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Volume 7, 2015

Edited by Fabian Dorsch and Dan-Eugen Ratiu

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# ***Turn, Turn, Turn: Civic Instrumentalisation and the Promotion of Autonomy in Contemporary Arts Funding***

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ABSTRACT. Over the past twenty-five years aesthetic practice, theory and Arts policy in Europe and North America has been subject to three different yet interrelated and international “turns”: creative, social and ethical this has been exemplified by Arts funding policy in Ireland. Combined, these three turns produce a tone of cultural production that is pitched toward a more measurable and overtly instrumental direction. This paper explores the trends regarding the critical terms of instrumentality and autonomy and their relevance to arguments relating to criteria employed in current Irish Arts funding policy. We argue that that existing Arts funding criteria relegates the autonomy of the domain of the amateur by instrumentalising “professional” practice through criteria of “quality” and “excellence.” We outline the history of Arts policy in Ireland in its journey towards an explicit and totalising economisation of the Arts characteristic of “the creative turn.” Our analysis of this turn is informed by the two other turns. We highlight the debate between Claire Bishop and Grant Kester as representative of the discourse surrounding the autonomy of consumption advocated in “the social turn.” We also examine the notion of participation and the strict regulation of roles envisioned in “the ethical turn.” Here we employ Jacques Rancière’s conceptual resistance to the notion of autonomy in aesthetics as the basis of our critique of these turns which we see as promoting a contestable instrumentalisation of the Arts in Austerity Ireland.

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## **i. Introduction**

There has been a tangible shift in Arts funding policy over the past twenty-five years. This shift coincides with the end of the Cold War and the saturation of Neo-liberal politics and economics across the West. Looking at how this has been articulated in aesthetic practice, theory and policy we connect three different yet interrelated, “turns”: creative, social and ethical. Combined, these three turns produce a tone of cultural production that is pitched toward a more measurable and overtly instrumental direction.

This paper focuses on the critical terms of instrumentality and autonomy and their relevance to arguments relating to funding policy in Ireland in 2015 where new expectations of brand development, cultural diversity and social inclusion are now explicit priorities for funded organisations. We will outline tensions between conceptions of autonomous production and autonomous experience of the artwork in the instrumentalisation of the Arts. The Arts have always been instrumentalised to a degree.<sup>1</sup> Today the instrumentalisation of Irish Arts policy includes a concern for civic education, the marketing of national identity and economic growth; specifically employment.

We will argue that existing Arts funding criteria relegates the domain of the amateur<sup>2</sup> by instrumentalising professional practice through criteria of quality and excellence. The elastic domain of the amateur includes all of those individual and group artistic activities that are not legitimised by the institutions of art as professional. Professional practice, by its very nature, is mediated. From the perspective of the institutions of art, the domain of the amateur has been understood in terms of an interested relationship to the work, parochial convention and privileging of the community with limited autonomy. By only conceiving of autonomy in terms of professional practice, existing arts funding is unable to recognise the autonomy within

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<sup>1</sup> For example, autonomy itself was instrumentalised for political purposes throughout the West during the Cold War (Vuyk, 2010, pp. 173-183).

<sup>2</sup> Our understanding of this domain is informed by its mobilization in the work of Bernard Stiegler. Stiegler recognises positive potential for the figure of the amateur in the digital age. Stiegler mobilises the notion of the amateur from the etymological Latin origin of *amat*, as in, to love. He juxtaposes this amateur to the loss of the amateur in relation to contemporary creative and cultural industries.



the domain of the amateur, unless it too is mediated.

## **2. Ireland's Journey to The Creative Turn**

From its inception, the aims of Arts policy in Ireland have included concerns of national identity, national branding and social cohesion. The Arts Act, 1951, was concerned with the formation of an independent national identity articulated through the development of a national brand built on excellence in native design. Pat Cooke, for example, notes “the core rationale is one that seeks to prioritise the visual arts as the basis on which the design standards of Irish goods and services can be raised to allow them to compete internationally and to enhance the quality of the Irish tourism product.”<sup>3</sup> Later criteria maintain this ambition by aspiring “to stand alongside the best of the past and the international present and challenge both creators and viewers to the [*sic*] extend themselves beyond the norm.”<sup>4</sup>

The aim of social cohesion, in this first Arts Act, was expressed through the ambition of promoting the Arts to the public. The Arts Council was tasked with “stimulating public interest; with promoting knowledge, appreciation and practice; and with assisting in improving standards in the arts.”<sup>5</sup>

The figure of the artist was not mentioned in the original Arts Act and at that time it was not the function of the Arts Council to directly fund artists. Artists, for the most part, were expected to fund their own activities. In 1965 the writer and former Arts Council director, Seán O’Faoláin, reflected an attitude that earmarked the romantic autonomy that was the hallmark of true artistic creativity where “art within the Republic shall itself be a republic”.<sup>6</sup> In reference to dependant artists, O’Faoláin wrote; “We could so easily be treated as a sort of wet-nurse or Father Christmas!”<sup>7</sup> Instead, “all that he [*sic*] should ask for was liberty and all that he should

