we might resist the tendency to abandon our strengths as the world turns to us in need.

If the essence of the arts is rooted in composite powers of attention and expression, then the aesthetic priority … sits at the heart of its social capacity.

… we might resist the tendency to abandon our strengths as the world turns to us in need.

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[58] David Maggs and John Robinson. *Sustainability in an Imaginary World: Art and the Question of Agency.* Routledge, New York, 2020. See, in particular, chapters 7 & 8.

[59] Bishop, 2012. 26.

[60] Question and answer session with Bill McKibben, Liu Centre for Dialogue, UBC, November, 2011.

[61] Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension.* Beacon Press, 1978. 3.

[62] John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb. Introduction. In John Abromeit and W. Mark Cobb (eds.) *Herbert Marcuse: A Critical Reader.* Routledge: NY, 2003. 21-22.

[63] Marcuse, 1978. 70.

Chapter 7

Is This an Ecosystem or a Zoo?

Transformation, innovation, and systems

In recalling John Robinson's insight, that there is no future which is not transformative, it would seem the non-profit arts world must either embrace innovation or be tossed like a cork on the waves. Critical to thriving within an innovation paradigm, Bakhshi, Schneider, and Walker claim, is the capacity to function not as a sector, but as a system.[64] In discussing this with Bakhshi, he said, "The key emphasis here is the relational unit, the network, the collaboration...You think about national statistical institutes, most of the data is on the firm, the family, the individual, or the household, not the relational unit."[65]

In this, we see our larger challenge to shift from Enlightenment to Anthropocene, from intrinsic qualities to relational dynamics. Yet to listen to the arts world describe itself, it would seem we are already there. When was the last time any of us referred to our sector without using ecological language? The arts ecology. The choral ecosystem.[66] How deep does such rhetoric go? Does it indicate a highly networked, integrated system of interdependence ready to foster coordinated innovation? Or are we still a loose collection of similar entities with similar problems and similar ideologies, grasping at earthy-sounding labels?

How ecological is our culture?

One of the more prominent efforts to understand this perspective is John Holden's 2015 report *The Ecology of Culture*. An ecological view, Holden believes, offers the cultural sector the capacity to recover "its organic meaning, its social significance, and its moral weight."[67] Yet here we see immediate evidence of how frail the connection is. For example, a key ecological concept of *emergence*—when a system displays properties unobservable in its parts—is

[64] Hasan Bakhshi, Philippe Schneider, Christopher Walker. "Arts and Humanities Research in the Innovation System: The UK Example." *Cultural Science Journal*, 2009. 4.

[65] Bakhshi, interview, December 10, 2020

[66] See for example: Arts Council England. "This England: How Arts Council England uses its investment to shape a national cultural ecology." Manchester: Arts Council England, 2014; Mark Robinson. "Just how big is the arts ecology?" at http://thinkingpractice.blogspot.co.uk/2010/07/just-how-big-is-arts-ecology.html, accessed 15/10/2014; John Knell. "Western Australia's cultural ecology: a very relaxed sort of crisis." London: Intelligence Agency, 2007A; John Kreidler and Moi Eng. "Cultural Dynamics Map: Exploring the Arts Ecosystem in the United States", 2005.

[67] John Holden. The Ecology of Culture. Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2015. https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/the-ecology-of-culture/. 12.

used to explore challenges of incubation, risk capital, and the struggles to get projects off the ground.[68] In other words, rather than emergence, we find ourselves discussing 'emerging' instead. The report appears to be drawn from interviews with cultural leaders which are then framed in terms of possible ecological themes. This might indicate how nascent sectoral thinking remains in this regard. Bill Sharpe, quoted in Holden, seems to confirm this:

> If we look at the way industrial policy has changed over the past 25 years, we can see a shift from picking winners towards maintaining the enabling conditions for successful innovation: healthy markets, liquidity of money providing available funds for investment, business incubator to nurture start-ups, fluid relationships with research centres and universities, etc. By analogy cultural policy now needs to start making the same transition… Innovation funding in the arts and cultural domain is still about picking winners; it needs to shift towards providing enabling conditions i.e. a healthy creative ecosystem.[69]

Despite our language inclining in a promising direction, the ecological instinct of the cultural sector seems preliminary yet. This is not meant to dismiss prior efforts to advance ecological thinking within the arts, only to recognize that we have not fully met the challenges and opportunities it presents. In the hopes of a brief yet meaningful next step, I wonder if greater metaphorical specificity might offer a deeper reckoning with ecological, or at least systemic, implications? Imagine how a deeper grasp of themes such as decline, death, decay, resilience, biodiversity, regenerative capacity, trophic structures, alternate stable states, and symbiosis might fire our systemic sensibilities? I will explore this approach to honing our ecological instincts through a pair of concepts.

Imagine how a deeper grasp of themes such as decline, death, decay, resilience, biodiversity, regenerative capacity, trophic structures, … might fire our systemic sensibilities?

Apex and keystone species

While the Canadian non-profit arts sector had been wrestling with the legitimacy of its institutional and funding hierarchies before the pandemic, COVID-19 has exacerbated this conversation. Seeing organizations dominate funding landscapes, assign themselves leadership roles, and then offer minimal leadership within the present crisis has sharpened a critical eye on the funding structures that maintain current hierarchies. In wondering about this dynamic, I asked author and retired Parks Canada ecosystem scientist Michael Burzynski to define an apex species:

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[68] Holden, 2015. 8, 13.
[69] Sharpe, 2010, 84, in Holden, 2015. 18.

> Biologically speaking they are the species that don't have predators. An adult whale, an eagle, a lion, an elephant, they're big enough that when they reach maturity nobody bothers them.[70]

The transferable issue here is risk. Apex species are exempt from the system's central risk. Crucially, this is not established by the species alone, but by its maturity. "Baby elephants, baby eagles get eaten, but once they're mature they are able to take care of themselves, they're pretty safe."[71] They are outside the food chain. A second insight into apex species is their indication of systemic health. "If you can maintain an apex species, everything else is doing okay. A healthy ecosystem is the only way you can maintain an apex animal," concludes Burzynski, then adds as an afterthought, "either that, or a zoo."

