

"Active citizens or passive consumers?
Culture, Democracy and Public Service
Broadcasting in the era of
an unaccountable
market".

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"Counting the cultural Beat".
Broadcasting Symposium.
Lecture Theatre 2.
Old Government Buildings,
Wellington, New Zealand.
Tuesday 31st August 1999.

The times through which we are now living are for many people who gave, and give, their energies to the public world, times of considerable pessimism. It is as if what is happening constitutes an imperceptible drift away from policy, from ideas, from philosophies. It is a condition that writers such as Charles Taylor in his work The Ethics of Authenticity, describe as a drift to unfreedom.

I believe, the manner in which we are uncritically accepting unaccountable markets as a substitute for accountable public policy represents one of the most serious aspects of this drift away from democracy. Indeed I believe, we are now living through the early stages of a deep enslavement. It is a historical moment of the greatest importance - our retreat from the public world, or substitution of existence as consumers for an active life as citizens, our definition of our world as a world of private consumption, our surrender on terms we neither understand nor have negotiated, to the market.

The loss of the public world is being experienced through the subjugation of the cultural space to a set of economic policies derived historically from a very narrow ideological furrow - the adherents of Van Hayek and the New Right.

It is a time of the greatest pessimism for even such distinguished historians of, and contributors to, public service broadcasting, as Michael Tracey whose seminal work The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting charts the story of broadcasting right up to its present time of crisis. Crisis it is. Broadcasting now stands to be judged as a production space for commodified entertainment product rather than that public space where citizens listened and viewed to be informed, educated, or entertained.

Yet broadcasting has always been inescapably cultural. There may have been a debate about the meaning of culture. I am using it here in the sense it is used by UNESCO in the report Our Creative Diversity, or the Council of Europe in its document In From The Margins i.e. I am using it in an anthropological sense as the full way of life of the people.

We spend a great deal of our conscious life watching and listening to what is broadcast. The late and great Raymond Williams gave as the title to his last paper "Be The Arrow Not The Target". When I as Broadcasting Minister was publishing a Green Paper on the future of broadcasting in Ireland I had this title in mind when I called the Green Paper "Broadcasting in the Future Tense: Active or Passive?". From when I read his work for the first time in the late 1950's or early 1960's I was moved by Raymond Williams commitment to public education and to the role of the media in the deepening, widening, and enriching of the life of the public. Indeed Michael Tracey's book to which I have referred quotes a phrase of Williams in which he describes some early versions of the B.B.C's version of itself in the world as "an authoritarian system with a conscience". Many may disagree with the Arnoldian élitism or the excessive reliance on Tradition but the notion that broadcasting had to engage with what was debated as the public good was unquestioned.

That public world, in which there was a connection between philosophy and politics, between ethics and economics, between culture and public service broadcasting is under severe threat in that public world with its tradition of public space and service is allowed to slip away. I want to suggest that the losers will not only be broadcasters and their audiences but the wider fabric of the society, across a long spectrum of time, which may not be able to recover the values it is now near unconsciously losing.

In the course of his discussion on the BBC Michael Tracey makes reference to a document published in the 1980's by the Broadcasting Research Unit in London, which

set out eight principles of Public Service Broadcasting:

1. Universality of availability;
2. Universality of appeal;
3. Provision for minorities, especially those disadvantaged by physical or social circumstance;
4. Service the public's sphere - the nation speaking to itself;
5. A commitment to the education of the public;
6. Public broadcasting should be distanced from all vested interests;
7. Broadcasting should be so structured as to encourage competition in good programming rather than competition for numbers;
8. The rules of broadcasting should liberate rather than restrict the programme-maker;

It is easy to see how such principles fit within a model of active participatory and democratic citizenship. It is equally clear that they do not constitute an agenda which would be accepted readily by those who are providing product for the commercial audio-visual market at the present time.

The issue of the Licence Fee as a source of funding was closely linked to the notion of community and what citizens held in common. It was not merely symbolic, although, it might have been on the public service channels that one expected coverage of the great events and personages of one's time. There was a sense in which the licence fee funded the public service broadcasting system, a system that contributed to cohesion, integration and a sense of identity.