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<sup>3</sup> Cooke, 2011, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> Matarasso, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> The Arts Council of Ireland, 2013, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Cooke, 2011, p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 106-107.

promise was disloyalty”.<sup>8</sup>

This position developed after 1973 when there was an explicit attempt by the Fine Gael-Labour coalition (1973-1977) to bring the artist to the centre of policy as a means to increase “public access and engagement.”<sup>9</sup> This approach saw the appointment of artists to the board of the Arts Council. 1973 marks a second age in the history of Arts policy in Ireland. From now on the core aims of national identity; national branding and social cohesion were articulated in terms of the artist’s obligation and responsibility to society. This new artist-centred policy placed a quasi-ethical and social responsibility upon the artist. In the period 1973-2009 the notion of the autonomy of the artist continued to be instrumentalised. Now the artist and “his” autonomy were seen as the provider of culture as a public service.

In this period, Taoiseach Charles J. Haughey introduced policies that prioritised a romantic notion of the autonomous artist as central to the image of Ireland’s heritage. His policies saw the introduction of tax exemption for artists, the establishment of Áosdana, IMMA, and Temple Bar etc. Central to these projects was the positioning of Haughey as a patron of the Arts and as a man of taste. Inherent in this relationship was a certain complicity of the funded artist and the institutions of art with the State. This political branding served to collapse the critical distinction between the autonomy of the artist and the national interest. Haughey’s approach tended toward an attitude that valorised the artist as a person of exception, wisdom and high standing. The funding criteria employed, particularly later in this period reinforced this valorisation of those legitimated as artists. Under Haughey’s Fianna Fáil led governments, policy, including Arts policy, was instrumentalised in terms of a narrow account of national identity branded in the service of producing a modern Ireland that could perform on a European stage.

Later, the emphasis on the ethical and social responsibility of the artist and the Arts was institutionalised in 1993 through the appointment of the first Minister for Culture, Michael D. Higgins. Higgins responded to the instrumentalisation experienced under Haughey, by articulating a

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 107.

<sup>9</sup> The Arts Council of Ireland, 2013, p. 9.

clear national vision for the Arts rooted in contemporary theories of ethical memory and citizenship that re-emphasised a commitment to public service on behalf of the Arts. The renewal of national identity through social cohesion was emphasised through a policy whereby “facilitating access to culture meant facilitating access to a more representative and complete historical narrative and facilitating participating in the Habermasian public sphere.”<sup>10</sup> The autonomy of the indigenous artist remained instrumentalised as public service, which could now resist the “colonization of the imagination.”<sup>11</sup>

The final age, coinciding with the Celtic Tiger (1997-2002) and subsequent bubble (2002-2007), witnessed an explosion in funding. Funding policy increasingly instrumentalised the Arts as a public service that could provide access to, and participation in culture. Issues of access and inclusion were the primary aims behind projects such as the building of regional Arts centres, the Per Cent for Arts Scheme, the funding of community Arts, the decentralisation of national cultural institutions etc. The funding criteria, from this period, expect artists to make “work of excellence” that privileges *technique, originality, ambition, connection, and magic*.<sup>12</sup> These criteria continue to form the basis of arts funding that valorises the role of the professional artist. However, Robert Hewison, in his analysis of recent cultural policy in the UK, observes that ‘excellence’ is an empty category without comparison with other work, with an implicit hierarchy of values.<sup>13</sup>

With this emphasis on access to the Arts, there is an increased focus on the quantifying and measuring of cultural experiences and an explicit turn toward the private sector for funding. From the mid-2000’s the Arts Council amplified the language of business, and encouraged arts organisa-

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<sup>10</sup> Slaby, 2011, p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83. Here Slaby is quoting Michael D. Higgins keynote address at the conference on “Irish Film - A Mirror Up to Culture,” Virginia Centre for Media and Culture, Charlottesville, May 9, 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Matarasso, 2000, pp. 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> “However much a performance or a work of art had a value in itself, that value was expressed [in the UK since 1997] in terms of how its ‘experience affects and changes an individual’. It went without saying that this change would be for the better.” Hewison, 2014, p. 94.

tions, both local and national, to secure private investment.<sup>14</sup> Aesthetic experience has now become subject to economic measuring.<sup>15</sup> The aims of national identity, national branding and social cohesion continue to be articulated in terms of the artist's obligation and responsibility to society. However, artistic creativity is increasingly understood as the production of exportable cultural goods and services.

### 3. The Creative Turn

Since 2008, Ireland has experienced a new faceless age of the instrumentalisation of the Arts. In response to the global recession and Ireland's loss of sovereignty, Arts policy, under the regime of austerity, has turned towards an explicit and totalising economisation to harness the potential of the Arts. This economic yield is to be achieved through the imposition of funding cuts to ensure efficiency and compliance with national economic targets. Central to this regime is the micro-management of cultural production and increasing demands of accountability and transparency in the service of national debt.

