PLAYING THE ART GAME

Coral Reef
Awash at Low Water

Coral Reef
Awash at Low Water

Landing

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MAGNETIC

VAR 10°30'E (1986)

ANNUAL DECREASE 5

CONTENTS

DEPTHS IN METRES
SCALE 1:25 000

SYNOPSIS

We'll use a recent exhibition as a jumping off point to explore the dangers of attempting a radical confrontation of the status quo from within the structures and conventions of the 'art-world'. Our contention is that in being aligned with 'art' (either explicitly, through self-application of the label 'art', or implicitly through exploiting the structures of 'art') radical acts run the danger of negating their own ends; whilst 'art' is many things, we'll consider its potential as an arm of the State – a contortion of form that works to neutralize its true essence, an essence that often has very little to do with the structures of the 'art-world'; and which, for reasons that will hopefully become clear, is inherently in opposition to restrictive State structures.

We'll also consider the potential for art to act as a fetish or resting place; a world within which radicalism can be safely play-acted without the threat of substantial change - change that may, at bottom, threaten the structures upon which the 'art-world' is built.

How does the public participate in political dialogue? What constitutes public opinion? What do people understand "public space" to mean? The significance of the social plays a central role in the discourse on art. Concepts such as participation, collaboration, the social turn, and community-based art have clearly influenced both the production and the reception of art.

The exhibition project Playing the City reveals public space to be a collective, free, and designable space. From 20 April to 6 May 2009, twenty-three international artists, such as Ulf Aminde, Dara Friedman, Dora García, Cezary Bodzianowski, and Sharon Hayes, will turn central Frankfurt into the site of countless activities and situations, ranging from performances by way of installations to "guerrilla actions" that involve the audience in a wide variety of ways.

Playing the City can also be followed on the Internet, as a digital extension of public space: the Web page www.playingthecity.de—created especially for the show—brings together all the video, text, and visual materials, an exhibition calendar, and a blog. It is thus a catalog and exhibition forum in one. An office and exhibition headquarters has been set up in one of the Schirn's gallery space where the exhibition team can do its work in public: fine-tuning the Web site, answering questions about the exhibition, and organizing, commenting on, and documenting all the actions. In addition, works by Rirkrit Tiravanija and Nasan Tur, among others, and videos of the actions that have already taken place will be shown in the gallery as a film loop.

This text comes from the press release for an event that took place recently in Frankfurt, called *Playing the City*. The release goes on to mention that the event is a "continuation of the ideas of important avant-garde movements of the twentieth century" and cites Dada, the Situationist International and Fluxus as being amongst these forebears. We'll be considering the ambitions of this event, and reflecting on the use of viewing actions like these through the lens of 'art'.

ART AND THE EVERYDAY

To get a little perspective on the motivations and intentions of *Playing the City*, it will be handy to consider those avant-garde that it cites in its release. We'll be interested in why they came about and why they took the form that they did. What were their ideas and motivations, and how might these still be relevant today?

Dada (1916-1922)

Born against the backdrop of the First World War, Dada was an international network of activists, united by their opposition to ideas and attitudes that were prevailing within both the art world and society at large. They perceived these ideas as corrosive, and as contributing towards a dysfunction, of which the War was seen as an obvious symptom.

This sense of *things going wrong* was perceived to be an outcome of capitalist-engendered modes of thought; many saw capitalism as a restrictive and oppressive system that is opposed to important needs and ideas. Their actions - their answers to the dysfunction - are the acts that have become Dada.

Status Quo

We are born into the world without knowledge of categories, standards or limitations: to the infant the world is a place of infinite potential. As we grow we become accustomed to the conventions of the society in which we live, drawing borders across an expanse of possibility; we are taught how to move, what to say and what not to say, what to do and what not to do; we are shown that certain actions are acceptable and certain actions are unacceptable; certain thoughts are allowed, whilst others are disallowed; and if we take this information on board successfully then we are able to become a functioning member of society. This process of adjustment is achieved through contact with ideas, which we are exposed to in a number of different environments. Our early ideas will likely originate from within the family or the school, and as we grow they will come from other places, like creeds, and the media. We can describe these sources of ideology as structures, and they are in place to allow the individual to adjust to the norms and standards of a society.

Adjusting to society is a vital process of negotiation and can – if taken at face value - be seen as a great achievement. Yet, in having our thoughts and actions prescribed we run the risk of losing sight of something that was precious to us as infants: our ability to *be ourselves*. Whilst our ideological structures show us how to fit in, they also help us to lose our individuality; jagged edges are rounded, so that the fit is a smooth one. And in our preoccupation with fitting we may neglect to consider what it is we are striving to fit into; to question smooth over rough, jagged over rounded. In this way the status quo is maintained.

It is in the interests of the State for things to stay as they are, and for people to go on adapting to society the way it currently is. Inasmuch as they function in helping us adapt to the current way of things, we can see these structures of ideas – the family, the school, the creed – as outposts of the State. We are taught to 'not get into trouble', 'to be good' and 'to do well', commonsense imperatives that work in our own interests, whilst also helping to maintain the status quo. So whilst, ostensively at least, the interests of the State may appear to be in common with the interests of the people, they may also be divergent. Through the structures of a society – which are also the telescoped ideologies of the State - conventions, standards, and limits ¬are maintained, allowing the proliferation of the overarching *State ideology*.

With this in mind, it makes sense that the dysfunctional structures that were detected within society at large were mirrored within the art-world – itself an annex of State ideology - and it was here that Dada

fought many of its battles. From their vantage point within 'culture', artists were well placed to sniff out corrosion. As Terry Eagleton reminds us, "Culture was about civility, community, imaginative creation, spiritual values, moral qualities, the texture of lived experience, all of which were under siege from a soulless industrial capitalism."[1] If the militant spirit effervesced within culture, then it may have been because it seemed "the only forum where one could still raise questions about fundamental ends and values, in the midst of a society impatient with such airy-fairy notions."[2]

Institutionalized Art

The popular paradigm of art is based upon ideas that have their roots in the Renaissance – an era that, emerging sleepy-eyed from pre-capitalist systems, began to place an unprecedented importance upon capital, prizing the initiative of the individual like no time before it. As capitalism grew in influence, its idea-system proliferated throughout society, and 'art' was inevitably subsumed. Adapting to its language and conventions, the art-world became another outpost within which, if only inexplicitly, the State could propagate its influence.

Our contemporary conventions showcase the kind of ideology that began to take hold in the wake of the Renaissance, ideology in which the logic of the marketplace prevails. Placing an exchange value upon the art-object allows it to be transformed into a commodity, able to be bought and sold like any other object, and recuperated into a system in which commodity exchange is the lifeblood. Viewing art in this way also serves to depotentiate any threat it may pose to the status quo, because whatever else it may be, it is, in the last, a commodity; familiar and safe.

The commodification of the artwork goes hand in hand with the cult of beauty. If an object can be packaged as beautiful and exotic then its market value can reflect these sought-after characteristics. In this sense, the *work of art* – art as beautiful object – became a dominant idea, proliferated by the art world and reflected in the 'beauty-sells' ideology of society at large.

Linked to this is the fetishization of the 'masterpiece'. As a thing of beauty and rarity, the art-object can be portrayed as a precious commodity, with mysterious powers of exchange - an idea that also serves to place great importance upon the artist. As creator of the great object, the artist is endowed with stature and importance; his value reflected in his talent, a rare gift from which is birthed the exotic and sought-after art object.

It is no coincidence that the Italian of the Renaissance is seen as "the first individual"[3]. Within a society that began to place greater importance upon individual achievement, in which every man was free to 'make himself', the artist, exploiting the power relations of the emerging capitalist system, was able to establish himself as an important individual, enabling him to rise above the mass of men. An artist's talent was his peacock's tail, a source of power within a society in which power relations had become increasingly important. Holding his masterpiece before him, the artist ascended. The heights offered privilege and security; he was distinct from the shapeless masses, and less vulnerable to the manipulations of those in power[4]. His work, whilst it may have been many other things, was now a justification of unbalanced power relations, a tool of tyranny.

It is in this way that art, despite all else that it was and is, became part of a system of exploitation. Through pushing the cult of the artist – the idea that the artist, gifted as he is, is in some way separate and *distinct* from the mass of men – art became the preserve of the few, in turn distancing the masses from something vital: creativity. Art was for those talented enough to create it, or rich enough to own it, a microcosm of the class-divisions that were emerging in society at large: "separation […] mis-recognized as autonomy, privilege justified as talent"[5].

Democratizing 'Art'

Dada sought to combat these ideas through rejecting the bourgeois framework of the established art world; to lay waste to outdated notions based upon exploitation in order to make way for new visions. It took form in literature, performances, paintings, poetry and music, most of which were contrary to

paradigmic forms of 'good art'. The sanctity of the precious art-object was purposefully subverted, and the artist-genius booted from his throne. Famously, Duchamp – the usurping court jester - launched an attack on Renaissance values with an attack on the model Renaissance man, scrawling a moustache on that most precious of artefacts, da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa'.

Through attacking the ideology of cultural structures, Dada also presented a radical challenge to the dominant ideology of the State. Its proponents described it as 'anti-art', suggesting that the true essence of 'art' was not simply to be found in those objects and practices deemed as acceptable by the structures of the art-world; indeed that its true essence was in some way being limited and curtailed by these structures. The masses had been robbed of 'art', a heist that had led to its incarceration in galleries and museums, with limited visitation rights granted to the public. Dada's was a plan to steal art back and set it free: to smash the object and release its soul.

The Situationist International (1957-1972)

Whilst Dada was largely concerned with the structures of exploitation within culture, the S.I. turned its attention more explicitly to society at large; its battleground was the everyday - the lives we lead day-in, day-out – and, like Dada, it was concerned with how our experience of the world is unjustifiably curtailed by capitalist ideology.

If Dada sought to drag art from the bourgeois confines of the gallery to the democracy of the street, to liberate creativity from the clutch of the 'artist' and return it to the masses, the S.I. ran with the idea, seeking to fuse art, and the creativity of the artistic act, with the flow of our everyday lives. The S.I. suggested that art should not necessarily be confined to galleries, where we must *go to it*; that it can also be intertwined with our everyday experience, as a fundamental aspect of a fulfilled existence.

The Situationists were dissatisfied with the kind of unimaginative and conventional experiences that were sanctioned by society, and saw opportunities to construct an everyday reality that provided greater possibilities for imagination and play. They came up with a number of initiatives that were designed to realize their ideas about creative living, important amongst which was the concept of the situation, which they advocated as a method of grasping and owning experience.

"We must thus envisage a sort of situationist-oriented psychoanalysis in which […] each of the participants in this adventure would discover desires for specific ambiences in order to fulfill them. Each person must seek what he loves, what attracts him. [...] Through this method one can tabulate elements out of which situations can be constructed, along with projects to dynamize these elements."[6]

The situation was intended as a unification of life and art. If before the two had been separate - with art as a peripheral experience, little related to the functionalities of everyday life - the situation was intended to reunite them, restoring creativity to the everyday.

Other initiatives included Psychogeography, which was primarily oriented towards seeing and realizing the potential for creativity and play within urban environments. It included, amongst other things, the concept of the dérive; "[...] to dérive was to notice the way in which certain areas, streets, or buildings resonate with states of mind, inclinations, and desires, and to seek out reasons for movement other than those for which an environment was designed. It was very much a matter of using an environment for one's own ends [...]"[7]

Linked to the idea of Psychogeography was Unitary Urbanism, which addressed the way that our environments are constructed and the potential they leave for possibilities of movement, imagination and play. Unitary Urbanism analysed the effect of architecture on our experience, with specific regard to the psychological implications of buildings and environments. It sought to merge functional considerations with the potential for play and imagination, in an effort to create environments that would facilitate the overarching Situationist project, that of creative living.

In giving names to the kinds of whimsical and ephemeral urges and ideas that we all probably experience from time to time, the Situationists sanctioned a broader range of movement for the individual within society; the importance of giving these ideas weight, be it though theoretical discourse or visible action, was that they became less easy to dismiss – they were no longer relegated to the realms of simple whimsy or fancy, or condemned to lurk in the shadowy recesses of the mind. Through elevating ideas about play and imagination to the level of serious discourse, they aimed to bring validity to these oft-overlooked aspects of experience.