Ireland has had both the challenge and the benefit of being a next door neighbour to the BBC. It is not surprising then that there has always been a pursuit of high standards.

Indeed there are times when one can detect the ghost of Lord Reith in some of the statements of those given charge of Irish Broadcasting. In more recent times I recall the Chairman of RTE of the day describing RTE to me as a business with so many thousand employees. I always refer to it as the national broadcaster. However, this precise shift from national broadcaster to large commercial unit with thousands of employees was a happening that had started in Britain and that totally changed the character of British Broadcasting. The ethos forced on Public Service Broadcasting was itself born in an anti-state enterprise environment.

Reflecting on this now, I have come to the conclusion, that the only sure rock upon which the future of public service broadcasting might be built is one that puts the programme makers at the centre of things, that is suspicious of alleged technical managerial expertise. If the absence of public understanding is losing some support for public service broadcasting I also have the feeling that the subjugation of broadcasting values to organisational ones is part of the loss of confidence that is now so blatantly clear in so many places.

In recent years of course, there has been a fundamental and rapid change in technology. This has represented a particular kind of seduction. Many politicians seem lost in awe or their eyes glaze over at the mention of the digital super highway. It is as if it all were too exciting, too promising as a competitive tool in the market to be made amenable to regulation.

If the technology has arrived with rapidity the issue as to how it should be applied, has, however, generated a deadly silence. Yet how this matter is handled will decide whether, we deepen and widen communications or whether, we open up a new fissure in society between the information rich and the information poor. The European Union is a good example of how those anxious to make profit from "new services" have with the

assistance of the Commission steam rolled over those interested in securing the future of public service broadcasting and an accountability to the public from those who have constructed new monopolies. Put bluntly the Commission has worked very hard at de-regulating public service broadcasting but, despite pressure from the European Parliament again and again, it has refused to bring in a Directive on Concentration of Ownership something which is increasing every day. Those who support public service broadcasting are sometimes pilloried as backward traditionalists, old regulationists, standing in the way of the shining future with new services. It was one of the achievements of the Irish Presidency of the European Union that we managed to put a special protocol in the Amsterdam Treaty that protected public service broadcasting to a certain degree.

Let us be clear, however, the pressure for commercial services delivered on market principles is even more likely to succeed in a new European Parliament that is right of centre.

In Europe today nearly every country is preparing or drafting broadcasting legislation that will attempt to strike a balance with the market place. In nearly every country the hard technology of communications is seeking to establish a hegemony over what is perceived to be the softer cultural target of broadcasting within culture. This issue arises regularly when such issues as whether, there should be a different regulator for content and mode of delivery. These are not just issues as to political turf. Behind them there is a huge body of investment whose short term profit may require the public interest to be forgotten.

The main tendencies in communications at the present time include convergence of technology, concentration of ownership in a number of international conglomerates and fragmentation of audiences. These tendencies occur at a time when the prevailing ideology guiding economic policy decisions is one that places an emphasis on

unrestricted market adjustments.

The circumstances of these transitions are different from other historical shifts of the industrial era. It is very different to question, indeed identify, the assumptions, upon which they are based. We are drifting into, rather than choosing, this new condition of our unfreedom - our existence as consumers rather than citizens.

Citizenship, the public space, the shared moment, the common history, the shared community of the imagination, are perceived as tired old phrases. Interests are what have to be addressed. A private world of consumer choice and its advertisements have replaced an older but still necessary debate about adequate provision in the public space. With these shifts in private consumption it is arguable if there is any real meaning to our use of the word culture at all. When a lifestyle is that to which we aspire cultural product has a meaning quite different, a mode of production quite different, from any previous concept of shared meaning.

It is when we are alone, consuming privately, consumed in our consumption, we experience a peculiarly new form of alienation and loneliness. We seek relief from the television. We are open to be entertained. We are willing to be subscribed to be entertained. Indeed the smart box on the television may take the thinking out of it for us altogether. Lots and lots of purchased fantasy in front of the television - that is what generates profits from the less than twenty large conglomerates that monopolise close to eighty percent of all the entertainment product sold on the planet. It will reassure us no doubt as well that the same people are caring for our children with an equivalent monopoly in video games except of course that the number of companies is closer to one dozen.