The government policy action plan, *Building Ireland's Smart Economy: A Framework for Sustainable Economic Renewal* (2008) situated Ireland, belatedly, within the "creative turn".<sup>16</sup> This turn theorises that economic prosperity is created in cities through the harnessing and growth of a knowledge/creative class. The creative turn is part of a broader international narrative linking economy and culture.<sup>17</sup> Robert Hewison has identified the history of the creative turn in the UK context. He dates this turn specifically with New Labour government policy from 1997. Hewison criticises the economic and political mobilisation of the idea of 'access to the Arts' as a policy tool for creating citizenship.

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<sup>14</sup> Slaby, 2011, p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> For example, see Hewison's description of "public engagement experiences". Hewison, 2014, p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>17</sup> Writers such as Landry (1978), Matarasso (1997), Florida (2002) *et al* popularised this approach. It was first embraced by the New Labour government in the UK in 1997 and later informed European policy (The Lisbon Agenda, 2000). See also Hewison, 2014, p. 51 and Slaby, 2011, pp. 81-82.

Although it is true that the arts are generally pursued for other than monetary or directly political reasons, the autonomy of art and its irrelevance to questions of power is a convenient idea if your class or social capital already gives you access to culture.<sup>18</sup>

In the Irish context, Alexandra Slaby (2013) and Pat Cooke (2013) both locate this turn toward an economisation of culture in the First Global Irish Economic Forum (also known as Farmleigh 1), October 2009. This Forum broadcast terms such as “Smart Economy”, “the Innovation Island”, “Build the Ideas Economy” and “Brand Ireland” as defining the role that cultural production would have to take to fix a broken economy.<sup>19</sup> Already, within the aforementioned funding criteria, François Matarasso’s explanation of the criterion of *originality* anticipated a dilution toward “[t]he more fashionable idea of innovation.”<sup>20</sup>

Policy has generally been enunciated through ministerial statements and broad directions to institutions of Art in the context of funding, rather than formal Departmental publications. However, it is difficult to discern a clear set of policy principles that would govern the allocation of funding and supports for the Arts through appropriate bodies such as the Arts Council. Historically, the role of policy has generally been devolved to the Arts Council.<sup>21</sup> The Departments view is that the Arts Council “is completely independent in its funding allocations and the Minister has no role to play in its funding or executive decisions.”<sup>22</sup> For example, the most recent published document: ‘Arts and Culture (Practitioners) National Interactive Strategy - Approach to Arts & Culture Support in a challenged

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<sup>18</sup> Hewison, 2014, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Cooke, 2011, pp. 100-103.

<sup>20</sup> Matarasso, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Within The Arts Council there is ‘The Council’ which rotates in a staggered manner and is comprised of practitioners and the staff of The Arts Council. In the absence of a National policy the closest thing to published policy are The Arts Council’s regularly published ‘Reports’. Decisions are made pragmatically while occasionally pursuing a particular direction and that direction currently is a focus on ‘audience’. Arts audiences are being researched by semi-autonomous small pilot surveys. See <http://www.artscouncil.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Strategic-development/Mapping-your-audience/>

<sup>22</sup> It is the stated objective of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht to “provide an appropriate resource, policy and legislative framework to support the stimulation and development of the Arts in Ireland”. <http://www.ahg.gov.ie/en/arts/>

funding environment' (2011), has not led to a concrete policy.

The Arts Council, as the key body in determining, mediating and ratifying who and what is funded, have embraced the creative turn:

I am more convinced than ever that the arts confer enormous public benefit. That benefit is manifold: it ranges from truth and beauty, through social cohesion and community identity, via innovation and the creative industries, to cultural tourism and foreign direct investment. Viewed from any of these perspectives, the arts are Ireland's signature, our hallmark, our calling card.<sup>23</sup>

This catalogue firmly positions the Arts in Ireland as primarily an instrument of political economy and the production of a sellable national brand. In this context the Arts funding criteria use of terms like 'quality' and 'technical excellence' whilst allowing the mobilisation of the amateur within 'participatory practice', serve to exclude artistic practice originating from the domain of the amateur. For example, in the key reference document used by the Arts Council, Matarasso's 'Weighing Poetry', claims that "[m]ost people will be aware that the technical level of a community play is lower than a production by a company of trained actors, though they may find it harder to explain where the weaknesses of the first lie."<sup>24</sup>

In order to be funded the work of the amateur requires the mediation of an artist/curator who is in turn, subject to requirements of professional validation. The domain of the amateur prioritises a community aesthetic, whereas professional practice prides itself in notions of excellence. Not only is the amateur diminished in terms of production but also reception, the amateur is considered to have "straightforward approaches to judgement."<sup>25</sup> The individual artist is also judged as "always" incapable of reliable (in Kantian terms "disinterested") judgement in relation to their own work "according to their own unique, internal criteria."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The Arts Council of Ireland, 2013, Chairman's [*sic*] message, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Matarasso, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1. Although Matarasso does not use the term "disinterested", the text relies on a Kantian approach to aesthetic judgment as seen in its use of the terms "taste", "enthusiasm" etc.