"... A healthy ecosystem is the only way you can maintain an apex animal, ... either that, or a zoo."

Considering the hierarchical structure of Canada's non-profit arts sector, poet and activist charles c. smith offers this description:

> Those institutions that began sixty years ago, they were off and running while [marginalized artists and forms] were not allowed to participate. They've been able to build up their services, their relationship to funders, board members, donors, and politicians. They built up their operating grants which gives them the ability to operate reliably, year-round. We are the newcomers, who were locked out for so long, how are we expected to compete at that level?

In identifying the connection between maturity and risk, smith's description naturally evokes an apex identity. He also voices a widely held frustration at the structural dynamics maintaining these identities. Yet if apex species survive by sitting atop healthy ecosystems, why the frustration? Isn't this a natural occurrence, indicating the overall good health of the system below?

Or do we need to ask how our apex species are surviving, after all? In the wake of the SARS epidemic (2003), when Toronto's arts ecosystem was so heavily degraded, it was these apex species that emerged on the other side of that event. If the system was degraded, and apex species require healthy systems, how did we end up with a cultural ecology comprised primarily of apex species in the wake of systemic shock? Perhaps they were surviving in the other way charismatic megafauna keep themselves alive? Not in an ecosystem at all, but in a zoo?

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70 Michael Burzynski, interview, October 21, 2020.
71 Michael Burzynski, interview, October 21, 2020.

One way to consider the meaning of this question, 'ecosystem or zoo?' is through the resourcing paradigm that maintains the sector in present form. While not solely responsible, operating funding from municipal, provincial, and federal funders are significant stabilizing forces in this regard. These streams provide operational funding to select organizations across the country, and while difficult to acquire, there are limited means for removing or even reducing such funding once in place. Does this serve the systemic health we love to evoke in our ecological terminology? Or is it derivative of the growth model lamented earlier by Bill Sharpe? Does it cultivate priorities of innovation, responsiveness, relevance, and diversity? Or is it one of the primary forces stalling and even disincentivizing transformation? Does it reflect a systems-view and drive a generative emergent dynamic across the country? Or is it a strange inherited, hodge-podge legacy, much of it held in place by the lobbying capacity of apex organizations?

If we want a more dynamic, responsive, and emergent sector, would it not make sense to release portions of this money into project funding? With such an injection, project funding would become far less precarious, while the rigid class structure built into the system would be rendered increasingly fluid, allowing a more genuine 'ecology' to compete, emerge, and evolve in ways that promise to optimize systemic vitality and social relevance.

Considering this operational vs. project funding dilemma for its role in fostering a more organic, self-organizing, emergent, and responsive sector, James Long of Vancouver's Theatre Replacement points to the three-year project grants as valuable middle ground. "I've always thought they were really smart because it allowed an artist to sit inside a question for three years and really invest in it. They provide greater stability, reduce precarity, while potentially inspiring, even requiring heightened attention to socially relevant work."[72] Considering these possibilities as good 'complexity economy' thinkers, of course, means we cannot ignore the law of unintended consequences. We cannot know how such a shift will ultimately manifest, we can only consider first and second order effects as carefully as we can and decide if the risk is worth taking.[73]

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[72] James Long, interview. May 12, 2021.
[73] For a useful exploration of project vs operational circumstances at a time of funding policy changes, see James Long's 2018 Master's Thesis in Urban Studies, "The Age of Engagement in Vancouver's Independent Theatre Sector" https://summit.sfu.ca/item/18611

A second class of species that might inspire thinking into what a more ecological system might look like are keystone species. "Keystone species are species that define, and in some cases create and maintain an ecosystem. There are the species like beaver, building whole wetlands. Just by their activities they modify ecosystems by flooding them, bringing birds, fish and other species into the system."[74] As the name suggests, take the keystone out and the structure of the system changes. I asked Burzynski if one can distinguish the keystone easily. "You'd have to understand how the system functions to a high degree. If you don't know that, no, you can't." I then asked if ecologists are ever surprised to discover which species turn out to be keystone in a given system?

> Most of the world's biologists were surprised recently in Yellowstone. They were having a whole series of problems maintaining a healthy ecology in the park and then, for completely other reasons, they reintroduced wolves only to realize the wolf was the keystone species. You'd never have thought that.

This example is worth exploring, as it illustrates how ecosystems work, and how they are defined by emergent, non-linear, dynamics:

> The wolves had been absent for 70 years, and during that time, the numbers of deer had built up in the park to such high numbers that, despite efforts to control them, they had reduced much of the vegetation there to almost nothing. But as soon as the wolves arrived, they started to have the most remarkable effects. First, of course, they killed some of the deer. But more significantly, they radically changed their behaviour. The deer started avoiding certain parts of the park, the places they could be trapped most easily, the valleys and the gorges, and those places started to regenerate. In some areas the height of the trees quintupled in just six years. Bare valley sides quickly became forests of aspen and willow and cottonwood and, as soon as that happened, the birds started moving in. The number of songbirds and migratory birds started to increase. The number of beavers started to increase because beavers like to eat the trees, and beavers, like wolves, are ecosystem engineers. They create niches for other species. The dams they built provided habitat for otters and muskrats and ducks and fish and reptiles and amphibians. The

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74 Michael Burzynski, interview, October 21, 2020.

wolves killed coyotes and as a result, the number of rabbits and mice began to rise which meant more hawks, more weasels, more foxes, and more badgers. Ravens and bald eagles came down to feed on the carrion of the coyotes, and bears fed on it too, and their population began to rise. But here's where it gets really interesting. The wolves changed the behaviour of the rivers. They began to meander less, there was less erosion, the channels narrowed, pools formed, all of which was great for wildlife habitats. The rivers changed in response to the wolves, the regenerating forests stabilized the banks, and the rivers became more fixed in their course. So the wolves, though small in number, transformed the ecosystem of Yellowstone National Park.[75]

Here we see the regenerative blossoming that comes of managing a system through its relationships instead of its components. Yet recall, this was an accident. Ecologists knew neither that they were removing nor replacing the keystone here, and so we cultural types might feel some relief. Systems are hard to nurture and manage. Get it right, however, and the results are spectacular.