Fluxus (1960s)

Fluxus can be defined as a loose network of artists who shared certain sensibilities. Its project, inasmuch as it had a unified goal, was very similar to that of the S.I.; those involved saw greater potential for movement and expression within daily existence than was currently sanctioned by society, and, through their various artistic projects, sought to live and advocate the creative life.

Whilst it was perhaps less explicitly radical than either Dada or the S.I., Fluxus was motivated by the same essential concerns, and, at bottom, shared the same enemy; the stifling influence of an advanced capitalist system. Inasmuch as Dada could be perceived as a predominantly destructive project – an attempt to destroy the values that it considered corrosive – Fluxus could be seen as largely the opposite. In the wake of Modernism, there was, in a sense, nothing left to destroy. Fluxus emerged at a time when the stable meanings of pre-Modernist society – faith in progress, order, and reason – had already been reduced to rubble; a time, on the cusp of what was to be referred to as Postmodernism, when all that was left to do was play amongst the ruins. If there was nothing left to destroy, then the only thing to do was build. Its project was realized through prolific acts of creation, most of which took place under the watchful eye of its unofficial 'CEO', George Macuinas.

Of particular importance were the ideas of participation and do-it-yourself. In advocating creative living, Fluxus pointed towards a way of life that was theoretically accessible to everyone, and through its initiatives it sought, like Dada, to combat the idea that art was the exclusive province of the artist, and to reintroduce the idea of creativity as a valuable part of daily existence.

Fluxus artworks were various in number and content, but notable among them was the Fluxbox. Primarily a way of re-categorizing various everyday objects – objects that we may have become mindless to - in a bid to stimulate imagination, each box would contain an assortment of objects, together with an image or text that aimed to reframe them, to explode their possibilities. One box, for example, contained a number of lengths of dried spaghetti, its title reading 'flux-snakes.' Another contained seeds, shells, twigs, keys, and a chesspiece, with the instruction to 'Spell your name with these objects.'

Also notable were 'Event Scores' – these worked in a similar manner to musical scores, only instead of containing musical notation they generally contained written instructions. Dick Higgins score 'Danger Music Number Eleven', for example, contains the instruction to "Change your mind repeatedly in a lyrical manner about Roman Catholicism."

Imagination was key to those involved in Fluxus, and their playful interventions were a way of reinvigorating a fundamental human capacity that was, and *is*, perpetually in danger of being dulled by a system that serves to limit the truth of the individual.

"Fluxus is inside you, is part of how you are. It isn't just a bunch of things and dramas but is part of how you live."[8]

Relational Art

The press release for *Playing the City* also mentions something called 'Relational Art', a term that has been used to describe forms of art that seek to produce or facilitate human relations; artworks that, for various reasons, seek to bring people together.

The term could be applied retrospectively to many of the initiatives of the ideas that we've just considered, in particular the situations constructed by the S.I. and the events of Fluxus.

Whilst its limits and intentions may be contestable, it is relevant to our inquiry inasmuch as it sought to highlight a trend that saw a lessening of the distance between the artist and the audience. Like Dada, it undermines the traditional post-Renaissance idea of the artist-creator/artist-genius, displacing his position and skewing the conventional relationship between artist and audience, allowing it to become more ambiguous. Here, the artist is able to slide from the role of creator and assume the role of *initiator*: instead of creating a work which is then consumed by an audience, the initiator of relational art may seek to simply create the conditions for an event – a meeting, a happening, a communing, a conflict – to take place. The opening upstages the artworks[9].

In its challenge to the traditional structure of the artist-audience relationship, Relational Art could be seen to inherit the projects of the avant-gardes. If we look at the Situationists ideas for the construction of situations, we see that they bear many similarities to those works that have fallen under the umbrella of Relational Art;

"[…] the most pertinent revolutionary experiments in culture have sought to break the spectators' psychological identification with the hero so as to draw them into activity. . . . The situation is thus designed to be lived by its constructors. The role played by a passive or merely bit-part playing 'public' must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term, 'livers,' must steadily increase."[10]

CAPITALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The avant-gardes shared a common protest against aspects of the capitalist system. We've brushed upon some of these already, but to gain a broader perspective on the situation it may help to probe a little further.

Emergence and Ideology

The conception of the individual offered by pre-capitalist society has little in common with contemporary notions. Whilst we live in a world in which we are urged to make the most of ourselves, in which we can – in theory at least – become whatever we want to become, the frontiers of the world for the pre-capitalist individual were largely governed by birth. Mental and geographical borders were pre-ordained, the lottery of heritage determining his role within society and his place within the world. His life, in large part, was already mapped out for him.

In contrast with modern man, the individual within pre-capitalist society appears to be characterised by a lack of personal freedom; a comparison that presents us with a picture of a limited life. Yet this absence of liberty was not without its benefits. Pre-capitalist society offered a stratified structure, in which the individual had an unchangeable and unquestionable role to play, imbuing life with "meaning which left no place, and no need, for doubt."[11] Having a definitive role within a structured system gave man a feeling of security and belonging.

Within such a strictly compartmentalized system, the image of the individual was indiscernible from that of the whole, and whilst we may interpret this as a lack of freedom, psychologist Erich Fromm suggests otherwise; "Medieval society did not deprive the individual of his freedom, because the "individual" did not yet exist; man was still related to the world by primary ties."[12] He had yet to emerge as distinct from the society that surrounded him, and was, in this sense, still the child, safe in the family-bubble: lacking the broad range of movements afforded to the mature individual, yet nevertheless able to defer personal responsibility and enjoy the security of a cosseted existence.

By the late Middle Ages the importance of capital had grown in along with increasing trade opportunities, weakening the unity and centralization of medieval society[13]. This change was particularly noticeable in Italy thanks to the commercial advantages offered by its geographical location[14], and, as we touched upon earlier, it was here that the individual first began to emerge from his primary ties.

The structures and systems of pre-capitalist society had grown around the everyday activities and aims of a life that had its roots in religious ideology. Economic activities were no more than a means to an end, the economic system a structural necessity that was shadowed by more pious concerns[15]. Capitalism was to turn this state-of-affairs on its head, placing the onus on the accumulation of capital and turning economic activity into an end in itself - an idea that, as Fromm points out, would have struck the pre-capitalist individual as decidedly irrational.[16]

Affects of capitalist ideology
on the psychology of the individual

With the traditional structures of society breaking down, a new order emerged, one based primarily upon the power relations engendered by capital. To possess it was to possess power, enabling a wider range of movement within a world that had suddenly expanded its borders. His bubble burst, man was faced with freedom.

In reframing man as an individual, capitalism was in many ways the uncompromising parent, giving the boot to its complacent child. It pronounced in no uncertain terms that the time had come for him to stand on his own two feet, prompting, on a societal scale, a process that Fromm refers to as *individuation*. Akin to the 'flowering' of an individual, individuation is essentially a course of maturation, in which the individual emerges from the sanctuary of the family (from what Fromm refers to as 'primary ties') into self-sufficiency, relinquishing comforting restrictions in order to face freedom - a freedom that demands they take full ownership of their thoughts, and actions.

In promoting the emergence of the individual and the accompanying severance of primary ties, capitalism can be seen as an important advancement in the maturation of society; not only did it free the individual from traditional bonds, it also contributed tremendously to the growth of an active, critical, responsible self[17]: as the individual saw the firm ground beneath him gradually begin to crack and give way, he realized he would have to learn to swim or risk drowning.

With the dissolution of pre-capitalist structures, man was offered a range of movement that was formerly unimaginable. Freed from the ties that had held him in place, he was, in theory at least, able to make of his life what he wished. The responsibility for his life was placed firmly into his own hands, his destiny unwritten.

Whilst looking good on paper, this newfound sense of liberation was not without its drawbacks. The security and structure of pre-capitalist society was vanishing along with the inherent sense of purpose and direction that it offered, developments that threatened to constellate anxiety within the individual who was used to the chloroform-comfort of primary ties. Freedom had exposed the individual to the elements, making him feel isolated, insignificant and powerless. Unknown machinations were now taking place around him, the earth rumbling with the new momentum of free trade.

How did man adapt to these new developments, and in what ways did they affect his thinking?

Market Orientation

In freeing man from his ties, capitalism offered the potential of a new, and better, life. His tethers cut, he was free to rise as high as he wished - but this privilege was not his alone. The heights were up for grabs, and in order to gain the best view he would have to ensure that he rose higher than those around him. The road to success – to the most advantageous view – was achieved through selling; if man could sell successfully then he was able to *become* successful. Instead of selling enough to get along – to maintain an age-old lifestyle – he was prompted to sell as a means to advancement. No longer tied to his place, through selling more he could break with tradition and imagine something new.

With the best views exclusive, the individual was forced to consider his product within a marketplace that was both more expansive and more competitive. Pious concerns were replaced with economic ones; everyday discourse coloured by the language and ideology of the marketplace. This state of affairs has reached its apotheosis in recent times. If something does not sell successfully – if not enough people want it – then it is deemed as a failure. Within this ideology, quantity becomes a key determinant of success; the more people want something, the more successful it is. The notion of success becomes confused with market-values, and success in all domains becomes defined by the ideology of the marketplace. Only a few people turned up to your party, so it was not a success. You only have a few friends, so *you* are not a success.

It is testament to the pervasiveness of capitalist ideology that we even come to think of ourselves as products, to be carefully crafted to sell to the highest number. Market ideology pervades all aspects of life, its fiction transforming us into commodities, and our relations into a series of marketplaces within which we sell ourselves: as employees, as sex objects, as lovers, as friends.

The concept of the 'glamour model' is an obvious example; with her blonde hair, bronzed skin and practiced repertoire of facial expressions, she is as finely-tuned to sell to a specific market as the newest model of executive saloon; she sells herself, and in doing so promotes to the masses the 'look' that she is selling – she tells us, on behalf of our collective ideology, 'this is what the market wants, and this is how you sell yourself to it" - the market, in this instance, being 'men' - or at least, the State's idea of men.

"Flesh is converted into sign", the body "etched, pummelled, pumped up, shrunk and remoulded"[18] in order to sell more effectively. Not only is the specific look of the glamour model pushed, but also the very idea that women must 'sell' in the first place, proliferating the mentality of the system. In her role as a tool of the State, the glamour model serves to teach a generation of girls how to kit themselves out to become successful commodities in a competitive marketplace.

Market-orientation is not restricted to glamour-model clones; most of us, at points, feel the pressure to sell ourselves in some way; and with technology increasing the forms through which we communicate, it is also - as a recent article on a "narcissism epidemic" among young girls suggests - proliferating the places in which one is required to self-promote.[19]

With all this emphasis on selling, we begin to think of the conventions of the system as innate and unavoidable. All motives become inextricably linked with selling and individual gain, and "what are you trying to sell?" becomes the permeating dictum. Our view of humanity is bent and twisted to fit a system that often works to encourage the worst.

Competition

In freeing man from the constraints of a stratified system, capitalism appeared to promote the idea of equality; man was free to define himself, and, importantly, to advance himself within society. Yet, through pushing the idea of economic advancement the system also placed emphasis upon the notion of competition, setting one individual against another.

We've seen how the ideology of the marketplace can infiltrate numerous aspects of our life, making us conscious of what we are selling, and how well we are selling it. This emphasis on selling inevitably promotes competitive relations, because in selling something - be it a skill, talent, idea or look - there will, more often than not, be others selling the same thing.

As an essential component of capitalist ideology, the notion of competition has suffused the popular consciousness, its influence spreading beyond purely economic relations. To compete seems like a very natural thing to have to do, and we have Darwin's *Theory of Evolution* to remind us that competition is in the natural way of things. Yet, whilst it may be an inevitable aspect of human relations, it remains a singular aspect upon many. The emphasis that capitalism places upon this idea, and the way in which it is communicated to us can frequently be problematic.