In our article on the pharmacology of the avant-garde, we argued that the deployment of new digital technologies, mark the possible site of resistance and potentially new beneficent forms of individuation.<sup>27</sup> These new forms of individuation inform new conceptions of the domain of the amateur, not necessarily bound to limited autonomy. These potentials are envisaged in Hewison's mobilization of Matarasso's later work where there is an understanding that:

The arts are not divided into two separate and antagonistic worlds: the amateurs and the professionals. It is better understood as a complex ecosystem in which people may play different roles at different times or in different aspects of their career.<sup>28</sup>

Contrary to this, Arts Council funding and the institutions of art re-enforce this distinction between amateur and professional while remaining happy to mobilise the domain of the amateur in the service of professional practice. We contend that the domain of the amateur, whilst not autonomous, can still be redemptive of economic instrumentalisation.

#### **4. Economic Instrumentalisation in The Social Turn**

The roots of the economic instrumentalisation and aesthetic depoliticisation, visible in Ireland's journey to the creative turn, can be traced beyond the current crisis. They can be seen in the recent social and ethical turns in art practice and theory. Concurrent with the Post-Cold War era and the rise of consumer capitalism, Arts practice increasingly privileges participation and interaction over contemplation. Artworks and exhibitions seek to engage, activate and harness new conceptions of public exchange. Socially engaged art practice, in addition to social cohesion, aspires to therapeutically cultivate participant's autonomy. The idea of autonomy, here, is again problematic because it is intentionally and consistently governed, particularly where the participant is only afforded the role of an 'extra'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The Aesthetics Group, 2015b.

<sup>28</sup> Hewison, 2014, p. 143.

<sup>29</sup> See Foster, 2003, pp. 21-22.

Autonomy that is afforded and accorded cannot be capable of instigating fundamental socio-political change. It can however be instrumentalised in terms of labour. In participatory projects, 'creativity' is instrumentalised as productive of public value at the service of cultural capital and knowledge production where arts practices become a form of an unpaid and underpaid "immaterial labour"<sup>30</sup> hence their appeal for institutions of art squeezed by austerity policies.

The academic institution is among the institutions of art. Like, other funding bodies, the Irish Third Level Sector and in particular Arts education is experiencing increased pressure from the State to justify its decisions on economic terms. This instrumentalisation of Arts education and research pressures the artist and the academic to justify their work on economic grounds as professional practice. Aesthetic research is seen as a mode of practice that identifies audiences and increases access to works of excellence. Universities are increasingly charged with producing creative entrepreneurs and consumers who are small autonomous self-organising units who are capable of self-employment and generating economic growth and employment.

The nexus of institutional approbation mediates a shift away from a conception of autonomy of production and reception towards autonomy conceived in terms of consumption. Autonomy conceived in terms of consumption collapses the traditional distinctions of production and reception, work and leisure, artist and audience. Consumption is productive and today its labour contributes to the production of what counts as the social.<sup>31</sup> Art experiences, that cultivate engagement, attendance and participation, are expected to activate productive creativity in the populace, repair the social bond and drive economic growth through the production and accumulation of knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Lazzarato: Immaterial Labor "involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as "work" [...] defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion (Lazzarato, 1997, p. 1).

<sup>31</sup> For more on the capitalist command over subjectivity see *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> This turn, in fact, discourages *dissensus* and what Rancière regards as true politics. For Rancière autonomy "carries the baggage of liberal individualism which is far from the project of any democratic politics." May, , 2008, p. 59.



Contemporary understandings of participatory art, that emphasise the role of the social, trace a lineage to the anti-spectacular praxis of the historical avant-garde.<sup>33</sup> For Nicolas Bourriaud, the production involved in contemporary socially engaged art practice is equivalent to an aestheticisation of the social,<sup>34</sup> where the social is the material of the artwork. The artist acts as the creative moderator of this productive exchange. Any work can potentially be a site of “social interstice”.<sup>35</sup> Bourriaud labels this discursive aesthetic “relational”. The artist is now, the creator of situations, albeit, they are now called relations. No longer are only objects reified but social relations themselves are reified as producing an immaterial “phantasmic social bond.”<sup>36</sup> The degree of participation offered in relational practices is, according to Bourriaud, up to the discretion of the autonomous artist. An effect of this approach is an instrumentalisation of the participation of the productive exchange under the sign of the artist.<sup>37</sup>

Theorists such as Claire Bishop and Grant Kester have both complicated and delimited the boundaries of the social turn in aesthetics. Bishop, following Bourriaud, claims that effective critique is best enacted through a leader or author figure within the community of the artworld. For Bishop, art’s political efficacy relies on aesthetic quality. The autonomy of the artist is crucial to the critical function of collaborative art. From Bishop we learn that social collaboration in art is not effective resistance because it perpetuates unequal hierarchies and a particular distribution of

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<sup>33</sup> Key examples include Yves Klein’s ‘L’exposition du Vide’, Iris Clert (1958) and Fluxus, On Kawara, ‘I AM STILL ALIVE’ (1968 – 1979) and Gordon Matta-Clark’s restaurant ‘Food’ (1971). Bishop embeds the roots of participatory practice within a terrain of anti-spectacular rhetoric associated with Debord, Artaud and Brecht.