> Systems are hard to nurture and manage. Get it right, however, and the results are spectacular.

Rewilding the arts

Reintroducing wolves to Yellowstone was an exercise in rewilding—an approach to conservation that aims to "restore self-sustaining and complex ecosystems, with interlinked ecological processes that promote and support one another while minimizing or gradually reducing human interventions."[76] By taking a highly managed, faltering ecosystem and empowering the forces of wildness, Yellowstone management did not return the park to health, but rather enabled the system to do so itself. The principle—to limit external control and empower systems to self-regulate—is useful for navigating complexity. What follows is a brief attempt to consider several cultural sector themes through this idea of rewilding.

A central theme in rewilding is **connectivity**, as contexts that are too isolated or too small struggle to become self-sustaining when the system lacks sufficient integrity. For example, natural parks or marine protected areas are often too fractured to self-regulate and require connection to other areas to increase independence. This resonates with research from the U.K., emphasizing the non-profit world's need to connect with commercial and amateur sectors. There, says Holden, "the recent formation of the Creative Industries Federation, 'bringing together commercial companies and publicly funded cultural

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[75] George Monbiot. Sustainable Human Channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ysa5OBhXz-Q&t=206s
[76] Andrea Perino et al., "Rewilding complex ecosystems." 2019, Science 364, 351. 1.

organisations, think tanks and education bodies, large and small,' is one manifestation of this trend."[77] The connection of arts practices to social challenges, is another. Increased connectivity across commercial and disciplinary boundaries will be central to revitalizing the sector.

Increased connectivity across commercial and disciplinary boundaries will be central to revitalizing the sector.

A central presence in rewilding is, as we saw, the **keystone species**. Can we, the non-profit arts sector in Canada, establish more explicit practices, expectations, and indicators for how organizations and institutions inhabit their systems as keystones? That is, how might they co-evolve to drive systemic health? Discussing this with James Long, he put it this way:

> What is the responsibility of the zoo [operationally-funded organizations] to the ecosystem [project-funded orgs]? That's always our question. We're trying to provide more mentorship and invest in making sure new artists have a voice and a place to make work, while trying to understand how we can advise them? We know things, we have networks, national, international, how do we support them? That's a big consideration we're grappling with right now, because it keeps us healthy too, they help us with our challenge of, 'how do we stay cool? How do we remain relevant?'[78]

Finally, beyond mentorship exchanges, Long identifies recommender grants as instigators of a more fertile relationship between apex and keystone species and the systems they inhabit. Here funders rely on organizations to be a more precise and effective at resourcing certain activity, but Long balances this enthusiasm with caution regarding potential nepotism and systemic injustice—concerns rewilding may help address. Recall that the success of the wolves in Yellowstone was not measured by their own population growth, but in the increases to the populations of other species: birds, beavers, reptiles, fish, foxes, and more. The triumph of a keystone species is measured by its ability to increase **diversity** in the system. In a recent interview with *Canadian Art*, John Hampton, director of the Mackenzie Art Gallery, echoes this dynamic in cultural terms, with his gratitude for "all the white folx trying to reorient institutions away from reifying their own positionality."[79]

The triumph of a keystone species is measured by its ability to increase **diversity** in the system.

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[77] Holden, 2015. 10.

[78] James Long, interview. May 12, 2021.

[79] https://canadianart.ca/news/john-g-hampton-mackenzie-art-gallery/

Loss aversion

A further rewilding insight might complicate our instinct to make moral heroes of the wolves, for the means by which they did good was through killing things. Predation, or actively closing the loop on life-giving trophic cycles, is central to rewilding. If we want to foster a more organic, emergent, and resilient sector, we need to come to terms with the importance of decline, death, and decay to overall health, resilience, and diversity of a system. According to a recent study, the average lifespan of a private sector company in Standard and Poor's 1958 listing was sixty-one years; today it is eighteen years.[80] Why are the non-profit arts such a contrast to this trend of shorter lifespans, higher turnover rates, and more rapid evolutionary cycles? If our goal is to reflect and reshape society, how can it change so much, and we so little? Or even more so, how can we constantly *insist* society change so much, while hoping we get away with changing so little?

In her work on this issue, arts leader Diane Ragsdale identifies the problem of organizations that have stopped achieving their goals but continue to exist: "Art is particularly susceptible to this permanent failure because we assume lasting for a long time is better than closing." While tenacity has its merits, it may not, as Ragsdale suggests, serve us well when the sector is degraded, facing a crisis of regenerative capacity, and confronting layered disruptions.

> There are huge opportunity costs for the sector. Every underperforming, permanently failing organization that continues to exist is taking attention, capital, resources, talent away from others. That big tree that's overshadowing all the others is keeping new life from coming up. At some point, if you want to see a more fertile sector, some of this needs to go.[81]

Failing to close the loop on our regenerative cycles starves us from crucial dynamics of decline, death, decay, rebirth, and renewal. Whether we accept insights from *Towards Braiding*, German sociology, rewilding, or Ragsdale's research in the U.S. sector, the observation is consistent, even if it feels so incoherent. How can a determination to survive undermine our vitality?

Failing to close the loop on our regenerative cycles starves us from crucial dynamics of decline, death, decay, rebirth, and renewal.

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[80] https://www.imd.org/research-knowledge/articles/why-you-will-probably-live-longer-than-most-big-companies/
[81] Diane Ragsdale, interview, October 1, 2020.

One way to view this struggle with obsolescence is through what behavioural economists call "loss aversion." Humans *dislike* losing something about twice as much as we *like* finding something.[82] Losing a dollar is offset only by finding *two*, leaving us consistently inclined to spend more in order to let go of less (hence the efficacy of money back guarantees and free trials).