In many instances a competitive mindset is aroused when it needn't be, through setting arbitrary limits on desirable resources. Psychologist Ellen Langer refers to this tendency as a 'belief in limited resources', and describes the effect that it can have in some of the most unlikely areas of existence. She gives the example of a couple going through a divorce, with both parents competing for custody of their child; "Who will "get" the child? This may be the wrong question. What is actually at stake? Is it the physical presence of the child that the parents want, or is it a certain relationship with the child? Is it the child's body or the child's unlimited love they seek? […] A mindful consideration of what is actually being sought might show that there is enough of the so-called limited resource to go around."[20]

Langer's example shows us how a competitive mindset can invade relations beyond the economic, and can become a default mode of exchange where, often, it needn't be. When the objects of our desire

are perceived as limited, it follows that to get what we want we will have to compete for it. Whilst it may be the case that many things are by nature limited, it is often from the emphasis upon the necessity to compete that dysfunction can arise. Fromm describes the effects of a competitive mindset upon the individual; "His relationship to his fellow men, with everyone a potential competitor, has become hostile and estranged; he is free – that is, he is alone, isolated, threatened from all sides."[21]

Advancement and Careerism

Whilst allowing the individual to flourish in formerly unthinkable ways, capitalism also unharnessed his urge for power and status. Our example of the Renaissance artist, using his art as a tool of power, offers us an early indicator of a mindset that would become commonplace throughout society.

Our gifts, the things that separate us - be it talent, beauty or intelligence – are instrumentalized, their function as occasions for celebration and communion seconded to their utility as tools of advancement. State ideology urges its citizens to 'be someone', a fiction that is communicated and strengthened through stories of success (from the everyday tale of achievement and victory featured in the pages of the local paper, through to the latest celebrity autobiography) and our worship of those who have 'made it' (celebrities; those who are top of their field; 'geniuses'). To progress economically and secure a favourable position within a free-for-all system, the individual is compelled to draw upon whatever resources allow him to achieve this. In this sense, the gift – as long as it is valued by society – takes its place as an element of a wider tyranny; both reason, motivation, and justification for the attainment of power.

The collapse of the static pre-capitalist system, in which every man was guaranteed a place, cast the future in shades of uncertainty. Man was free to define his destiny, and in order to safeguard it he was compelled to consider his prospects within the market. Self-preservation became an important consideration, and careerism a defence against fear of the future. Within the capitalist system man was constantly urged to think of himself, if only to avoid coming a cropper further along the line.

Capitalism promoted rampant self-interest, whilst at the same time directing energies away from something that may have helped man to face his fear of the future: self-development.

Self-development

We've touched upon how, in ousting the individual from the bosom of society into a position of self-responsibility, capitalism marked a milestone in the psychological maturation of society. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that capitalism provided the conditions for growth, laying the responsibility for development at the feet of the individual. Many were simply not ready to accept this responsibility and instead of learning the new steps that were required of them, regained equilibrium through what Fromm refers to as 'secondary bonds.' Through these means the individual willingly annihilated himself within the whole, returning once more to a state of reliance.

We achieve self-annihilation in a variety of ways, not least through the denial of self-development. Perversely, self-development is perhaps the very thing that would allow us, following the severance of our primary bonds, a positive equilibrium once again.

But what do we mean when we talk of self-development? It involves, amongst other things, thinking about the self – about our beliefs, our ideas, our ambitions. In thinking about these important things we are able to take responsibility for them, to make the thoughts our own, and thus counteract the assumptive ignorance of received wisdom. We are able to form a personal life-philosophy, regardless of how rudimentary it may be.

It does not mean a wrapping up within the self, or a constant state of navel gazing: self-development is not selfishness. Rather, to think about the self is to learn to know and to love the self – it is an affirmation of who you are. To listen to what you need; to take time to know yourself, and to allow yourself the room to grow, is to turn out towards the world. In loving yourself you are more able to

love others, and to be more amenable in your relations. It is an act in service of the community, because through finding and developing the self the individual becomes more able to service the community. Self-development, as perverse as it may seem, involves a relinquishing of the self and is, in the last, an act of turning outwards.

The Flight from Self-development

Thinking about the self is often not a comfortable or easy thing to do, and fortunately the system provides us with a variety of ways in which we can avoid doing this.

The idea of self-development is itself denigrated through a widespread denial of the self, and through watchwords like 'selfish' and 'self-indulgent' that allow us to circumnavigate other words, like 'self-analysis'. We deny ourselves - our needs and development - in the interests of society; which, in the last, are the interests of the State. A paradoxical smokescreen is put in place around this denial, with contemporary society seemingly placing more importance on the individual than at any time previously. Ours is, we are frequently reminded, a selfish society: it is an old saw to point out that consumerism is rampant; that we like nothing more than to spend on the latest commodities and indulge in hedonistic abandon, all the while moving further away from so called 'traditional values'.

But what is really happening here? Is this fiction of the contemporary individual really about self-affirmation? Perhaps what we are affirming is the *pseudo-self*; a safe assemblage of the self afforded to us by the system, replete with pre-ordained desires, opinions, and ambitions – that confuses its own voice with that of its maker.

Through its distractions - its motion - the system helps keep us from standing still too long, aiding us in our flight from the true self. Work keeps us busy for a large proportion of our time, and when we aren't busy with work we are offered a variety of activities to help maintain the momentum. Through staying busy we are able to preserve a sense of self-identity that reflection dispels. When we are at work in the world we have a seeming solidity[22]. Without self-knowledge we remain unaware that our structures rest in water, and the confusion of the depths – with its promise to disorient and inspire - is kept from us.

These distractions are undoubtedly not, in most cases, crafted with this sinister purpose in mind; it is the systems into which they are birthed that are rigged for maximum manipulation. It is the way that we are taught to consume, the compulsions that we learn unconsciously and take as givens – this is where the dysfunction lies.

Nanny State

The system does our thinking for us on the things that matter – politics, ethics, philosophy – so that we needn't concern ourselves. Complicated issues are made still more so by all sorts of methods to befog them. Knowledge is divided into a series of domains, to which the public has varying degrees of access. Certain knowledge becomes 'specialist' and is confined to the domains of the 'specialisms', where it is understood by 'specialists'. When specialist knowledge does trickle down to the masses, it is invariably communicated in a condescending and obfuscating fashion, by a communications establishment that may be more interested in making money than actually communicating (Doctor and journalist Ben Goldacre on the media - "Why is science in the media so often pointless, simplistic, boring, or just plain wrong? […] It is my hypothesis that in their choice of stories, and the way they cover them, the media create a parody of science, for their own means."[23])

The insignificance of the individual is furthered through the vast and overwhelming nature of things. Modern ghost-stories tell of the horrors of biological weaponry; clips of military hardware overwhelm us with their brute force, bringing the alien and unfathomable sounds and dimensions of war machinery into the collective imagination, the collective nightmare; news programmes serve up conflicts in places we will never visit, and barely knew existed; concrete and glass tower over us, metal flies by us in a

cloud of exhaust fumes, music becomes louder, faster.

In his analysis in 1942, Fromm made reference to *Mickey Mouse*, suggesting that the popularity of the cartoon was partly attributable to its archetypal display of the 'small guy' winning out over the 'big guy', a way for culture to maintain the illusion of control. In our age, we could perhaps just as easily look to the likes of *Transformers* as fulfilling this function: machines mesh in a clattering ballet of mechanised violence, and yet, from the carnage it is man – and the precious, unbroken sanctity of his body - that emerges triumphant. Amongst the crash and roar of advanced mechanisation, myths like *Transformers* sell the illusion that we are in control, whilst ultimately working to steal away our sovereignty.

Film, along with television, advertising, and other forms of storytelling, also serves to sell us a variety of fantasies and illusions that work to satisfy our collective and individual ideas of utopia, pacifying any urge we may have to actually realize these visions. As theorist Terry Eagleton explains, "By encouraging us to dream beyond the present, it may also provide the existing social order with a convenient safety-valve. Imagining a more just future may confiscate some of the energies necessary to achieve it."[24]

As we touched upon, the system assigns us with a version of ourselves – the pseudo or social self – through telling us what we want and what we need, a process that is achieved via the various ideological structures of the State. Our cultural structure defines us through the popularization of certain types of art, the telling and re-telling of certain stories. Our communications structure, through its adverts and media stories, shapes our wants and needs, and delineates our ethical borders. Finally, our educational structure prepares us for what is to come through a process of pruning, initiating us into the customs of society and defining our conduct within it. The boundaries of our meanings are drawn by the system, and to look beyond them is to risk condemnation.

Through these systems a social-self is assigned to us, and this is the self that resides within the 'public domain'; here the vibrant colours – the individual idiosyncrasies - of a society are mixed into a grey-brown soup. It is mostly a safe place, where risks cannot be taken; where the exposure of the individual – the true self – chances provocation and offence. "[The system] labels all actions 'individualistic' […] while subterraneanly, in despised everyday domains, it necessarily furnishes, as in a delirium, the elements for a collective formation … With this raw material, we must occupy ourselves – with gray buildings, market halls, department stores, exhibitions."[25]

The public domain is accompanied by a 'public voice', exemplified by prevalent and popular figures like *Big Brother*'s Davina McCall, mercifully defining the limits of our intelligence and critical capacity with various proclamations on our behalf - "Did you understand that? No, neither did I!"

In the absence of the firm ground of self-knowledge, commodities - red-blood cells of the system - become ways of buoying up the self. The less an individual feels he is being somebody, the more need he has for possessions[26]; we come to define ourselves through what we own, the commodity reflecting a perceived sense of self. Our objects surround us, telling us everything about ourselves; who we are, how important we are, the ways in which we matter. If we can surround ourselves with enough objects then it follows that we would no longer need to look *inside* to know the self, and to love the self would simply be to love our possessions.

The State is the bad parent or the unconcerned lover – rich, and disinterested – showing affection through money and expensive gifts. Psychological self-development, as a concrete reality (as opposed to a fictional utopia, the likes of which we see frequently in modern forms of storytelling) is not in its interests; a nation of people who think for themselves would not fit into the capitalist mould quite so easily, and we may even begin to question the sanity of our various structures and systems. For this reason, amongst others, self-development is not on the popular agenda. Our capacity for critical thinking is dulled, and our political energy lost within the white-noise of complications, obfuscation and mistruths. Psychological immaturity becomes the status quo.

Capitalism allowed us the freedom to define ourselves in a way that was previously unavailable. Self development would, in Fromm's view, make redundant the methods of escape that we currently employ to maintain our equilibrium, relieving us from 'negative freedom' and helping us toward 'positive freedom' – that is, freedom that is founded upon a positive assertion of the self and the world, rather than denial and escape.

We'll return to the idea of self-development and psychological maturity later on, and look into its implications both for the individual and society.

It is worth noting that when we talk of the distractions of the system (such as cultural objects, like films or television programmes) our criticism is not so much of the objects themselves – which may often be created with the best of intentions - but with the ways in which they are used; in other words, the systems which instrumentalize them, put them to use. To observe that films are often part of a machinery of distraction, that they sanitize and sublimate tendencies that may go against the status quo, is not necessarily to condemn those involved in making films as conscious agents of the State. On the contrary, those who create these objects may often do so as a positive expression of creativity, and in our consumption of these objects we are able to appreciate and celebrate this creativity. This transaction – the sharing of ideas and meaning through culture – is a fundamental one to our species, and we cannot condemn these objects, or those that create them, for their part in it. If a malignancy exists, then it is in the structures and systems that surround these innate, and harmless, transactions. It is often our systems that force us onto the self-destructive paths that we tread, and these objects may be as much victims to them as we are.[27]

Relations within the system

Capitalism tends to promote what psychologist Ellen Langer has termed 'outcome-orientation'; "When children start a new activity with an outcome orientation, questions of "Can I?" or "What if I can't do it?" are likely to predominate, creating an anxious preoccupation with success or failure rather than drawing on the child's natural, exuberant desire to explore. Instead of enjoying the colour of the crayon, the designs on the paper, and a variety of possible shapes along the way, the child sets about writing a "correct" letter A."[28]

Outcome orientation can be seen as a symptom of the kind of wide-scale instrumentalism that is promoted by the system. Just as our actions are frequently determined by their potential for *success*, and our talents transformed into tools of *advancement*, our relationships are also often defined by utility.

We can see an illustration of this in popular entertainment programmes like *The Apprentice*, in which contestants define their relationships to each other purely through the rules of the game, one that necessitates the ruthless relations of market-oriented instrumentality. To each other, the contestants are first and foremost competitors, a fact that is reflected in their frequent lack of compassion towards one another. To their superiors they are subordinated, at the arse-end of an inherently unbalanced power relationship. The underlying justification for these relationships - relations that, in another context, may appear decidedly dysfunctional - is the dictum 'Its only business'. We are, then, under no illusions; these are business relationships, dictated by the rules of the marketplace: compassion needn't come into it.