<sup>34</sup> “What nowadays forms the foundation of artistic experience is *the joint presence of beholders in front of the work*, be this work effective or symbolic.” See Bourriaud, 2002, p. 57.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> “the society of the spectacle is thus followed by the society of extras where everyone finds the illusion of an interactive democracy in more or less truncated channels of communication...” *Ibid*, p. 26.

<sup>37</sup> Foster considers the confusion over the status of the addressee of the relational work as often alienating: “Bourriaud... sees art as ‘an ensemble of units to be reactivated by the beholder-manipulator’...[yet] At times, ‘the death of the author’ has meant not ‘the birth of the reader’, as Barthes speculated, so much as the befuddlement of the viewer.” Foster, 2003, p. 5.

the sensible that divides a population in to active and passive sides.

Kester, in contrast, is willing to accord a more radical role to the heteronomy of the collective. Regarding the reductivist approach to the collective witnessed in Bishop as an abdication of the political force of the collective, Kester emphasises the organised political resistance available in collectives. Crucially, such “projects challenge us to recognise new modes of aesthetic experience and new frameworks for thinking identity through the thickly textured haptic and verbal exchanges that occur in the process of collaborative interaction.”<sup>38</sup>

Bishop criticises, “Kester’s *Conversation Pieces*...[for advocating] an art of concrete interventions in which the artist does not occupy a position of pedagogical or creative mastery.”<sup>39</sup> Kester counters that only ethical discourse can be productive of a desire for a critical cultural response to hegemony of neo-liberal politics. Kester sees that in recent collaborative practices, aesthetic autonomy is being “recoded or renegotiated”.<sup>40</sup>

In Kester’s approach, the spectator and the artist are only effects of the collective. Socio-political change then, if it is to be accorded in terms of aesthetic practice, needs to be seen in terms of concepts such as communal and collective action.<sup>41</sup> He maintains that collaborative projects must resist the temptation to prescribe and describe the frame of reference for a ‘community’. For example, he challenges Miwon Kwon who, like Bishop, places the artist in a privileged position in such collaborative encounters.<sup>42</sup> The artist in Kwon’s approach is responsible for instilling a community with a properly “self-reflexive attitude.”<sup>43</sup>

The use of competing claims of community/collective in this exchange, often utilising diverse histories and philosophies of art practice, remains bound to the role of the author and the role of the critic in relation to the

<sup>38</sup> Kester and Strayer, 2005, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup> Bishop, 2006, p. 6?

<sup>40</sup> Wilson, 2007, p. 114.

<sup>41</sup> In the words of Nancy, “the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community.” (Nancy, 1991, p. 3).

<sup>42</sup> Kwon contends that Kester himself has invested his concept of “politically coherent community” with an essentialism - a reductive “nostalgic fantasy of pre-urban existence that is assumed to have been without alienation, mediation, or violence.” (Kwon, 2004, p. 149).

<sup>43</sup> Kester, 2004, p. 162.

space of the community. Bishop explicitly describes the collective as a managed space, while for Kester; there is scope within collective art practices for new forms of political engagement and autonomy that challenge the authority of the traditional art practice and theory. In Ireland we have seen these positions paralleled by Haughey and Higgins respectively.

Kester and particularly Bishop, reference Jacques Rancière's writing on the egalitarian potential of aesthetic experience. For Rancière, however, art practice and its institutions do not have the ability to eek out any pure space of autonomy. Informed by the etymology of the term autonomy as a place and law apart, Rancière regards autonomy as paradoxical, particularly when applied to art. It is this aporia at the heart of the notion of autonomy that sees Rancière distance himself from this concept.

Autonomy is not one of my words. My words tend to indicate a movement out of a situation. I prefer terms such as: dis-identification, dissensus and emancipation. My ground words don't relate to the idea of an autos, but refer to the idea of a move –from a situation, from a place, from an identity, from an autos.<sup>44</sup>

Instead Rancière's stated preference is for the term *dissensus*: "the notion of the autonomy of art goes against one of my main affirmations – art never gives itself its own law."<sup>45</sup> Rancière seeks to overcome the language of autonomy. For Rancière, autonomy cannot be isolated or fulfilled.