What loss aversion seems to be telling us, is that we feel loss inside a moment of change more acutely than gain. Facing inevitable transformation and a critical need to cultivate a collective spirit of innovation, a cognitive bias like this might be unhelpful. Loss aversion may contribute to poor decision-making, fanning uproar where none belongs, inspiring irrational resistance to essential evolutions. From a complexity perspective, loss aversion is the path dependence of our psycho-emotional state, no less stubborn than the path dependence of technical systems, policy structures, and other features of society where grooves grow into ruts we then struggle to escape. The more existing pathways *feel* better, the more we find ourselves caged inside a perpetual crisis of faith, a structural disbelief in better worlds to come.

In our efforts to cultivate a more systemic, integrated form for our sector, the metaphors of ecosystems and rewilding may shift our perceptions and practices in helpful ways. If they do lead us towards relaxing top-down maintenance of the status quo and recovering the revitalizing emergent dynamics of the system, accepting obsolescence by growing less 'loss averse' will be critical to our pursuit of such renewal.

... we feel loss inside a moment of change more acutely than gain.

...accepting obsolescence by growing less 'loss averse' will be critical to our pursuit of such renewal.

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[82] Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky. "Prospect theory: An analysis of decision under risk." 1979. *Econometrica*, 47, 263-291.

Chapter 8

Can We Learn Our Way Out?

Innovation and learning

In chapters 6 and 7 we explored grounding ourselves in a unique value proposition and integrating our sector through an increasingly systemic orientation. Now our innovation challenge brings us to a third priority: our capacity to learn. This priority has been given significant emphasis recently:

> The World Economic Forum has identified active learning and learning strategies as second on its list of the top 10 skills needed for 2025, right under innovation. A sustained commitment to learning is so critical that it is now being considered a career requirement. The report predicts that half the world's work force will need to reskill within the next five years as a result of the disruption caused by the pandemic and the continuing evolution of automation.[83]

We might find comfort in noting that ours is not the only workforce facing massive disruption. What follows is an exploration of two learning strategies that offer a path toward embracing the challenges and opportunities of the emerging complexity economy.

Predictive forecasting vs. strategic foresight

In the 1970s, energy giant Royal Dutch Shell decided it "had to find a new way to plan," as predictive forecasting—predicated on trying to figure out what is going to happen—was decreasingly useful as growing uncertainty gripped global energy markets.[84] As a result, the practice of strategic foresight was born. Horizons Canada, a federal department dedicated to infusing policy-making with foresight, emphasizes the distinction of this approach:

> The objective of foresight is not to predict the future, but to prepare strategies that are robust across a range of plausible futures. Foresight is often confused with forecasting. Forecasting *does* try to predict the future. It takes data from the past and extrapolates it into the future using a variety of tools, from statistics to simulations.[85]

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[83] https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/careers/leadership/article-empowering-innovators-of-tomorrow-fighting-climate-change-one-idea-at/

[84] Pierre Wack. "Scenarios: Uncharted Waters Ahead," Harvard Business Review. Sept-Oct 1985. 75.

[85] https://horizons.gc.ca/en/our-work/learning-materials/foresight-training-manual-module-1-introduction-to-foresight/

Foresight, on the other hand, structures a relationship to the future without appealing to prediction. This is particularly useful in times and contexts of uncertainty.

Futurist Joe Tankersley offers an approach to strategic foresight that illustrates its novelty and utility. The goal, he explains, "is to cultivate a constructive vision, strategize how to get there from here, and then move iteratively and generatively in that direction." **Iteratively**, in that a repeating loop of reflexive inquiry—i.e. *learning*—drives the process. **Generatively**, in that we are produced by the journey we take. We ready ourselves for the future not by figuring out what it will be, but by positioning ourselves to evolve with it in a highly responsive way. For Tankersley, the foresight journey cycles through eight steps: vision, mapping, scenarios, values, vision (revisited), strategic narratives, backcasting, and mile markers and signposts, briefly characterized in what follows.

To begin, Tankersley invites us to establish an ideal **vision** of our own future state. Who are we going to be? What are we going to be doing? How are we going to do it? This is not meant to be utopic, but aspirational. Vision is followed by **mapping**, where we anticipate the system or context in which our vision will play out. What is the range of possibility? What are the active drivers of change? This establishes a relationship between ourselves and our potential futures not as prediction, but as a range of possible, plausible, probable, projected, and preferable outcomes.

This allows us to generate **scenarios**, a series of 'what ifs' enabling us to explore the processes and circumstances necessary for one scenario or another to emerge. Encountering the entity we might become, Tankersley points out, confronts us not with facts about the future necessarily, but an increasingly animated encounter with our **values**. As we imagine different scenarios, what responses are triggered? What elements are desirable and what do we wish to avoid?

This returns us to our initial **visioning** stage, to clarify and ground our sense of purpose before developing **strategic narratives**, or clearer, more concrete scenarios. Foresight practitioners like Tankersley, Horizons Canada, or OCAD University's Strategic Foresight and Innovation program develop techniques for cultivating strategic narratives, i.e. role playing, storying, guided imaging techniques, visual tools, and gamification. This brings us to a process of **backcasting**, where a strategic narrative of our ideal future orients us to the question: how do we get there from here? This question requires the establishment of Tankersley's **mile markers and signposts**. Mile markers identify key moments in our narrative—e.g. public gathering policies, live audience returns—that help identify what is necessary for our vision to stay on

track. Signposts, on the other hand, help identify alternate routes should these mile markers fail to materialize.

Motorboats, sailboats, and our four disruptions

A central value of the foresight journey can be drawn from John Robinson's distinction between motorboats and sailboats.[86] Drawing up a five-year plan with the conviction that if we don't know where we want to go we won't get there, and then implementing a strategy to arrive at that destination, is *motoring*. Identifying a vision, recognizing the elements relevant to its fruition, plotting a probable course towards it, and then working iteratively in an emergent negotiation between self, vision, and context, is *sailing*. Sailing emphasizes the iterative, generative dynamic. We embark on a process of 'how' marked by an emergent give and take between vision and context that itself becomes a process of 'what' as we evolve in response to winds, waves, and the other traffic on the water. Through this give and take, we trade predictive forecasting's ideal of a destination for strategic foresight's virtue of the journey. We forego the desire to reach our destination intact and open ourselves to the possibilities of what we become as a result of going.