Whilst *The Apprentice* may simply be an exaggerated pantomime, or a cynical fiction, its relationships help illustrate a widespread truth; that often, instrumentality is our primary bond to each other. The instrumental relationship transforms us into 'things', there to be manipulated for various ends. We see the effects of instrumental relations in the workplace, where the relationship between employer and employee is often, as Fromm suggests, permeated by a "spirit of indifference […] It is not a relationship of two human beings who have any interest in the other outside of this mutual usefulness."[29] Our relationship to our work, the thing that we may spend most of our time engaged with, is often just as devoid of love and imagination, existing purely as a means to an end; a way to make money. Again, the system defines the limits of our meanings, encouraging unimaginative bare-bones relationships that speak a language of cold necessity.

As with competitiveness, it may be that instrumentality is an unavoidable outcome of human relations. If this is so, then we must question the sanity of a system that seeks to emphasize this idea rather than minimize it.

FROM '-' TO '+'

In our analysis of capitalism we've hoped to highlight dysfunctional elements of the system in order to show why the avant-gardes found it problematic. Their willingness to embrace freedom – to think for themselves, to *own* themselves – cast them in opposition to a system that prefers to limit the truth of the individual.

Terry Eagleton paints a picture in which radicals are "saddled with inconvenient beliefs"[30], in which the radical does not so much have their sights set on the future, in dreams of a utopia, as in the present, in working to remedy the deficiencies of the here and now. If we elaborate on this image, we can see society as pathologized, with the radical as part-symptom (neurosis), part-cure (therapist); drawing attention to dysfunction, whilst working to remedy it. The radical-as-therapist hopes to bring society towards a more 'healthy' state of being; a state in which the individual (and, by extension, society) could flourish to a greater extent than is presently possible.

In this image, Dada, with its emphasis on destruction, becomes a Jungian neurosis - a rogue element of the psyche, undermining and sabotaging its conscious intentions. Jung saw the psyche as self-regulating, balancing the conscious desires of the ego with the needs of the unconscious. When the actions of the ego caused an imbalance, then a neurosis would result; in this sense, part of the function of the neurosis is to bring attention to what is being overlooked, thus restoring balance to the whole.

If we look at society in the time leading up to Modernism and Dada, we see an emphasis on certain values. The grand-narrative of Progress was in full swing, a fiction that served to elucidate the importance of order and reason. With discoveries and advancements within many fields, man felt he was heading for great heights; yet, with his gaze set on the stars, he failed to notice that his feet were still on the ground, still treading mud.

From the viewpoint of the psychology of the individual, Enlightenment ideology was unbalanced; in its rush towards the horizon, it denied those aspects that may hold man back - his irrationality, his destructiveness, his *shadow* - a widespread repression that forced these forgotten elements into the collective unconscious. Within an individual, if important contents are denied they will often surface in the form of a neurosis - a stutter from the perfect speaker, a tic in the perfect face - and we could see Modernism as a societal version of this, kicking down the building blocks in a inexplicable rage. This is why Modernism was, in many ways, a destructive phenomenon: in laying waste to the values of pre-Modernist society, it restored balance to the collective psyche.

Thus, in our image, Dada is about pathology or deficiency, a neurosis that served to bring attention to overlooked elements. As we've seen, the S.I. and Fluxus were arguably more constructive than Dada. They may have sprung from a similar place, from the same pathology, but in their constructive aspects we could see a resolution to push further. Whilst they were concerned with the pathological aspects of society, the S.I. and Fluxus also sought to offer ideas on how the healthy life should be lived - on how the individual could flourish. In our image, they become therapeutic movements, hoping to engage society in a constructive dialogue, to offer ways forward toward a more healthy existence.

If Dada sought to bring attention to the dysfunction in its bid to return society to health, then the S.I. and Fluxus proposed a way of life that would maintain this health. We can see Dada's concern as being with illness; with the path from the negative (-) to the neutral (0); whilst the others were largely concerned with flourishing; with the path from 0 to + .

Our psychological analogies prove pertinent, as we see in the work of many psychologists similar concerns and ideas to those of the avant-gardes. In dealing directly with the various forms of pathology that occur within a society, psychologists can offer us valuable insight into it. In order to give us some perspective on the projects of the avant-gardes we'll consider the work of a few psychologists, and hope to highlight parallels between the two.

Ellen Langer:
Mindfulness

Langer's concept of mindfulness can be likened to a system of continual self-assessment – it is, in a sense, about keeping tabs on yourself. To be mindful is to be aware of the categories and mindsets that you are living by. It is to be conscious and in control of what you are doing, to take responsibility for your thoughts and actions, and to own them and to update them accordingly.

To become mindless is to lose awareness of the self. Whilst an individual could be described as mindless, it would perhaps be more helpful to describe them as *being* mindless; an important distinction, which implies that mindlessness is not a position or a condition, like 'depressed' or 'optimistic': rather, as a lack of mindfulness, it is an ever-present danger, something that we can all fall into at any time.

Fluidity

"Just as mindlessness is the rigid reliance on old categories, mindfulness means the continual creation of new ones. Categorizing and recategorizing, labeling and relabeling as one masters the world are processes natural to children. They are adaptive and inevitable part of surviving in this world."[31]

In practical terms, the more fluid we are able to keep ourselves – the less we define ourselves by binary oppositions – the better equipped we are to adapt to new information and to grow. This does not mean abandoning positions entirely; rather it would be to acknowledge that the borders of our distinctions are porous rather than clearly defined. In keeping the borders of our categories permeable and fluid we are better able to adjust to a world of shaded differentiations.

Mindfulness does not imply abandoning meaning. We each have our own vocabulary of meanings, or fictions, which, over time, we add to or subtract from. Some may establish their guiding fictions early in life and preserve them unchanged, living by the same meanings throughout their lifetime, whilst others may be constantly adding to a solid base of meanings - or may simply overhaul their whole vocabulary.

If we view our vocabulary of meaning as a city, then to be mindful would be to keep the borders of your city open - to allow new information access, and to allow old information to depart. It would also be to acknowledge that your borders are flexible, that they can expand to accommodate a growing population. A mindless approach would be to set unmovable city limits, to limit the population, and close the borders to strangers.

We can draw parallels to this idea in psychologist James Hillman's description of the 'Psychic Hermaphrodite'. Hillman (referencing Adler) suggests that the true reality of the world is one of shaded differentiations, rather than oppositions. He uses the figure of the hermaphrodite as an antidote to oppositional thinking, as a figure whose presence keeps us mindful of the truth of things and the unreality of our constructs.

"So when we meet antithetical thinking, our question will no longer be how to conjunct, transcend, find a synthetic third, or breed an androgyne. For such moves take the antithesis literally, preventing the mind from moving from its neurotic constructs."[32] To be mindful is to remember the hermaphrodite, to remember that our categories may help us but that they are, in the last, not to be taken literally. The hermaphrodite reminds us that, whilst we may find comfort in our binary constructs – in our labels and definitions, our border-lines and distinctions – these are all *fictions*: vessels crafted upon a sea of differentiations; the murky depths of endless possibilities.

Philosopher Gilles Deleuze has also referred to this idea, in what he termed the paradox of infinite identity[33]. Whilst we mostly live in a world in which meanings are fixed – in which a man is a man, and hot water is hot water - Deleuze directs us to the point at which these fixities break down. So, whilst hot water may be hot, it may also be cooling; in this sense, it is constantly *becoming cooler* than it was.

When we begin to look beyond the static definition of 'hot water' we see the ways in which the water is slipping this definition; that, in fact, it is not necessarily a static thing – it is becoming cooler (unless it is being heated, in which case it is becoming hotter). Deleuze refers to this constant flux as 'pure becoming'.

He goes on to say, "Paradox is initially that which destroys good sense as the only direction, but it is also that which destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities."[34] With this idea of paradox we can draw links to Hillman's notion of the hermaphrodite; both urge us to keep in mind the true nature of our 'fixed' definitions.

Being mindful (or mindless) does not imply a resting point (i.e. 'I am mindful, as part of my structure of being') rather it connotes motion; it is to recognise the flux of life, that motion and change are in the nature of things and to be aware and adaptive to this change, if necessary. Mindfulness is non-culminative – in other words, a certain number of mindful acts do not mean that an individual has become 'mindful'; every moment is potentially a new test, a new opportunity; we can, and do, slip from mindfulness at any point. It is then, not a mark of excellence, or a summit to be reached and sat upon – to advocate mindfulness is not to speak of attaining perfection. Langer recognizes that we all slip into mindlessness at points, that our fallibility is part of what makes us human; but to recognize how and where we slip is to take greater responsibility for ourselves.

As an aspect of self-responsibility, mindfulness is linked to the notion of 'psychological maturity' that we referred to earlier. We've seen how to be mindful is to become aware of the meanings and categories that we are living by, and to cultivate the ability to be flexible. To be aware that our way – our *meanings* – are not the only ones is also to become more amenable to the stranger, and the world of foreign meanings and values that he could potentially represent. It is to understand that all possible meanings are inherent, and latent, within ourselves and that the stranger is simply a different constellation of the self. Whilst, in order to flourish, some may need the firm base of meaning more than others, to be aware of the *flexibility* of meaning is to be less afraid of the unknown. There are clearly ethical implications to the mindful existence.

And Capitalism

To be mindful is in many ways to go against the flow of the system. Earlier on we examined how in a market-oriented society relationships can often become instrumental, defined by the restrictive horizons of their function. And so, one human being, out of everything he is and could be, becomes an 'employee' and another, from all the possibilities of his existence, becomes an 'employer'; likewise, someone becomes 'customer' and someone else 'shop assistant', and it is often all too easy to forget to see beyond these functional labels.

If instrumental relations are an unavoidable outcome of the system, then to be mindful – to attempt to see the relations that lie beyond instrumentality – is to think and act in a radical way.

D.W. Winnicott:
Creative Living

For Winnicott, creativity is the retention throughout life of something belonging to infant experience: the ability to create the world. He suggests that when a child is born it experiences for a short time a feeling of omnipotence; at first it is only aware - in a limited manner - of its own existence, over time becoming aware of the world of objects and ideas that predated its birth. When the child is born, the world is born along with it - everything is created anew, and for the first time. This feeling of omnipotence is facilitated by the mother, who, if good enough, provides the child with what it needs when it needs it, giving the impression that, by will alone, what was needed was *created*.

From this (lack of) awareness comes the feeling of omnipotence; that everything the child experiences it also *creates*. As it grows it will come to see that this is not the case; things will not go its way, and the world will assert its own inevitable will: the child is impinged upon, shown who's boss.

Freud termed this impingement the Reality Principle; it is, in a sense, the process of disillusionment, a coming to terms – or a tug of war - with objective reality. The infant experience is, then, a creative one; creativity is a way of endowing things with meaning, giving the infant the confidence to emerge, step by step, into the world; it allows them to plant roots into the soil, and stand firm in the wind. As its illusions are shattered the breeze picks up force, and creativity – the ability to personalize, to mythify, to *assert the self* – strengthens us against its incursion. This is why, as Winnicott suggests, we do not entirely relinquish our creativity: not only does it defend us against the impingement of outside factors, it also allows us the confidence to *go forth*, to engage with things, to slip and tumble; to play.

Winnicott provides us with an instance of creative living in an everyday scenario; "I know that one way of cooking sausages is to look up the exact directions [...] and another way is to take some sausages and somehow to cook sausages for the first time ever. The result may be the same on any one occasion, but it is more pleasant to live with the creative cook, even if sometimes there is a disaster or the taste is funny and one suspects the worst. The thing I am trying to say is that for the cook the two experiences are different: the slavish one who complies gets nothing from the experience except an increase in the feeling of dependence on authority, while the original one feels more real, and surprises herself (or himself) by what turns up in the mind in the course of the act of cooking. When we are surprised at ourselves, we are being creative, and we find we can trust our own unexpected originality. We shall not mind if those who consume the sausages fail to notice the surprising thing that was in the cooking of them, or if they do not show gustatory appreciation."[35]

With Winnicott we see the democratisation of creativity; it is a capability within each of us, and is not confined, as convention may dictate, to the realms of 'art' – an opinion that must surely have been shared by those involved in the avant-gardes. If creativity is a way of seeing, then it is suffused into everyday life by simply having a personal view of everything: something that, as Winnicott suggests, infants excel in.