As far back as Immanuel Kant, autonomy is conceived as self-legislation and opposed to heteronomy. Rancière's approach, is to collapse this distinction. The Romantic notion of the autonomous artist, however instrumentalised, is an ideology. Autonomy is but a discursive feature of "the aesthetic regime of art". Freedom of expression is the defining feature of the "aesthetic regime of art", yet freedom is not autonomy. Aesthetic agency is possible but only in a limited sense.<sup>46</sup> For Rancière, at the

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<sup>44</sup> Rancière, 2011, Newspaper 3, p. 32.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> Rancière offers us events in the shape of the examples of Gillard, Jacotot and Blanqui. From these we learn that an event is something that shows a radical equality whereby those who are excluded by the political count are made to count. The aesthetic is useful because it can best welcome this change. These events are but moving the deck chairs. The expansion of the franchise is not an overturning of the distribution of the sensible.

heart of the claim of aesthetic autonomy there lies a politicisation of the aesthetic. The relationship instituted by this regime blurs traditional distinctions between art's specificity and the social/political. The autonomy of aesthetic experience, in this regime, is crucial to political efficacy and is capable of reframing divisions of the sensible. A work is autonomous (or at least deemed so) if it "stands out as an exception. Thus: art is art to the extent that it is something else than art."<sup>47</sup>

Art, in this regime, is not autonomous from politics. Autonomy in this regime of art is "alleged"<sup>48</sup>, "staged"<sup>49</sup>, "idea"<sup>50</sup>, "claimed", "invented", "so-called"<sup>51</sup>, "contradictory", a "modernist doxa"<sup>52</sup> "paradoxical"<sup>53</sup>, "kind of"<sup>54</sup> (all words used by Rancière to describe autonomy, *our emphasis*) by art in terms of experience. We could add 'funded' to this list. Art is not autonomous, yet the aesthetic regime institutes "the autonomy of a form of sensory experience. And it is that experience which appears as the germ of a new humanity, of a new form of individual and collective life."<sup>55</sup> This appearance is being wielded in Irish Arts policy at the service of the goal of economic recovery.

For Rancière, the key point concerning the possibility of art to rework the social is to recognise its embedded nature within the distribution of the sensible. "The autonomy [the Arts] can enjoy or the subversion they can claim credit for rest on the same foundation"<sup>56</sup> as the regime they seek to undermine and distance themselves from. In colluding with the partition of the sensible the subversive anti-aesthetic is merely playing the artworld game allotted them.

In professional Arts practice the anti-aesthetic historically has coa-

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"Autonomy [...] only exists in the moment in which an individual presents his inner belief in his equality against all hierarchies, thereby disrupting the social order but never supplanting it for the risk of becoming it. (Rancière, 2011, Newspaper 2, p. 67)

<sup>47</sup> Rancière, 2002, p. 137.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p. 134.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 135.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 136.

<sup>51</sup> Rancière, 2005, p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> Rancière, 2003, p. 205.

<sup>53</sup> Rancière, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> Rancière, 2009b [2004], p. 32.

<sup>56</sup> Rancière, 2006, p. 19.

lesced around the term ‘avant-garde’. Peter Bürger recognises a possibility of the avant-garde to subvert the existing institutional network. He notes that the art institution “only became recognisable after the avant-garde movements had criticised the autonomy status of art in developed bourgeois society”.<sup>57</sup> Bürger understands the autonomous art institution and the reified art it contains as a product of bourgeois society.

Historically, one avenue for this professional anti-aesthetic has been the mobilisation of the domain of the amateur. Avant-garde communities operate to undermine this autonomy and vice-versa. Avant-garde practices historically have been instrumentalised because their criticisms of the institutions of art are co-opted by those very institutions as new economic possibilities.

Ultimately the debates between Kester and Bishop are exemplary of the instrumentalisation of autonomy in the social turn as they are bound to this artworld gaming because both positions continue to valorise the position of both art historian and critic. The critic continues to assume the position of assessing the perceived success of such practices and therefore remain embedded within the hierarchical structures of the artworld. Although Bishop explicitly promotes the necessity of symbolic content and authorial role of the artist, Kester never fully circumvents the essential catalysing role the artist maintains within such dialogic practices. Nor does he fully account for the pre-existing social divisions that are played out through the production and reception of such projects. Matarasso’s criterion of *magic* attempts to include the potential of the aesthetic for lasting transformation. “Great art triggers change is [*sic*] us [...] it becomes part of our selves, a ghostly presence, haunting and not always entirely friendly.”<sup>58</sup>

Despite emancipatory claims about work that is participatory, interactive, relational and socially engaged etc., these works, when considered in terms of autonomy, remain subject to regulation, governance and control. Hierarchies are reproduced through the delegation of occupations and roles within institutional structures and the works themselves. The notion of autonomy in art, an example being the autonomous artist, is re-

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<sup>57</sup> Bürger, 1999 [1984], p. *lii*.

<sup>58</sup> Matarasso, 2000, p. 5.

peatedly mobilised as productive of alleged social cohesion.<sup>59</sup> The social turn, by situating the domain of the amateur in relation to the legitimated field of the arts, undermines any potential autonomy or political potency of that domain.