In this, again, we find ourselves aligned with the spirit of *Towards Braiding* in that there is no obvious march to an assigned destination of post-colonialism, only a willingness to become the result of the journey: "The quality of the process and the outcomes will depend on the quality of the weaving of relationships, and this weaving depends on people engaging in good faith, being open to the unexpected, *and allowing themselves to be transformed*."[87]

Adopting a spirit of strategic foresight may not require a full-blown development exercise as described above. The field holds value even when stripped down to what I see as its most relevant ideas for our circumstance: resist prediction and turn to the future not for what we need to do but for what we need to become. How does it feel to inhabit uncertainty and fluidity? What is the impact on our sense of identity, value, and the role we might play in what is to come? Imagine that tomorrow we will board an airplane with a few hundred other passengers, and no one knows where it is going. How differently would we pack our suitcases? How would it change the way we engage with others on the flight? How would it affect our attention during the journey? In March of 2020, an airplane left town for a destination unknown and we are all onboard.

> ... we trade predictive forecasting's ideal of a destination for strategic foresight's virtue of the journey.

> ... there is no obvious march to an assigned destination of post-colonialism, only a willingness to become the result of the journey ...

86 John Robinson. "Problematizing Collective Behaviour Change: a procedural sustainability approach." Presentation to KLASICA-IASS Workshop on Behaviour Change for Sustainable Futures Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Potsdam, Germany, Nov 6, 2017
87 Jimmy and Andreotti, 2019. 58.

Art and the promise of R&D

This chapter is focused on the imperative of learning as it pertains to our capacity for innovation and, in particular, our migration towards the complexity economy. The second strategy in this imperative is our sector's relationship to research and development (R&D). How do these domains come together, and what does it mean when they do? In seeking an art-society relationship that is more applied and accountable, I have tried to understand the current underperformance as a tension between art's unique value proposition and the ways of knowing foundational to Western society. In the relationship between art and R&D, this tension becomes acute and concrete. For this reason, it offers an ideal site of engagement for the larger transformation we are seeking—both the changes we need to make within our sector, and those we need to propel in the world as well. Once the arts and R&D have learned to play well together, the world will never be the same.

In an article Hasan Bakhshi wrote with Radhika Desai and Alan Freeman from the University of Manitoba, the authors identify the tension between art and R&D through a pair of core prejudices. "First, arts and culture are excluded from R&D by definitions based on its science and technology origins. Second, the arts and cultural sector relies on a conception of creativity that mystifies too much of its work, preventing it from accessing valuable public resources."[88] In other words, R&D is stuck in Jimmy and Andreotti's bricks, while, as we have seen earlier, art tends to adopt a defensive stance regarding the status of its knowledge. Happily, however, these prejudices no longer hold up in the context in which art and R&D must prove themselves now. In the emerging complexity economy their need for one another should outshine any abiding suspicion. Our first question is how art gets beyond its defensiveness to step into a relationship to society that is applied and accountable. The report will then conclude with the question of why the world needs to change in order for art to do so, and what might happen when it does.

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[88] Hasan Bakhshi; Alan Freeman; Radhika Desai. "Not Rocket Science: A Roadmap for Arts and Cultural R&D," MPRA Paper 52710, University Library of Munich, Germany, revised 01 Jan 2010. 2.

In seeking to define R&D for the arts, Geoffrey Crossick describes the approach taken to arts research—and by extension to R&D for the arts—when he was head of the UK's Arts & Humanities Research Board: "What is the research problem? What methods will be used to address it? And who is going to be interested in the answers?" While Crossick admits this is "not quite hypothesis driven," the point is that "there has to be a research process that starts with a problem and ends up with somebody being interested in your answer, other than yourself."[89] In this, the potentially disorienting challenge of R&D grounds itself in a three-part 'problem-method-user' criteria that many in the arts will find familiar.

In her 2017 report, "Defining R&D for the arts and knowledge cultural domains," Elizabeth Lomas gives a broad overview of possible R&D activity in the arts, along with the content this might produce:

- Theoretical – resulting in new knowledge, new theories, and new perspectives
- Curatorial – resulting in conceptual, material, and interpretative outputs
- Creative – resulting in ideas, images, themes, formats, and perspectives on beauty and use
- Technical, design and production – related to new materials, technology, production, delivery of new spaces, functionality
- Business – delivering new commercial models
- Market – both commercial and non-commercial
- Audience – targeting, acquisition, and evaluation
- Social science – delivering art and culture to aid wellbeing, happiness, social harmony and understanding across communities, including spaces for change and positive dissent, new spaces for collaboration
- Economic – delivering new models of financial and transactional processes
- Cultural and social – resulting in understanding of identity, [national] reputation, narrative, cohesion, difference, change, diplomacy, and tourism
- Environmental – resulting in better-designed environment, sustainable space and production, urban regeneration, beauty
- Educational – resulting in new models to teach in order to engage and improve performance through time[90]

..."there has to be a research process that starts with a problem and ends up with somebody being interested in your answer, other than yourself."

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[89] Geoffrey Crossick, interview, Nov. 18, 2020.
[90] Elizabeth Lomas. "Defining R&D for the arts and knowledge cultural domains." University College London, 2017.

Here we see the range of opportunities an R&D engagement with our sector presents, the values it offers, and the shift in the art-society relationship it implies. As former Canada Council CEO Robert Sirman noted, many of these modes animate a 'systems-thinking' paradigm, as they address interactions between art and the systems in which it might operate. This is critical, as it shows R&D's capacity to work in two directions at once: first, restructuring our sector's relationship to internal themes such as creative practice, data governance, and business models; second, in stimulating explicit engagement to external 'systems' dimensions such as education, economy, environment, and well-being.[91]

While early readers of this work understandably have wanted more concise grounding in what R&D means for artists and arts organizations I have discovered precious few shortcuts whose convenience outlives their cost. Art and R&D are equally broad, diverse, complex, and dynamic practices, compounding the risk of simplifications. Fields such as social R&D and arts-based research have a tremendous amount to contribute to this discussion, but are themselves highly textured, contested, rapidly evolving, and resistant to easy summation.