"In creative living you or I find that everything we do strengthens the feeling that we are alive, that we are ourselves. One can look at a tree (not necessarily at a picture) and look creatively. If you have ever had a depression phase of the schizoid sort (and most have), you will know this in the negative. How often I have been told: 'There is a laburnum outside my window and the sun is out and I know intellectually that it must be a grand sight, for those who can see it. But for me this morning (Monday) there is no meaning in it. I cannot feel it. It makes me acutely aware of not being myself real.'

Although allied to creative living, the active creations of letter writers, poets, artists, sculptors, architects, musicians, are different. You will agree that if someone is engaged in artistic creation, we hope he or she can call on some special talent. But for creative living we need no special talent. This is a universal need, and a universal experience, and even the bedridden, withdrawn schizophrenic may be living creatively in a secret mental activity, and therefore in a sense happy."[36]

Erich Fromm: Spontaneity

We've already touched briefly upon Fromm's notion of individuation, a course of maturation that faces each individual. As children we generally live under the protection of a higher power, the parent or guardian, and our bondage to them provides us with a sense of security. In growing we are forced from beneath their wing and out onto the path of maturation; we must become individuals, free to fly our own course, to make up our own minds. In becoming free from primary bonds – those ties that are characterized by the relationship to the parents; that imply a lack of individuality, but also a sense of

security and orientation – we are faced with the bewildering reality of our independence; a situation that, as we've seen, was brought about on a societal scale by the advance of capitalism. Unable to bear the anxiety that is constelled by our state of isolation and unsurety, we may choose to flee once more into bondage, as an escape from the negative aspects of freedom.

In our escape we abdicate the responsibility of maturity; we flee the path on which we are set, fearing the vulnerability of open space, and the interminability of the horizon, running instead for the safety of cover, of stasis. To walk the path is to realise the self as a totality; we must become transparent to ourselves, so that as little as possible remains repressed. When we can see through ourselves we are able to more fully *be* ourselves.

Here we can see parallels to the idea of mindfulness; becoming transparent implies recognising our nature; understanding, for example, the meanings that are guiding us, the categories and assumptions that we are living by, and how they are influencing our thoughts and actions.

When we are able to be ourselves we are more able to be spontaneous, and spontaneity is, for Fromm, an expression of "genuine happiness"[37]. He points to small children as an example of those who are able to live spontaneously; "They have an ability to feel and think that which is really theirs; this spontaneity shows in what they say and think, in the feelings that are expressed in their faces." He goes on to say, "Whether it be the fresh and spontaneous perception of a landscape, or the dawning of some truth as the result of our thinking, or a sensuous pleasure that is not stereotyped, or the welling up of love for another person – in these moments we all know what as spontaneous act is and may have some vision of what human life could be if these experiences were not such rare and uncultivated occurrences."[38]

Fromm is careful to qualify his ideas about individuality, reminding us that the path from primary bonds to an realization of the self is also the path towards new bonds; those built on an affirmation of the self, rather than a denial; "Spontaneous activity is the one way in which man can overcome the terror of aloneness without sacrificing the integrity of his self; for in the spontaneous realization of the self man unites himself anew with the world – with man, nature, and himself."[39]

Individuality, for Fromm, implies uniqueness, with spontaneity as the ability to affirm this difference in the presence of the community. It is the opposite of the pseudo-self or the social-self, which is always a compromise to conformity.

Fromm's notion of spontaneity is closely tied to Terry Eagleton's ideas about love. To become transparent – to see the self and accept what we see – is to love the self; and to love it is to be *disinterested* in it – and here we can draw a distinction between self-love and selfishness. Disinterestedness is in many ways an opposite to selfishness, the latter involving an incessant concern with the self founded on a *lack* of self-love. To be disinterested is not to not have interests, rather it is just that our interest lies in another rather than in ourselves. The selfish person is unable to be disinterested because their sense of self rests on decidedly unsteady foundations, necessitating a constant looking downwards – and *inwards* – a paranoid self-monitoring that fears dissolution. In contrast, the person who is disinterested - who loves the self - has firm foundations, allowing them to direct their gaze outwards into the world, safe in the knowledge that their bedrock is solid.

If love is, as Fromm suggests, a "lingering quality" waiting to be actualized by an object, then transparency – self-love - is the first instance, and the flowering, of a love that is able to flow outwards and into the community. So we see that Fromm's notion of self affirmation – that is, acceptance of our individuality "in all our squalor and recalcitrance"[40] - is in the end an affirmation of love, a love that can lead outwards towards the other.

To be spontaneous is to see and enjoy the positive aspects of freedom; it is to stay on the path, and to walk onwards with open eyes. "The basic dichotomy that is inherent in freedom – the birth of individuality and the pain of aloneness – is dissolved on a higher plane by man's spontaneous action."[41] It is, then, free*standing*, instead of free*falling*. The fear of the child who, upon contact with the expanse of the world – its whirl of experiences and possibilities - rushes to the security of his parents and the various protective illusions of a cosseted existence, is made redundant by a new sense of security – "The new security is dynamic; it is not based on protection, but on man's spontaneous activity. It is the security acquired each moment by man's spontaneous activity. It is the security that only freedom can

give, that needs no illusions because it has eliminated those conditions that necessitate illusions."[42]

Like mindfulness, spontaneity is generally discouraged by our various systems, many of which can be seen to exist as a refuge from negative freedom.

Eric Berne:
Awareness, Spontaneity & Intimacy

Berne proposes that many of our social transactions are what he terms 'games': 'social action based on ulterior transactions'. Games are often used as ways to maintain the status quo – a way of doing something or going somewhere without really doing anything, or going anywhere: motion masking stasis. In this sense, part of their use is as a way to structure time.[43]

We can see an example of this in a game Berne calls 'If It Weren't For You'. This is a game played between spouses, in which a woman marries a domineering man so that he will restrict her activities and thus keep her from getting into situations which frighten her[44]. Ostensively she resents the restrictions he places upon her freedom, but unconsciously she fears this freedom and appreciates the familiar comfort of his parental prohibitions. The game may become a familiar dance-routine of arguments and conciliations, and can even give birth to secondary games such as 'If It Weren't For Him', in which the woman voices her frustrations about her husband to her friends.

If we see 'If It Weren't For You' as essentially about *transcendence*, then its remit needn't be restricted to the husband-wife scenario. We play IWFY in order to prevent a phobic situation occurring – to prevent transcendence – whilst masking our fear of this situation, even to ourselves. Our reluctance to change is projected onto an outside object, which then becomes the stumbling block preventing our path to transcendence, keeping us immanent. Whilst masking our fears, the game has the added benefit of helping us to structure time; it facilitates a never-ending story in which the hero is forever adventuring, putting us rodent-like on a wheel that spins and goes nowhere.

Berne describes the point beyond games – an idealised point – as the attainment of 'autonomy' (again, we see similarities with ideas that we've already touched upon; in particular Fromm's idea of maturity, as *autonomy* from the parents; and Winnicott's creative living, the ability to create our own worlds) Autonomy is manifested by the release or recovery of three capacities: awareness, spontaneity and intimacy.

Awareness is the ability to see the world in your own way, a seeing-through of second-hand categories; "the capacity to see a coffeepot and hear the birds sing in one's own way, and not the way one was taught." Like Fromm, Berne uses young children as exemplars of awareness: "A little boy sees and hears birds with delight. Then the 'good' father comes along and feels he should 'share' the experience and help his son 'develop'. He says: 'That's a jay, and this is a sparrow.' The moment the little boy is concerned with which is a jay and which is a sparrow, he can no longer see the birds or hear them sing."[45]

Spontaneity is described by Berne as the "liberation from the compulsion to play games and have only the feelings one was taught to have." It arises from awareness, as a mindful expression of the true self. From awareness and spontaneity comes intimacy, the naked candidness of game-free communication. Intimacy is, for Berne, the most honest form of contact between individuals.

So whilst games may be unavoidable, it is preferable to not be caught within them, to be able to abandon them at will. To be stuck within our games is to abdicate autonomy, to be guided by unconscious motivations and forces.

Other Visions

Carl Jung

Individuation can be seen as the development of *personality*, which Jung defined as "the supreme realization of the innate idiosyncrasy of a living being." The path of individuation involves, as with many of the ideas that we've just considered, knowing the self: "Personality can never develop unless the individual chooses his own way, consciously and with moral deliberation."[46]

Whilst a person who chooses his own way may be on the course to becoming an individual, Jung was careful to point out that the process of individuation is not something that can ever be completed. Individuation is, like mindfulness, not a trophy to be attained; rather, it is an ongoing process, a mode of living.

In contrast to a path of individuation, Jung described the route of conventions; "The other ways are conventionalities of a moral, social, political, philosophical, or religious nature. The fact that the conventions always flourish in one form or another only proves that the vast majority of mankind do not choose their own way, but convention, and consequently develop not themselves but a method and a collective mode of life at the cost of their own wholeness […] The mechanism of convention keeps people unconscious, for in that state they can follow their accustomed tracks like blind brutes, without the need for conscious decision. This unintended result of even the best conventions is unavoidable, but is no less a terrible danger for that."[47]

James Hillman

We touched upon Hillman before, with his notion of the 'Psychic Hermaphrodite'. Hillman's use of the hermaphrodite can be seen as an entrance-point into a *polytheistic* mode of thought. Prevailing ideas may have us believe that a path of maturity is about transcendence; a path of integration that leads to a solid and unified whole. The mature individual is often painted as someone who has direction (or, *a* direction), who has 'found their way' or is on a fixed path; as someone who is sure of their opinions; who has 'made it', who has *become* (is whole). The images that surround this individual are generally ones that connote solidity and stasis, and a singularity of mind, and they have their origins in the monotheistic mode of thought, a vision of life that has at its heart the perfect unity of a singular God.

Hillman sits the monotheism of the Christian tradition next to the polytheism of the Greeks: one God and one way in contrast with many gods, and many ways. His ideas grant the psyche room to breathe, allowing doubt, misgivings, mistakes, paradoxes and new directions – the expanse of multiplicity - back into the course of life. He reintroduces the image of water, with its permeability and refusal of form, flowing first this way and then that.

R.D. Laing

Whilst Laing may not provide us with an explicit vision of the idealized individual in the way that others have, we are able to sketch a picture through his criticisms of present structures. Like those involved in the S.I., he was concerned with the stifling effect that modern society has on the individual, and the way that it tends to curtail experience and foreshorten our imaginative capacity.

"We act on our experience at the behest of others, just as we learn how to behave in compliance to them. We are taught what to experience and what not to experience, as we are taught what movements to make and what sounds to emit. A child of two is already a moral mover and moral talker and moral experiencer. He already moves the 'right' way, makes the 'right' noises, and knows what he should feel and what he should not feel […] As he is taught to move in specific ways, out of the whole range of possible movements, so he is taught to experience, out of the whole range of possible experience."[48]

Like others that we've considered, Laing makes reference to the child as a paradigm of the idealised existence; "Children do not give up their innate imagination, curiosity, dreaminess easily. You have to love them to get them to do that. Love is the path through permissiveness to discipline: and through discipline, only too often, to betrayal of self."[49] It is through adapting to society – through learning the 'right way to move' and the 'right things to think' - that the child loses what is most precious about it; its innate ability to be itself: "[In adjusting to society we have been] tricked and [have] tricked ourselves out of our minds, that is to say, out of our own personal world of experience, out of that unique meaning with which potentially we may endow the external world [...]"[50]

Anthony Storr

"Becoming what one is is a creative act comparable with creating a work of art. It is *freeing* oneself from the tyranny of one's upbringing; emancipating oneself from convention, from education, from class, from religious belief, from all the social conventions, prejudices, and assumptions which prevent one from realizing *one's own nature* in its totality."[51]

THE USE OF 'ART'

At the beginning of this text, we briefly considered a recent exhibition called *Playing the City*, which cited a number of avant-garde art movements as inspiration for its own activities. We considered the ideas and motivations of these movements in a bid to discover what they had in common and how they could relate to *Playing the City*, a line of inquiry that necessitated an analysis of the discontents of capitalism. We've also considered various ideas and visions about fulfilment that have been put forward by psychologists, and we saw that many parallels could be drawn between these ideas and those of the avant-gardes.

We'll now look once again at *Playing the City* in an attempt to figure out what its motivations and aims may be and how they relate to what we've already discussed, and we'll speculate on the effectiveness of trying to achieve these aims in the way that it has.