When we approach anti-aesthetic discourse through the figure of the amateur we see that the amateur is instrumentalised as autonomous creative Other. The Arts Council's first principle, for example, is recognition of "the primacy of intellectual and artistic freedom."<sup>60</sup> The exclusion of the amateur from the categories of Arts funding is a form of negative instrumentalisation. It is a negative re-enforcement of the idea of the autonomous professional. The amateur is characterised by institutions of Art and Arts policy as not authenticated, awarded, remunerated, legitimated and lacking professional "excellence".

As a result the traditional binary between amateur and professional is blurred. For example, in the case of remuneration the professional artist, like the amateur, is often unpaid and required to subsidise production. The avant-garde thus represents an excess of excellence, whilst the amateur represents deficiency in terms of the funding criteria.<sup>61</sup>

We can now identify three categories of instrumentalised producer in relation to aesthetic autonomy – the avant-gardist, the legitimated artist and the amateur. All three are products of contemporary institutional categorisation that maintains them within a hierarchy of intelligences. The social turn instrumentalises consensual knowledge production, shock and revelation under the retention of authorial control.

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<sup>59</sup> Foster, for example, problematizes the "shaky analogy between an open work and an inclusive society..." in relational practice which he feels does not take an adequate stand that would impact more profoundly on society. Foster, 2003, p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> The Arts Council of Ireland, 2013, Chairman's [*sic*] message, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Rancière has recognised the political instrumentalisation of the amateur in relation to cinema: "The politics of the amateur opposes the idea that there would be a position – a discipline – that would belong to the literary or film theorist, the social historian or the cultural historian, etc.; and it opposes it because there is no univocal definition of these spheres, there is no reason to consider that the phenomena classified under these names constitute a set of objects that can be defined using rigorous criteria." Vila Bassas, 2013, p. 11.

## 5. The Depoliticisation of the Aesthetic in The Ethical Turn

Bishop, referencing Rancière, contends that, “The social turn in contemporary art has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism.”<sup>62</sup> The outcome of this turn is an “authorial renunciation”<sup>63</sup> of critical and creative capacities. For Rancière art, within the aesthetic regime, is increasingly instrumentalised in terms of an “ethical turn.”<sup>64</sup> The ‘ethical turn’ is a regressive tendency towards the strict regulation of roles within the community. The ethical regime, for Rancière, defines a rigorous distribution of images that institute a rigorous partition of occupations that instruct a community ethos. Rancière traces this regime to the curriculum outlined in Plato’s *Republic*.

The social turn, thus, in practice, policy and theory tends towards a regression to the ethical regime. This is the ethical turn. This ethical approach employs a notion of a consensual community, as witnessed in the social turn, where the lack of critical distance between the state of the situation and the hoped for situation to come flattens the possibility of dissent. In the ethical community, art relinquishes its role in wider social change through policies, which hold the present order in place, disallowing the formation of new political subjects. Funding policies, for example, delineate a particular order, a given state of the situation and the distribution of roles and hierarchies within that situation. The heteronomy of the several peoples of traditional political conflict are reduced into a single autonomous people.

Furthermore, when we turn to a consideration of contemporary socially engaged art practice this ‘ethical turn’, marks a shift in how reception is instrumentalised in terms of autonomy. This is a shift from a receptive creativity to a productive creativity. No longer are terms like reflection, contemplation and interpretation prioritized. The merging of production and reception through engagement, interaction and participation is now seen as productive of autonomy.

The debates between Bishop and Kester demonstrate a tension between (or as Rancière would say “emplotment” of) autonomy and hetero-

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<sup>62</sup> Bishop, 2006, p. 3

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 5

<sup>64</sup> Rancière, 2009b [2004], p. 109.

nomy at the core of “socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art.”<sup>65</sup> Visible too in these debates is the co-option of aesthetic strategies at the service of existing hierarchies already described in the economic instrumentalisation of culture inherent in the creative turn. The capacities of aesthetics to enable Rancièrian conceptions of equality are overlooked.

Despite contemporary ethical claims of autonomy there is for Rancière nonetheless a tension in the performance of collective life: namely, ‘who is in control of the explicative order?’ Rancière is steadfast in his disavowal of a blueprint for autonomy. For it will eventually be little more than a shallow mobilisation. *Dissensus* is denied because a hierarchy of addressee’s is imposed, such as the professionals and the amateurs.<sup>66</sup>

Inherent in the notion of criteria for judging art is the idea that the cultural value of the Arts is not to be measured in terms of subjective and individual pleasure. The criteria referenced by the Arts Council of Ireland embody this relegation. Matarasso recognises that these criteria inform notions of quality. In defence of the terms on which quality is to be weighed he relies on a notion of “the inescapability of judgement.”<sup>67</sup> Judgement, for him, remains inescapably bound to a hierarchy of judges.

Even in the category of ‘magic’, which allows for subjective experience of ‘excellence’, it is still deemed necessary that “great art triggers change.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the experience of art is not considered an end in itself; it is instrumentalised in the services of social and self-improvement, which is described as ‘change.’ Change, in this context, is a synonym for instrumentalisation. The positive and/or negative consequences of change are not considered independently of this instrumentalisation. The idea of change has itself been instrumentalised in the service of maintaining social order and control. Beyond the experience of art, the very notion of the

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<sup>65</sup> Bishop, 2006, p. 2?