Consistent with Crossick's definition, one principle that can help us understand how R&D might move through an arts organization, is that R&D is typically problem-based. R&D usually emerges in response to an identified problem with existing stakeholders. This is obvious for many R&D opportunities on Lomas' list, as there is little difference between how a tech firm, insurance company, or arts organization might approach technical, business, market, audience, or economic challenges. When we move into theoretical, curatorial, creative, cultural and social areas, however, the methods implied are our creative practices themselves, e.g., how and what we dance, paint, and sing, where this takes place, with whom, for whom, and why. Here an idea of 'problem-based' creative practice—where artistic decisions emerge more in relation to a problem in the world than in relation to a practice or discipline— might stand in distinction to purely 'inspiration-based' activity.

R&D usually emerges in response to an identified problem with existing stakeholders.

... 'problem-based' creative practice ... might stand in distinction to purely 'inspiration-based' activity.

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91 Robert Sirman, written feedback, January 20, 2021.

This is not to suggest that inspiration-based art is not responding to problems, or that problem-based art does not rely on inspiration. However, it does raise essential questions about the connection. First of all, how do we understand problems in terms of aesthetics? That is, how do we learn to identify the 'arts-shaped holes' in our worlds? What do these consist of, relative to a given problem? If we are considering our relationship to social justice, or sustainability, or health, what elements of these issues are relevant to aesthetic inquiry? Information and knowledge? Eliciting, expanding, and mapping collective values? Shifting perception and possibility beyond established rationalities? Engaging, activating, and leveraging situated well-being? Expanding and grounding collective identity and action? Bolstering spiritual and imaginative vitality?

With an ability to make sense of the arts-shaped holes in our worlds, we can then ask what art-making processes bring aesthetics to bear on a problem in productive ways? What practices are suited to which holes? How do we structure their integration? Once this integration between problem and method has taken root, how do we measure and evaluate? How do we identify, collect, and shape data in meaningful ways? Are we documenting the work? The process that developed the work? Critical engagement with the work? Impact on audiences? Impact on the artists themselves? Changes in participant and stakeholder knowledge? Perception? Values? Beliefs? Behaviours? In situ? Over time? Here we have much to learn from fields such as social R&D and its capacity to shape processes around social challenges, social outputs, and social innovation; and arts-based research for its capacity to work with art as methodology.

Learning for and from each other: invention and innovation in R&D

Critical to understanding our sector's R&D challenge is the distinction between *invention* and *innovation*. **Invention** can be a unique, creative process that enhances the expression of an artist or work. **Innovation** comes when enhancements embed themselves beyond the limits of an artist, process, or work. Invention occurs in the studio; innovation happens in the world. Here R&D reinforces a central point from the previous chapter: unless we integrate as a system, learning to scale and advance in coordinated fashion, we may be rich in inventiveness, but shall remain poor in innovation.

Invention occurs in the studio; innovation happens in the world.

... R&D, invention, and innovation form distinct steps on a continuum.

Sarah Schulman, lead partner with social design firm InWithForward, structures this distinction through a typology in which R&D, invention, and innovation form distinct steps on a continuum. **R&D** prompts fresh insights and opportunities. This is where we explore and experiment. **Invention** transfers this into products, tools, processes, and technologies, stabilizing experimentation in a coherent offering. **Innovation** shifts rules, networks, and resources in processes of adoption. Here the system changes as a result of new affordances, insights, and imaginative possibilities.[92] Schulman explores three conditions required to turn ideas and experimentation into innovations. First, recognize the distinct challenges along this continuum (i.e., invention does not equal innovation); second, establish a differentiated yet coordinated system able to move ideas along the continuum (i.e. converting ideas into inventions into innovations); third, foster a policy context and resource paradigm that recognizes and supports this coordinated, differentiated process.

Returning to the cultural sector, Bakhshi, Desai, and Freeman help us understand innovation and how we can adopt it by discussing what is *not* R&D. For example, advocacy is an area where much of the research for the non-profit cultural sector occurs, yet is not, in their view, R&D. "R&D is a dynamic process of learning aiming at innovation; evidence for the purposes of advocacy typically portrays existing reality."[93] Even more challenging is the authors' claim that creative experimentation and the development of new work is itself *not* R&D. Here the distinction turns on whether processes of creative experimentation are structured sufficiently to make findings explicable, sharable, and applicable. "If, as is usual in the arts and cultural sector, the knowledge created and the methods used are neither made explicit, nor codified, nor replicable for extension and use by others, such...activity falls short...of R&D."[94]

... the flood of online streams discussed earlier could have been invaluable R&D.

For example, the flood of online streams discussed earlier could have been invaluable R&D. Had we been set up as a sector to frame that activity with a variety of researchable questions and match those questions with appropriate methodologies, we would have created a vital pool of data to inform further online activity. Instead, we have anecdotal lessons, the learnings of individual organizations, and scant means to identify larger, sector-wide patterns. In this regard, a clearer sense of how to structure and progress a problem along an innovation continuum would have served the sector well.

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92 Sarah Schulman. "Develop and Deliver: Making the Case for Social Innovation." Inwithforward. May, 2017. 4-5. Available at: https://inwithforward.com/2017/10/develop-deliver-making-case-social-rd-infrastructure/
93 Bakhshi, Desai, Freeman, 2010. 5.
94 Bakhshi, Desai, Freeman, 2010. 6.