Art + Life

Playing the City is, amongst all else it may be, an exhibition about art. Whilst its press release begins by asking a series of questions that would not be out of place in a sociology text – "How does the public participate in political dialogue? What constitutes public opinion? What do people understand "public space" to mean?" – it quickly follows these with statements that appear to assert its main concern - "The significance of the social plays a central role in the *discourse on art*. Concepts such as participation, collaboration, the social turn, and community-based art *have clearly influenced both the production and the reception of art*." Art jargon persists throughout the release. The event itself is called an 'exhibition', and the activities that are to take place are given labels like 'installations' and 'performances'.

From this we could venture that its main concern is in exploring the ways in which art and life can come together, a remit that appears to be not too dissimilar from that of Fluxus or the S.I.; initiatives in which creativity was viewed as a vital aspect of a rounded existence. Art was, for them, a door to creativity, as well as a method to promote mindfulness and spontaneous action: it was, in essence, a form through which to realize a mode of living. Whilst these movements have been affiliated with the art-world (their proponents labeled 'artists' and written about in 'art-history'), it is worth remembering that creativity need not be confined to this domain, something that Winnicott sought to remind us of with his distinction between creative living and artistic creation.

There appears to be a contradiction at the heart of *Playing the City*, in that it claims to be about the unification of art and life (creative living) and yet, in the way that it talks about itself, risks being the opposite. It seems to confuse creative living with artistic creation. Through constantly referring to 'art' and classifying certain actions as art-actions ('exhibition', 'installation', 'performance') it draws distinctions, and in so doing allows these actions to be separated from 'life'.

Art as In-between

The term 'art' has been used to refer to many things over time, so much so that it now seems to be stretched to its limits; it is obese, and in many respects has lost much of its functionality in becoming

so. And yet, the fluidity of the term – its unwillingness to be *pinned down* – may provide us with a clue as to its essence.

As we touched upon when we looked at the effects of capitalism, we live in an age of specialisms, in which information is categorized – placed under the umbrella of a *specialism*, and marked for the attention of the *specialists* (we've already seen the value of this kind of division for the State). In contrast to this would be the idea of the 'metaphysician'; that is, a person who takes an interest in information from a variety of fields (typically science, philosophy and art) – an idea that has been on the wane since the time of the Renaissance, and the rise of capitalism. In the compartmentalized society of advanced capitalism, the metaphysician is a person of little practical (market) value, and nowadays may be more commonly referred to as a 'dilettante'.

Art can be understood as the negative space in between our categories and definitions. We are generally able to shelve all of our various manifestations of culture under a series of terms, and in this way we anchor experience. And so, upon a sea of possibility, we create our vessels, giving them names like 'cinema', 'dance', 'theatre', and 'literature'. Yet beneath them the sea remains, its fluidity – its insubstantiality – a constant threat to our safely anchored structures.

The sea – this substance that slips and slides, avoiding the rigor-mortis of solidity – this is the domain of art. Art is what we call the space that exists in between everything else, the space that R.D. Laing referred to as "The zone, the zone of no-thing, of the silence of silences, […] the source"[52], and the place that Hillman alludes to as the *metaxy* – it is what, in the event of a large enough storm, our vessels – our definitions – slip into.

So what is the use of this space? Why should we dignify its elusiveness with a name? To answer this we must first remember that, before our fine vessels gave us solid ground to stand upon there was only sea. This undefinable mass came first, and from it all of our ideas were born. It is a place that eludes definitions, and in this sense it remains a place from which alternatives emerge; where *other things* can be tried out.

So whilst our structures may offer us comfort (the comfort of being able to label experience; to understand it, to grasp it – to say, 'this is a film', 'this is a book') we must remember that they are structures that *we* erected – and whilst they can provide us with shelter and a vantage point, they can also constrain us, or imprison us. Depending on our point of view, they may threaten to block out the roar of the sea altogether, allowing it to slip mercifully from memory.

Let's take an example – if we consider a modern dance performance; we have labelled this area of experience 'dance' and because of this, when we go to a dance performance we expect to experience something approximating our culturally received idea of what 'dance' may be. This is a reasonable expectation, yet if we allow it too much credence then we may forget that a dance performance can be many things other than what it promises at surface level; it could be a way of appreciating music; or a way of reflecting on space, or architecture; it could be a sexual experience, or a tyrannizing one. The reality of the performance threatens to explode its vessel into a million pieces, to return it to water.

Water is the place from which new forms arise: a place of practice, experimentation and freedom from definitions. Our age chooses to call this place 'art', a term that, through its fluidity – its vagueness; its unwillingness to function as a proper signifier – serves to capture the motion of the sea. This is why we run into so much trouble when we attempt to pin this word down, to say 'art is this', or 'art is that' - water cannot be pinned down, it refuses. We could then just as easily give it another name, one as equally fluid: we could simply call it 'freedom'.

We have chosen to call those who inhabit this domain 'artists', although, again, they could as easily go by other names. A scientist can swim in the sea, as can a philosopher, a writer, a plumber. In truth, this area of the in-between is open to anyone because it exists within all of us. The sea is an element of the psyche, a capability. It is home to what Keats termed 'Negative Capability'; "when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason".

Psychologists frequently refer to this idea, invariably describing it as an element of psychological 'maturity'. The ideas that we've already considered go hand in hand with it; mindfulness and its aversion to fixed definitions and categories; creative living with its dictate to see the world your own way (or to

cook the sausages your own way). Fromm makes links to it with his notion of spontaneity - 'free activity of the self' - which he puts in opposition to uncritical adoption of patterns suggested from the outside (again, the ability to make up your own world; your own definitions) He makes explicit reference to the artist as someone who can express himself spontaneously and goes on to say that "if this were the definition of the artist […] then certain philophers and scientists have to be called artists too […]"[53]

He sees that the 'artist' is simply someone who is thinking in a certain way, is using a capability that is inherent within each of us. The artist is a person of the sea, at ease on firm ground or in water.

Immanent (Double)Agents

Much as experiences can be tied down by definitions and labels, we, as individuals, can also become anchored, when we become 'types'. This links in with our earlier discussion of mindlessness: when an individual sets narrow city limits and lives by a number of fixed meanings, they risk becoming mindless to the alternatives that are latent within them. These alternatives tend to become unconscious (the individual becomes unaware of his own, alternate, possibilities) and are then projected onto others, who then run the risk of being condemned by the individual for deviating too far from their 'type' (their meanings, values, etc.).

To become too much of a particular type – to transcend the sea, the plane of immanence – is to rise too far from the ground. The heights of transcendence are cloudy, and in rising the individual risks losing visibility. From up high he can no longer see or communicate with other types, his ability to interact on a wider level curtailed.

In this way society becomes compartmentalized (and, as we've seen, *specialized*). If we decide that it is important for lines of communication to stay open, then we need those who have not risen, or have not risen to the point at which their visibility is impaired. Those that can skirt the surface, slip between types and carry messages from one to the other. These would be the oil between the gears, the liquid between the solid, slipping and sliding and keeping things turning smoothly.

These people are immanent people, and they embody the psychic hermaphrodite. We have come to refer to some of them as artists, although, as we already touched upon, another name could as easily be used. The value of the artist is his immanence, his ability to slip, slide, and swim; to carry messages from one vessel to another.

Public Enemy

The fluidity of the term 'art' makes it vulnerable to misrepresentation; it does not draw its boundaries and defend them aggressively in the way other terms do. Its open borders make it susceptible to attack, and, unfortunately it is frequently the victim of aggressors.

Because 'art' classifies the in-between and the unknown, it has also come to represent the unsafe. Unfortunately, we often cannot tolerate the uncertainty that negative capability demands – we rush to definitions and meanings as to safe houses, relieved to find shelter and the familiarity of four strong walls. We are afraid of the freedom of the sea, and its endless confusion of possibilities. Our definitions – our structures – act as bulwarks against this anxiety, giving us something solid to hold onto.

This individual fear of freedom is reflected on a societal level, in the structures and systems that we erect in order to protect us from it. Our systems restrict us, but often we appreciate this restriction, just as we once appreciated the protective custody of our parents. Yet the process of maturity necessitates a breaking free of parental restraint, a breaking of bonds that allows us to flower in our own right. Our systems allow us the luxury of remaining immature; they are our surrogate parents, offering us a

place to rush to where we can remain dependant. And, as we've seen already, it is in the interests of the overarching system for us to remain this way.

With this in mind, the artist – artist as a person who swims, who does not fear freedom – presents a problem to the system. The artist is not as dependent upon its comforts, its definitions, and so is not as susceptible to its manipulations. Art – the sea, the area of slippage – is an eternal thorn in the side of a system that wishes to eliminate freedom. It represents a challenge both to the individual who fears the sea within, and the society that refuses to acknowledge that its foundations rest in water.

Society deals with this danger in a number of ways, not least through the systematic ridicule of 'art'. It is kept at arms length through repeated negative characterizations of art and artists in popular culture; in newspapers we see the regular lampooning of art, along with a stock caricature of the modern artist, and stories will often concentrate on its market aspects (i.e. buying and selling) rather than its ideational value; in films art is frequently a roughly sketched diversion (we see a recent example of this in the film *(500) Days of Summer*, in which the two main characters attend an art show, where they find the usual array of random art objects – which, presumably, they are meant to address with the usual clichéd air of contemplative distance – before unanimously deciding that they'd prefer the easy familiarity of the cinema instead). These instances all help to create and maintain a negative image of art in the popular consciousness, which allows it to be more easily dismissed whenever its tide threatens to wet our feet.

Because art is a place where new forms are tried out, it also becomes a place of deviation from established structures. It is the running ground of the deviant, the vantage point from which an individual can see our structures for what they are, can get a feel for them, and can offer us alternative perspectives on them. Deviance can come in many forms, from the transgressive performances of Paul McCarthy, to the playful initiatives of the S.I., through to the everyday deviance of the free publication (in a society in which saleability is an utmost virtue, to give away is always an act of deviance).

To deviate from the structures of the State is to risk condemnation. We have, through the various ideologies in which we have been immersed from an early age, been conditioned to react in an alarmist fashion to deviation, and as a society we are very sensitive and suspicious of it. So drenched are we in State ideology that we condemn and castrate its troublesome members on its behalf, often without stopping to think about the unexamined assumptions that led us to these condemnations. "Why give stuff away – you must be rich or crazy", "Why spend time studying something that won't result in a job? It's a waste of time", "His father left when he was only young (his father is evil)"

As someone who swims outside the structures of society, the artist is nearly always a deviant. His determination to enter the crashing waves is perplexing and troubling to those who value their moorings, and the news he brings from the depths is disconcerting and unwelcome to those who rely on the stability of the status quo.

We've seen why art may pose a threat, both to the individual and to society, as well as to a system which has no place for its nebulous refusal of form. It should come as little wonder that, in the popular imagination at least, art is a ridiculous and pretentious deceiver, with nothing of real value to offer. When painted this way, it need not be given a serious hearing, and its potentially subversive words can fall harmlessly on deaf ears. Through being assigned a character and a set of traits by society it has, in the words of the Situationists, been *recuperated*. The system has dressed it up in a variety of ridiculous outfits – the pierrot, the hopeless dreamer, the impractical rebel – and in these guises it is set before the crowd; its threat neutralized by the farcical costumes it has been made to wear.

So, whilst 'art' may stand for the sea, or for freedom, for many it simply stands for something that isn't worth their time.

Distance

When we label something we isolate it from the continuity of experience, fishing it from a sea of possibilities so that we can *know* it, holding it in our arms whilst a picture is taken. Whilst a label can be

useful, it can also work to create difference; in defining what something *is*, we also define what it *is not*, and a dichotomy takes shape. Again, this construct may be useful, but the danger lies in when we take it literally and forget its arbitrary nature.

This is particularly pertinent when it comes to labelling people. In placing a label upon a person, or a mass of people – in creating a 'type' – we also create borders where before they did not exist. A label allows us to establish distance between the self and the other, and to forget the thread that connects us. The notion of distance is literalized and becomes concrete, leading us into an outlook based on difference, rather than connectedness. Blinded to the winding road between us, we build a wall upon it, transforming shades of gray into black and white, liquid into solid. From behind the safety our wall – our fictions of 'us' and 'them' – we can hurl stones and bombs into the unknown.