<sup>66</sup> Bishop, for example, uses Rancière to dispel the instrumentalisation of art in terms of a heteronomous and collective experience: “For Rancière the aesthetic doesn’t need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change, as it already inherently contains this ameliorative promise.” (Bishop, 2006, p. 4) However, as we have seen, for Rancière to find redemption in aesthetic autonomy, as Bishop suggests, is equally illusory.

<sup>67</sup> Matarasso, 2000, p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*



Arts is not considered an end in itself. It is implicated in the same instrumentalised system of assessment that applies to “every other sphere.”<sup>69</sup>

The foregoing of the hierarchy of value implicit in the criteria would break the chains of instrumentalism, and enable artists to express themselves, if they were ‘excellent’. However, as Hewison observes, by describing excellence in terms of its transformational effects, instrumentalism remains in play. “However much a performance or a work of art had a value in itself, that value was expressed in terms of how its ‘experience affects and changes an individual’. It went without saying that this change would be for the better.”<sup>70</sup>

Having relegated the value of individual pleasure to “simple enjoyment”<sup>71</sup> Matarasso retains an account of pleasure. This is a judgement of pleasure first located in the individual and then necessarily validated through persuasion of the collective. The enjoyment of that debate is privileged over any real change and predicated on a set of relative and contingent values that are the hallmark of Neo-liberal politics and economics.<sup>72</sup> Matarasso considered his own criteria incomplete and later protested at the co-option of his paper: “I did not understand how much politicians and planners, [...] struggle to distinguish between what is important and what can be controlled. I did not understand that they see culture as a source of social instruction rather than of self-development.”<sup>73</sup>

Ultimately, the ethical turn can be seen in Irish funding policy that does not enable real or structural change but serves to “bring funding decisions more closely in line with policy priorities.”<sup>74</sup> Once policy priorities are published and instituted, judgements on aesthetic quality tend to be determined in terms of the criteria instead of debate.

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Hewison, 2014, p. 94.

<sup>71</sup> Matarasso, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> “we have to understand that debating our values through the language and forms of the arts is actually a good thing, perhaps the vital place of the arts in a democracy. We should relax, accept that artistic values, like all human values, are relative and contingent, and enjoy the debate: at least we’ll have something to talk about” *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Hewison, 2014, p. 52.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

## 6. Conclusion: Judgement

There is a political potency to the autonomy of the excluded Other. This is something that can never be realised in the service of goals such as National Identity, National Branding or Social Cohesion. Given the narrative of Irish Arts funding and the parallel trends in contemporary Arts practice and theoretical debates in aesthetic theory, we can see that the claim of autonomy in the domain of the amateur is necessarily subject to instrumentalisation. Currently this domain is idealised in terms of economic instrumentalisation. In even delimiting this as a domain we too are guilty of a certain romantic idealisation.

In light of the social turn the task of the professional, in a position of mediation, is to transform community interest into disinterestedness. The ubiquity of participatory practice can be seen in Arts funding criteria, which prioritise “connections with the world beyond the artist.”<sup>75</sup> The domain of the amateur is to be led by professional practice at the service of economic outputs. This domain is not simply dissipated by requirements to fulfil national economic targets; its potential is currently instrumentalised as a cultural product. The social turn instituted by Arts funding criteria offers scant resistance to the demands of the creative turn inclusion is presented in the form of amelioration. Instead of producing socio-political change, the domain of the amateur in Ireland in 2015 is treated as a competitive advantage for economic growth and the servicing of debt.

The status of the professional artist is maintained through the validation of the institution rather than by monetary means; an award from the Arts Council confers status, which delineates professionalism and the associated realm of ‘excellence.’ Why do the criteria employ notions of community and connectedness and explicitly exclude the domain of the amateur? The model of socially engaged art practice utilises the amateur, particularly its ability to represent a community, a place or an idea offering the appearance of agency. This negative instrumentalisation enshrines exclusion by labelling a community or subject as removed from validated practice, while offering a semblance of agency. Professional didacticism, in Ireland in 2015, is conceived as productive of entrepreneurs and consumers, not social inclusion.

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<sup>75</sup> Matarasso, 2000, p. 5.

In each of the three turns, the role of the judgement of the amateur is absent. The wholesale embrace of the creative turn to service short-term economic targets, internationally and so explicitly in Ireland, must count as a complete squandering of the opportunity to recreate aesthetic identity and construct social equality. In terms of Matarasso's criteria this is an abandonment of ambition. For him only works of ambition can "have a legitimate call on scarce public resources."<sup>76</sup>

Austerity conceives of the role of the Arts, not in terms of an opportunity to engage with the civic, or an example of provocation, or ethical utility, instead the Arts are seen in Ireland in 2015, informed by these three turns, as primarily of economic value.

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