The Digital Strategy Fund

Schulman's first two conditions identify internal gaps in our sector's relationship to itself that need to close in order to grow our innovative capacity. I suggest we saw both gaps exposed in a recent initiative from the Canada Council. The Digital Strategy Fund (DSF) was a $88.5 million, four-year fund designed to increase digital capacity in Canada's non-profit arts sector. I asked Lise Ann Johnson, Director of Strategic Granting Initiatives, whether it was fair to see it as an R&D initiative:

> The application form requires applicants to frame the problem they are trying to solve, as opposed to simply describe the activity they want to do, which is the traditional focus of grant applications. Successful projects need to address a problem that benefits the larger community, going beyond a single organization; and project design pushes people to collaborate, within and beyond the sector. It was never called an R&D fund, but yes, I think it is, it could have been.[95]

Considering the DSF for what it exposes about our sector's relationship to R&D is not to criticize the initiative, but to value it for its insight into how ready we are to meet this emerging imperative. As Johnson explains: "The Digital Strategy Fund wanted to be an innovation fund, and while there were some very strong projects out of the gate, the sector overall wasn't entirely ready. We had to pivot to address basic development of skills and knowledge, a foundation on which to build innovation."

In the early years of the DSF, both funder and sector struggled to operate within an innovation paradigm. Consistent, clear instructions on how to properly engage the fund were frustratingly difficult to come by, and many of us (myself included) struggled to get beyond trying to use it in a context of practice. As Johnson says, "that's not what it was set up to do. It was set up to spur innovation and transformative change for the sector." That is, identify shared problems and opportunities, propose applicable methodologies, and generate scalable findings.

These shortcomings identify the first of Schulman's challenges around R&D and innovation—understanding the distinct modes of activity, experimentation, invention, innovation, and the practices they imply. Johnson's further analysis shows a resonance with Schulman's second challenge as well, regarding systemic conditions. She illustrates this first in terms of risk:

In the early years of the DSF, both funder and sector struggled to operate within an innovation paradigm.

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95 Lise Ann Johnson, interview, December 15, 2020.

This is a huge generalization, but as much as we advance innovation in an artistic framework, our organizations remain conservative. It partly stems from the non-profit model, a very specific kind of governance structure we've set up to support creation and production of artistic work. Artists make bold artistic choices, but I'm not sure we do the same on the organizational side. It's partly where we prioritize and are willing to invest in risk. You have to invest in risk if you're going to undertake any kind of transformation, but I'm not sure we're set up for innovation in the sector, and the Digital Strategy Fund was trying to address that.[96]

In other words, how well did our sector understand the need to put structures, organizations, and systems in the R&D portion of Schulman's continuum? Johnson raises the question of organizational models, for example:

There may need to be different models to facilitate transformation. One of the components of the DSF is called Transformation of Organizational Models and it was designed to help the sector take advantage of the digital world and transform the way it works. We need to be rethinking business models, structure, governance, collaborations, potentially even questioning the not-for-profit model itself.[97]

While this issue may have meant little to our pre-COVID-19 existence, in the sudden urgency to turn performing arts companies into media companies, it became critical. Speaking with Joel Ivany of Against the Grain Theatre about *Messiah/Complex*, one of the more successful creations from our COVID period, he illustrated how their creative pivot has trickled through the entire organization.

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[96] Lise Ann Johnson, interview, December 15, 2020.
[97] Lise Ann Johnson, interview, December 15, 2020.

We used to structure our year by growing a series of different productions one at a time, each moving steadily uphill towards opening night. Now, the work comes in chunks, pre-production, capturing sound, music, then filming, moving into post, then launch. Knowing how to structure, schedule, and staff these up-and-down processes has been something we've had to learn. We are less used to this in the live world, where we bring designers in right before we go into the theatre, and then you have two weeks to tech. Imagine if it worked in a way where you could be creating bits of content for months, testing, trying different things out, perfecting some, rejecting others, with less of a linear drive towards opening? Turning towards digital requires these changes in planning our productions, our seasons, and even our companies.[98]

Here, a new creative modality requires significant learning around production models, how they serve a given project, and how they integrate into a season of producing. I wonder how much experimentation of this kind took place under the DSF, how relevant it has become post-pandemic, what questions we were prepared to ask then, and, by contrast, what questions we are eager to ask now.

R&D and the promise of art

This brief detour offers insight into how well we inhabit Schulman's first two challenges of R&D and innovation: do we know how to operate inside an innovation paradigm? And do we have the necessary systemic structure? Returning to the question, "Can we learn our way out of this?" the answer appears to be, not yet. But the DSF represents a vital step in engaging R&D at a national scale and illustrating its importance to revitalizing the sector.

As Johnson points out, our capacity for innovation and R&D should not be limited to the digital. "Innovation can be about racism, equity, diversity and inclusion. It can be about the environmental crisis. If digital drove a need for innovation, it did not limit it." In other words, we need to carry a structured innovation mandate beyond our technical challenges to the relationship between art and society more generally. "What is the role of the arts in terms of its larger social impact? We don't have that muscle very well-built within the Canadian arts sector. We have rested on assumptions about the intrinsic value of professional arts and now we need to expand that in a hurry." This carries us directly to Schulman's third challenge, an adequate resource paradigm.

... the DSF represents a vital step in engaging R&D at a national scale and illustrating its importance to revitalizing the sector.

"Innovation can be about racism, equity, diversity and inclusion. It can be about the environmental crisis."

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98 Joel Ivany, interview, March 22, 2021.

Which brings us to the crux of the relationship between art and society. For what, exactly, is a society paying for when it buys a more innovative, R&D-savvy arts sector? In his extensive work on R&D, innovation, and culture, Hasan Bakhshi identified R&D as "an approach to investing in innovation."[99] Investing in R&D is investing in our ability to solve problems. To this end, then, it is not surprising that Bakhshi and others are increasingly vocal in criticizing the 'STEM to GDP' bias of R&D: *science and technology in, economic return out*.[100] This limited vision of the innovation a given society needs has left us in a comedically affluent world bereft of the basic problem-solving, meaning-making, and value cultivation it requires. Our planet is collapsing, just as we've invented machines that can anticipate which toothpaste we prefer.