We can think of a society as a body, as a single organism of disparate, yet fundamentally connected parts, which are reliant on each other for the functioning of the whole. We may label a part for a variety of reasons - to diagnose, to categorize – but whenever we label it we also hold it up to the light, isolating it from the continuity of the body. Whilst this action has its uses, it is not without its dangers. Perhaps a limb is causing the body trouble; it is weakened, and has become a source of discomfort. Instead of learning to live with it – to adapt our lifestyle to its demands - we may choose to amputate our weakness, to cut it off and forget its existence. In this way we abdicate responsibility for the body-as-whole, dividing it up into a series of parts, each one vying for its own autonomy – its own right not to be held back by the other – each becoming equally expendable to the other. Every part becomes vulnerable, faces the chop. The body forgets its nature, its connectedness, cutting off its head to save its feet.

As we've seen, artists – as representatives of the in-between – may pose a threat to various elements and structures of society, and there are those who may wish to discredit them. The label 'artist' allows a distancing of a person from the whole – of limb from body – a distance that creates vulnerability. The person-as-artist slips from the continuity, becomes anomalous.

In this way the label 'artist' holds potential as a tool of division, threatening to isolate an individual from the mass of men. This division works on a number of levels; not only is the artist able to be persecuted more easily when distanced, he is also able to be painted as an aberrance, his brilliance or madness explained away on account of his distance from the norm, a distancing that works to reinforce the cult of the artist (the artist as fundamentally distinct from the masses). 'Artist' (as label) becomes a valuable tool of the State, the term blinding the masses to their own potentialities as in-between people, taking an area of experience and branding it as a specialism. The in-between – the sea in each of us – becomes the domain of a few: those strange folk we call 'artists' …

We've seen why the State may not want its populace to enter the sea - to become 'artists' - and with this in mind we can understand why the label is often denigrated in the popular consciousness. Through separating the artist from the masses, the State is able to dress him in the aforementioned costumes - the deviant, the fool, the dreamer, the impractical rebel – and in so doing, discredit the idea of the in-between. When the artist himself voluntarily emphasises his own uniqueness he unwittingly plays into the hands of the State, furthering the separation of 'art' and 'life'.

As a person of the sea, the artist is someone who is suspicious of labels, realizing their tendency to obscure fluidity and to promote structures and borders; and he is mindful of our constant temptation to take these borders literally, to forget their impermanence. In constructing the artist as a type – as something else, someone else - the term is removed from its true essence, as in-between person: as an element of us all.

Handle With Care

'Art', then, can have a double meaning; to those who are disposed to it, it can stand for something liberating and exciting, but to those that aren't it is a watchword for the undesirable, the time-waster, the trouble-maker – and worst of all, the *unknown*. Bearing in mind its potential for constellating anxiety and

irritation, we should, perhaps, be careful of how and when we invoke its presence.

The organizers of *Playing the City* have made the decision to associate the event with art: to bring in the jargon and conventions of the art-world. Yet, as we've seen, this needn't have been the case. The event itself is, if we take it at its word, concerned with creative living, something that needn't involve artistic creation, and, by extension, the conventions of the art-world.

The acts involved in *Playing the City* are invariably radical, inasmuch as they are intended to promote ideas that can be seen to go against the grain of State ideology, intentions that are made explicit through those references to the avant-gardes that we considered previously. If, then, we take the event at its word, it intends to be, in some way, a radical event.

And yet, through its precursory reference to art-structures ('gallery', 'exhibition', 'installation'), its use of art-jargon and its incitement of art-history, *Playing the City* appears to make it clear that it is to be seen through the lens of 'art'. It immediately anchors its actions to a structure, to the safety and solidity of a familiar term. As we've seen, in classifying itself in this way it risks its own recuperation - whilst its events may be radical, their ensconcement within 'art' threatens to disarm them, to make them safe. At once they become something known, and understandable. If the value of the radical act is in its ability to constellate anxiety – to force those who witness it to stop and *think* – then the association of art allows a way out. 'Art' opens a back-door, and says "Quickly! Through here; before you see too much, think too much!" When it becomes clear that the event is an art event, a chain of associations is allowed to be set in motion, culminating in a relieved dismissal – "Phew! It's only art! (for a second there I didn't know what was going on)" *Playing the City* hopes to combat mindlessness, yet by branding itself as an art project it invites its audience to retreat to the firm ground of a well-worn category. In this way it works against Negative Capability – the slipping and sliding of a confusing experience, when we don't know what to make of it, how to label it, shelve it – almost negating its own ends.

That isn't to say that many of those who witnessed or took part in the events of *Playing the City* would have come to the realization that what they were experiencing was art; but the danger is that they *may have*, and that through publicizing the event under the umbrella of art, it made this danger more likely.

'Art' is the catchall term for depotentiating difference and deviation. Because it is a favoured put-down of the State, and because it threatens to undermine him at every turn, it is, in many ways, the enemy of the radical.

Blunt Tool?

It appears that a critical assumption is also being made; that, because art was once a legitimate and effective tool for the avant-gardes, it still must be so. This is, perhaps, to ignore some important considerations.

First among these is the recuperation of the avant-gardes. In becoming a part of 'art history' the avant-gardes have, in many ways, become depotentiated relics – as Gene Ray points out, 'the indictments and death sentences brought by the avant-gardes against bourgeois art and the society that sponsors it have [not] been convincingly answered or escaped. Nor has the archive machine demystified these groups, in any enlightening way, so much as facilitated the management of their threat through the banishment of a different forgetting."[54]

These movements and their techniques are now a known commodity. The 'situation' - once a valuable tool of the dissenter - has switched sides, flaunting itself as a quirky advertising idea, in which fictional people enjoy 'creative' situations all in the name of the latest model of mobile phone or automobile.

The system has picked through the carcasses of the avant-gardes, taking whatever it finds useful and discarding the rest for the historians to make presentable. The corpses of Dada, Fluxus and the S.I. are hung up under the label 'art', and it is here that they rest, historical curiosities that pose little danger to anyone. Capitalism has found its use for the type of creative dissent pioneered by the avant-gardes, and

in the wake of their recuperation we must question whether their tactics are still effective (or if, indeed, they ever were).

The Use of 'Art'

These musings leave us with the question: why 'art'? If *Playing the City* truly hopes to shake people from mindlessness, would it not have been better to have gone un-publicized, and to be disconnected from the ideas of 'art' or the 'art gallery'? Why have these ideas been mixed up with the project in the first place?

We've seen that *Playing the City* has radical intentions – to confront, to provoke mindful thought – and we've also seen how, through its associations with 'art' it works against these intentions. We've seen that, beyond the province of the artisan, 'art' is often an arbitrary term that is used to describe an in-between area; an area that, by its nature, defies the use of labels and fixed definitions (defies the use of 'art'); and that the 'artist' is often simply a person who is able to inhabit this area, to swim as well as walk.

To name something 'art' is in many ways a concession to transcendence; it is to take the unknowable and to make it safe, to tether it and to make it acceptable to those who do not swim. The artist (the in-between person), more than anyone, realises the absurdities of these labels and he uses them with care, aware of the dangers of rising too high: of losing sight of the sea. He understands that labels have their uses, that they can often be valuable; but he also sees that they are often not quite as solid as we think they are, that they are cracked, and can crumble.

And so the in-between person will always question the use of 'art', especially in reference to his own thoughts and actions. He understands that its use is a concession – that, sometimes it may be necessary in order to make himself understood – but that, in mooring his actions to this term, he has also pared them down.

If *Playing the City* were truly intended as a radical event, is it wise that it has associated itself with such a well-worn and safe term as 'art'? How much more effective would these events have been if 'art' - the life-jacket for those in need - was not safely in reach? Sure, some may have drowned; but equally, others may have learnt to swim…

We could consider this an oversight on behalf of those involved, but it may also be illuminating to search for another explanation…

PLAYING
THE ART GAME

We may find an interesting explanation through turning once again to Eric Berne, and his game analysis. As we've touched upon, game analysis was developed in order to allow us to examine and comment upon many of the everyday social scenarios that we find ourselves in. Berne proposed that many human interactions are 'games': action that seems to be doing one thing on the surface, whilst doing another beneath surface level – as he puts it, *action based on ulterior transactions*. We suggested that games are often used as a form of static motion - a way of appearing to do something, or go somewhere, whilst staying static. The attraction of games lies in their ability to structure time (and hold off the bewildering possibilities of the universe), to maintain the status quo (action without *action*) and to delay transcendence (and therefore avoid what Berne calls 'real living' and 'real intimacy').

Is it possible, then, that *Playing the City* could be based on ulterior transactions; could it, in truth, be *playing the art game*? It speaks of radical intentions, and yet disarms its own threat through clothing itself in the robe of 'art', the robe given to it by the system. Like those who play many of the everyday games that Berne describes, *Playing the City* may have the best of intentions – consciously, those involved may fully believe in the radical intent of their actions – yet, unconsciously, they may not want to change anything.

Fetishism

Whilst it may cite such radical forebears as Dada and the S.I., *Playing the City* seems to stay safely within the rules of the game. Through its use of jargon, its connoisseurship, its specialist interest in art-as-phenomena, it fetishizes 'art'; instead of being a means to realise change – a vehicle, a mode of travel – it becomes a resting point. In the end, 'art' becomes the goal, not 'change'. In being an exhibition about art – a showcase of its potentialities – *Playing the City* wears the outfit of the radical whilst assuring us that its intentions are anything but. It is a child, dressing as the bandit to amuse its parents, wielding its plastic weaponry and shouting clichéd slogans. As Gene Ray says, "one may question the bourgeois paradigm, only not in any way that is *effective* or has *results*; one may play with the symbols of radical politics, but one must not act on them; anyone can say the emperor has no clothes or even scream it within the closed walls of a gallery, but no one may *cut off his head*."[55]

Regardless of the individual intentions of those involved in *Playing the City*, they are contained within a structure (an 'exhibition') that, at bottom, works to neutralize radical intent. The art-game is being played, and, voluntarily or not, they are pawns within it.

In his essay *On Commitment* theorist Theodor Adorno points to an example of art-fetishism in the work of playwright Bertold Brecht; " It is true that Brecht never spoke as sceptically as Sartre about the social effects of art. But, as an astute and experienced man of the world, he can scarcely have been wholly convinced of them. He once calmly wrote that when he was not deceiving himself, *the theatre was more important to him than any changes in the world it might promote*." He goes on to say, "The only ground on which Brecht's technique of reduction would be legitimate is that of "art for art's sake" […]" Whether Adorno's critique rings true or not, he raises a pertinent point; that art, despite any claims to the contrary, can often be as much about *art* as it is about anything else; so whilst, in Brecht's case, 'change in the world' may have been the ostensive goal, his unconscious enterprise may simply have been about remaining within the world of 'art'.

The attraction of the fetish is often its use as a resting place – it delays transcendence (the goal) and keeps us in immanence (always about to transcend). In this way, the fetish retains momentum, keeps us playing the game, going around - motion that also serves the interests of the State. In keeping people busy, keeping them moving, it can prevent them from stopping and thinking, from looking inward and asking questions.

With their emphasis on the circular movement of immanence, game playing and fetishism allow us the comfort of familiarity; we can stay in the same spot, doing the same things, without the threat of change and its promise of the unknown. The sanctity of the status quo is maintained. Like any other world (of science, of music, of sport) the art world can provide a resting place, a safe place to live. And like these worlds it provides its inhabitant with an identity: roles to play, a language to speak, thoughts to think. It *prescribes*. And herein the art-world anchors itself in opposition to the sea.

We've been talking of the artist as radical, and it is worth considering that radicalism can also act as a fetish. As we mentioned earlier, Terry Eagleton offers us a picture in which the radical would rather not be the way he is; "They regard themselves as holding awkward, mildly freakish opinions forced upon them by the current condition of the species, and yearn secretly to be normal. Or rather, they look forward to a future in which they would no longer be saddled with such inconvenient beliefs, since they would have been realized in practice. They would then be free to join the rest of the human race."[56]

Yet, joining the rest of the human race may well be the kind of future the radical-as-fetishist fears, because it would mean surrendering the distinction afforded by 'freakish opinions.' Contrast Eagleton's description with a soundbite from artist Momus; "Living here, I'd feel there were no more battles to fight, no more doors to kick open. History would stop, there'd be nothing to do but create future generations to hand one's good-taste, enlightened, healthy-living values down to." His words don't seem to reflect an outcast who just wants to fit in, rather the opposite: his difference defines his identity. Momus offers us an interesting view on his brand of rebellion; "It's important to remember that rebellion -- in other words, the part of our value system that is determined by position, by dialectics, by reaction -- is a kind of collaboration with the things rebelled against. For instance, right now I'm wearing a t-shirt turned inside out, because I've decided t-shirts with slogans or images on them are naff. I'm listening to a very abstract piece of music by David Toop, partly to erase or complicate the courtyard ambience of Michael Jackson hits and make the soundscape in my flat a bit "classier". In both cases, my stance is a collaboration with the "naff" things I'm deliberately snubbing. They become the ground to my figure, the thing that makes it connote. I really have to thank the people I'm rebelling against for "collaborating" with me in this way! Without them, I couldn't be me."[57]

Momus is honest about his fetishism; through dialectics he collaborates with those he rebels against, pole supporting counterpole, in an endless circular dance. His radicalism, as he openly admits, is an identity, a place to live within, not to escape. Momus' rebellion-games reinforce his *position*[58], as the outsider, the person who 'kicks doors open' and rebels against things; and he understands that his counterpole is vital in confirming this position. The art game is equally as important for those that play it, allowing its participants the comfort of stability, through reinforcing their positions. It allows individuals to be 'artists' and to go on being 'artists'.

We've also seen how, in much the same way, it can provide a home to the 'radical', allowing a parade of radicalism within the safety of make-believe. In this way, a safe-detonation site is created within society, where explosive acts can be tested and observed; an officially sanctioned site-of-rebellion where the radical can do his thing under a watchful eye. By keeping his actions above-ground, in safe forms, this sanctioned playground allows the radical to exist – gives him a place to play, toys to play with - whilst performing a secret act of sterilization, robbing him of his potential to disrupt the status quo. The game-playing radical fears change as much as the system that he rebels against, and his game becomes a pact; 'allow me to exist, to imagine change, and to fantasize about it, but do not allow it to happen, because I fear it as much as you do.'

In seeing the art-game for what it is, the true radical – committed to change over all else – would refuse to play entirely, becoming the game-breaker (or what Berne refers to as the 'antithesis'). This would be the uncomfortable radical described by Eagleton, eager to shrug off his guise as soon as possible.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers us another description; "[…] by an accident of social genetics, into the well-policed world of intellectual games there comes one of those people (one thinks of Rousseau or Chernyshevsky) who bring inappropriate stakes and interests into the games of culture; who get so involved in the game that they abandon the margin of neutralizing distance that the illusio (belief in the game) demands; who treat intellectual struggles, the object of so many pathetic manifestos, as a simple question of right and wrong, life and death. This is why the logic of the game has already assigned them rôles - eccentric or boor - which they will play despite themselves in the eyes of those who know how to stay within the bounds of the intellectual illusion and who cannot see them any other way."[59]

Revisionism

Whilst the game playing of *Playing the City* may be the outcome of a fetish, we could also perceive it as a form of revisionism. An analogy can be found in the strikes that took place in France, during May'68. When the people of France abandoned the factories and took to the streets, the trade unions were crucial in breaking the strikes and getting people back into their workplaces; ostensively acting in the interests of the workers, the unions played the crucial role of intermediary between the reformers and State, eventually brokering a deal that would see the former return to their posts.[60]

Those who were striking were sick of a system that they saw as exploitative and wanted a new system, one that wasn't rigged for exploitation. The unions' *coup de maître* was in reducing these revolutionary intentions to a program of strictly professional demands[61], ameliorating the threat of revolution and forcing a compromise with the State. In transforming a revolutionary challenge – a challenge that wanted to force new ideas, that spoke a new language – into a series of conventional demands (change in wages, working conditions, etc) the unions were able to neutralize the danger of the unknown, disarming a bomb that threatened to explode the status quo. The workers were forced to come to terms with the system, to speak the old language; and the new tongue - with its talk of revolution, of new ideas - was killed in its infancy, along with any ideas about an alternative system.

Just as the trade unions acted as intermediary between the State and those that threatened it, ameliorating their radical energy, we could perceive the various structures of the art world as performing a similar task. As we've seen, the very nature of 'art' (as in-between, as sea) poses an inherent threat to a system that fears the depths, threatening to explode definitions and suggest *other ways*. Anchored against this danger is the 'art-world', a structure with fixed definitions and conventions, that even plays the system's most valued game, that of commodity exchange. In place of the trade union, we have the gallery, promising to sanitize the threat of 'art' – to quarantine it within its four walls from where it can be safely observed. Fluid becomes congealed; in-between is brought into a pact with the State, made to negotiate and fit into the status quo.

Gene Ray realises this compromise; "To transform art into a revolutionary weapon, it would first be necessary to "abolish" – that is, negate, decompose, dissolve, *liquidate* – the bourgeois paradigm of art. This negative movement would disentangle the truth of art – its promise of happiness and utopian force – from the untruth of the commodity form."[62] Ray realizes that to return 'art' to the sea would involve the decomposition of those structures that demand it become solid, that demand it stand still, stay in one place, pose for the camera and smile. In anchoring it to safe paradigms the gallery rebukes the truth of art; words like 'exhibition' and 'performance' become nothing more than labels of the bourgeois ideology.

"Set free this truth would then be carried on in a positive and creative movement that goes beyond […] the bourgeois paradigm in the construction of new practices […] To the extent that art realizes [this] it will supercede itself, qua art, and disappear into the conflicts of politicized life, becoming in the process a real weapon of hope."[63] Here Ray talks of the sea; the return of 'art' from solid to liquid, to the place of the 'in-between person' and not simply 'the artist'.

CONCLUSION

This text was written in response to a recent event, in which a number of radical acts took place from beneath the umbrella of 'art'. Our project has been to consider the implications of affiliating radical, against-the-grain actions such as these with the art-world.

We began our disquisition with a brief analysis of a number of art-related avant-garde movements, followed by an equally brief assessment of capitalism, and considered the influence of the latter upon the former. The idea of life hinted at by the avant-gardes - Dada's demolition of restrictive and oppressive structures; the S.I.'s widening of experience and possibility, its refusal to allow instrumentality to curtail imagination; the category-redefining of Fluxus, with its prolific acts of creativity and promotion of the creative life - these were ideas also to be found in the writings of countless psychologists. Running throughout these writings was the prescription of self-knowledge as a means to realize the "innate idiosyncrasy" of the self, and also as an ethical imperative; with the child and the artist being called to mind as a paradigm of the true individual.

In drawing a parallel to psychology we were able to liberate useful ideas from the territory of the art-world, allowing us to come to an understanding of the essence of 'art' as a space – a potentiality - that exists within us all. If capitalism acts to define the borders of our meanings and definitions through State ideology, then art, as in-between, works to explode all borders, returning us to a cosmic expanse.

In this sense, the 'artist' becomes anyone who thinks and acts in a certain way, as anyone who *swims* as well as walks. Fromm even mentions the artist, alongside the child, as a paradigm of the spontaneous individual, and we see that the 'artist' exemplifies many of the desirable traits that are talked about by psychologists. Freeing the notion of the 'artist' from the realms of the art-world allows us to understand the broader implications of the idea, returning its potentialities to the discourse of everyday existence. The term is democratized, allowing access to those outside of the art-world, whilst at the same time prompting those inside to look beyond the horizons of their habitus.

The nature of 'art' presents a radical challenge to a system that has no place for its fluidity, and this is why, as the organizers of *Playing the City* recognized, it has frequently assumed an important moral and political role in the modern age. However, as a structure of the State, and as a shelter from the anxiety of negative freedom, 'art' can often appear to have a twofold, and often contradictory, purpose. Despite the antithesis of art-world and art-as-sea, the former endures as the keeper of 'art', often providing a home to those who fetishize 'art'; and, as an outpost of the State serving to ameliorate art's watery threat to the status quo.

Our reflections on *Playing the City* have highlighted how often the 'art-world' may not be an effective place from which to present a radical challenge to our systems, encumbered as it is by its own anchored safety; an anchoring which, in many ways, acts against the true nature of art as we've come to define it here; *art as sea*.

The acts of *Playing the City* may have been more effective if they were considered first and foremost as radical acts, rather than art acts. If these acts were truly about challenging the status quo, then it is our contention that they would have presented a far greater challenge had they not relied on the crutch of art to legitimize their existence.

ENDNOTES

[1] Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*, p.83

[2] *Ibid*

[3] Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*, p.37

[4] *Ibid*, p.40

[5] Ray, Gene. *Art Schools Burning and Other Songs of Love and War*, chap. 5, para. 5

[6] 'Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation', *Internationale Situationiste #1*, para. 2

[7] Plant, Sadie. *The Most Radical Gesture*, p.59

[8] Higgins, Dick. *A Child's History of Fluxus*, para. 18

[9] Momus, 'Bourriaud x Curtis' on *Click Opera* (blog), http://imomus.livejournal.com/271729. html

[10] 'Preliminary Problems in Constructing a Situation', *Internationale Situationiste #1*, para. 1

[11] Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*, p.35

[12] *Ibid*, p.36

[13] *Ibid*

[14] *Ibid*, p.37

[15] *Ibid*, p.95

[16] *Ibid*

[17] *Ibid*, p.93

[18] Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*, p.164

[19] Bunting, Medeleine. 'The narcissism of consumer society has left women unhappier than ever', *guardian.co.uk*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jul/26/women-wellbeing-unhappiness

[20] Langer, Ellen. *Mindfulness*, p.28

[21] Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*, p.54

[22] Gray, John. *Straw Dogs*, p.194

[23] Goldacre, Ben. 'Don't Dumb Me Down', *guardian.co.uk*, http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2005/sep/08/badscience.research. Read his blog here: http://www.badscience.net/

[24] Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*, p.100

[25] Sigfried, Giedion, *Bauen in Frankreich*, p.15 (found in *The Arcades Project* by Walter Benjamin, p.390)

[26] Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*, p.104

[27] For a brief analogy, see Illich, Ivan. *Celebration of Awareness*, p.18

[28] Langer, Ellen. *Mindfulness*, p.34

[29] Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*, p.102

[30] Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*, p.181

[31] Langer, Ellen. *Mindfulness*, p.63

[32] Hillman, James. *Healing Fiction*, p.103

[33] Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*, p.4

[34] *Ibid*, p.5

[35] Winnicott, D.W. 'Living Creatively' in *Home is Where We Start From*, p.51
Langer also uses a culinary example when describing something similar; "So often in our lives, we act as though there were only one set of rules. For instance, in cooking we tend to follow recipes with dutiful precision. We add ingredients as though by official decree. If the recipe calls for a pinch of salt and four pinches fall in, panic strikes, as though the bowl might now explode. Thinking of a recipe as a rule, we often do not consider how people's tastes vary, or what fun it might be to make up a new dish." (Langer, Ellen. Mindfulness, p.16)

[36] *Ibid* p.43-4

[37] Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*, p.224

[38] *Ibid*

[39] *Ibid*

[40] Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*, p.168

[41] Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*, p.225

[42] *Ibid*, p.227

[43] Berne, Eric. *Games People Play*, p.151

[44] *Ibid*, p.91

[45] *Ibid*, p.158
[46] Jung, Carl. *The Essential Jung*, p.195
[47] *Ibid*, p.198, 202
[48] Laing, R.D. *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise*, p.51
[49] *Ibid*, p.60
[50] *Ibid*, p.61
[51] Storr, Anthony. *Dynamics of Creation*, p.153 (emphasis added)
[52] Laing, R.D. *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise*, p.38
[53] Fromm, Erich. *The Fear of Freedom*, p.223
[54] Ray, Gene. *Art Schools Burning and Other Songs of Love and War*, intro., para. 2
[55] *Ibid*, chap. 2, para. 8
[56] Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*, p. 181
[57] Momus, 'Living in NKLN to keep PZBG alive' on *Click Opera* (blog), http://imomus. livejournal.com/473768.html
[58] Berne, Eric. *Games People Play*, p.42
[59] Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, p.54
[60] Elliot, Karen. 'Never Work!' from *Variant*, Summer 2009, p.25-29
[61] *Ibid*, p.29
[62] Ray, Gene. *Art Schools Burning and Other Songs of Love and War*, chap. 5, para. 2
[63] *Ibid*, chap. 5, para. 9