Nowhere is this dynamic more acute than in the context of climate change. As John Robinson and I have argued elsewhere, climate change is not a problem *for* a Western, Modernist (science and technology) approach to reality, but rather a problem *about* this approach.[101] It reveals how much our bricklaying is undone by the problem. Standard R&D is the essence of bricklaying, a positivist, science and tech approach to big problems. Climate change is a big problem. And while R&D has done well to address its science and technology dimensions, bringing us to a point where the science of climate change is uncontroversial, and the technology existent, the problem is still very much a problem. What better way to illustrate the need to break free of our bricklaying parameters? As climate change unequivocally reveals, our lives depend on innovations that standard R&D cannot produce.

The aestheticization of the world

While I acknowledged at the start of this report that the relationship between art and society may not be the first thing we grab when trying to untangle the mess we are in, I did argue it should be. As this critical disconnection between our problems and our problem-solving shows, framing an innovation paradigm in terms of complexity is not just to relieve the arts of their subservient role in society, but to relieve society of its pathological ideology—an ideology whose solutions accelerate the problems they are trying to solve.

> Investing in R&D is investing in our ability to solve problems.

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[99] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gg92lUtG3nI

[100] See for example Hasan Bakhshi and Elizabeth Lomas. *Defining R&D for the creative industries.* March 2017. Available online at https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/policy-briefing-digital-r-d/. Rajasekaran and Schulman also identify this dynamic in a Canadian context as well.

[101] David Maggs and John Robinson. *Sustainability in an Imaginary World: Art and the Question of Agency.* Routledge, New York. 2020. 14-15.

Once we move art into a complexity framework, how do we move society there too? In other words, how do we begin to engage complex problems like climate change in terms of cultural and subjective dimensions? In terms of their arts-shaped holes? What does it mean to open questions of identity, place, meaning, purpose, value, and care in terms of climate? How do we shift from technical and managerial approaches built around harm reduction to unlocking the expansive, regenerative possibilities the problem requires? As climate researcher Mike Hulme says, our relationship to climate must shift from a society trying to solve its problem, to a problem trying to solve its society:

> We need to reveal the creative psychological, ethical, and spiritual work that climate change is doing for us. Understanding the ways in which climate change connects with foundational human instincts opens up possibilities for re-situating culture and the human spirit at the heart of our understanding of our changing climate. Rather than catalyzing disagreements about how, when and where to tackle climate change, the idea of climate change should be seen as an intellectual resource around which our collective and personal identities and projects can form and take shape. We need not ask what we can do for climate change, but to ask what climate change can do for us.[102]

We see this approach unfolding in work like Sheila Watt-Cloutier's *The Right to Be Cold* (2015)[103] and Jimmy and Andreotti's hope to connect "braiding work and decolonization with the pressing challenges of climate change."[104] Add the cultural focus of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, and the momentum of this orientation is irrepressible. Here, key aspects of a complex problem are met by core capacities of arts practices delivering on an earlier pledge of this report: that the complexity economy positions art as uniquely capable, relative to aspects of society it has traditionally lagged behind (science and technology).

Previously, if artists wanted to get involved in climate change or other social challenges their opportunity was primarily through using expressive power to raise awareness. The gig was (and often still is) painting the bricks the bricklayers laid. Here, art's power of attention is ignored, and its power of expression instrumentalized. As the unique value proposition argument goes, this approach means that the arts might do some communicative work, but are hard pressed to do any work uprooting and refashioning the problem-dimensions themselves, let alone their meaning, our relationship to them, and the pull of radical alternatives. As our inability to get past science and

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102 Mike Hulme. *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*. Cambridge University Press, 2009. 326.
103 Sheila Watt-Cloutier. *The Right to Be Cold*. Penguin Canada, 2015.
104 Jimmy and Andreotti, 88.

technology solutions to climate challenges demonstrates, this is the very work we need. There are, in other words, gaping arts-shaped holes in this world.

The operational paradox promised at the start of this report arrives here in the form of a relationship between art and society that is more applied, more accountable, yet equally more grounded in our unique value proposition. In this, we sail beyond the instrumentalization of the arts and on into an aestheticization of the world instead. Here, the world-making work of aesthetic attention and expression—that capacity to shift our sense of what things are by considering and reflecting experience through the forms and materials of our creative practices—plays a substantive, explicit, and recognized role in shaping collective possibility at a time of critical need.

As I have tried to show, getting there requires a dual agenda. We need to develop the internal capacity to cultivate and scale our collective agency in the name of greater application and accountability, while at the same time, cultivate the capacity to insist on a necessary transformation of the external context in which such agency is understood and deployed. In this, R&D offers a recognized banner of structured learning that engages rigorously with the challenge to move ideas from the crucibles of creative practice to the proliferating contexts of sectoral and societal innovation. It is, in other words, both a method for getting our own house in order and a context through which to pursue wider impact.

... aesthetic attention and expression ... plays a substantive, explicit, and recognized role in shaping collective possibility at a time of critical need.

Post-script

The rest, by now, is repetition. Four disruptions that demonstrate our inadequacy and send us crisis-hopping coalesce into the innovation paradigm of the complexity economy. In so doing, they reposition both our inner capacity and outer context in ways that promise a transformation of the relationship between art and society. Pluralism shifts from moral imperative to strategic advantage. Collective structure and identity evolve from sector to system. And the insights of *Towards Braiding* and strategic foresight ready us for uncertain futures through an inherent willingness to be transformed.

   Through it all, we are the arts and must remain so. We are of little use to anyone otherwise. Grounding this process in the aesthetic—our unique value proposition—is an attempt to amplify and operationalize the paradox that has always inhabited our social destiny. What Claire Bishop calls "the productive contradiction of art's relationship to social change" is the act of understanding art as both essentially autonomous and "inextricably bound to the promise of a better world to come."[105] Abandon either, and we forfeit point and purpose. Hold on to both, and we might emerge a more explicit and accountable service, retaining the integrity of our unique capacity even as we move further afield in its application. In this, like Odysseus, we might fasten ourselves to the strengths of what we are, while sailing deep into the drowning world.

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[105] Bishop, 2012. 29.

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