There are rare exceptions to this - moments when the public world is rediscovered. I was

moved by the account in Michael Tracey's The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting of the forty eight hours around the death of President John F. Kennedy when advertisements disappeared and a vast diverse community shared a moment of grief. It was a public moment to which immense personal emotion was brought by so many - becoming part of the collative memory.

Watching the near total eclipse in Ireland recently was also interesting in its own way in so far as people left their private space to share the experience. They gathered in little groups at corners, and in public places, occasionally sharing glasses - refugees from a previous world of the public and the communal.

At the bases of the choices we will make in the next few years are some fundamental value choices involving such questions as -

- What value do we put on the public world?
- What value do we put on issues beyond the immediate, beyond a single life span?
- How do we wish to remember and be remembered?
- What do we wish to free to imagine?

Such value choices raise questions about the cultural space, its relationship to the economic space, how it is to be defined, is it to be open or closed, democratic or autocratic, fixed by tradition or flexible to the contemporary and the as yet unremembered.

For example, if the cultural space was defined in some Arnoldian way, stressing an élitist version of the inherited tradition of the powerful, if the focus of the beautiful, the true and the good was defined by a particular class most would find it to be oppressive or

conservative or both. We would find it easier again to reject a statist definition. In a curious way there has always been public support for a definition of culture that would have critical capacity at its centre, emphasising, I suppose, that to live reflexively in ones world is both one of the most basic and most difficult instincts we share in our common humanity.

There was always then a debate as to what constituted cultural value. Those who made programmes knew that sometimes their work would strike a strange resonance with the past, sometimes it would be anticipatory in its innovation. Nothing was really predictable but the standard had to have, as its basic, respect for freedom and creativity.

What we now face is an uncritical acceptance of the provisions of the market. A market segment has to be filled. A programme has to be provided. It can be made expensively at home or it can be purchased cheaply from those who are dumping product from abroad. These are not choices without consequence. It is not only the programme maker who does not get to make his or her programme. It is that a story in the public world is being suppressed. It is that another group of consumers are being given a formula produced, homogenized product.

Let me emphasise the distinction between making a programme with its high fixed costs and providing a programme with its low variable costs. Making a programme in the full consciousness that it resonates with a public of which the maker is a part is qualitatively different to filling an entertainment slot with a product from a pool of homogenized programmes purchased from the west coast of the United States for a market anywhere at any time.

Perhaps, the most serious debate on television production in recent times in Ireland was that which is described in Jack Dowling, Lelia Doolan and Bob Quinn's Sit Down And Be

Counted - The cultural Evolution of A Television Station. Published in 1969 with an introduction by Raymond Williams it is an extraordinarily book in terms of its attempt to marry issues of organisation, authority, philosophy, science, culture, and human behaviour among a complex group of talented and often difficult people. The book represents an extraordinarily moment in Irish television history - the moment prior to surrender of the intellectual and aesthetic to a more short term organisational and accountancy ethos.

I thought of this book often during the period in which two major decisions had to be taken concerning television production. The first of these was the prohibition on interviews with members of listed proscribed organisations - the infamous Section 31 of Irish Broadcasting Law. The second was in the period of my taking a decision with proposals for the establishment of an Irish language television station - Telefis na Gaeilge.

In relation to the first of these I could discern opinion being quite divided among broadcasting practitioners. While the majority appeared to hold an anti censorship view I was in no doubt of the existence of a group who were happy to live with the organisational neatness of a prohibition. Not having to exercise discretion always helps the dedicated organisational person. On the second issue Telefis na Gaeilge, about whose foundation I understand two doctoral theses have been completed, I must be brief. However, let me say that the issue was primarily one of economics versus culture. The new service was established with valuable assistance from the most senior levels within RTE and grave reservations from others. It must be remembered that this station established to serve the Irish language community was established as an extension to public service broadcasting at the very time a blizzard of commercialism was blowing across the broadcasting world. Today, with its young staff, it is as a publisher broadcaster I believe, successful and in a good position to make the shift to a new

technological environment. What I want to place on record, however, was the sheer vitriol that informed some of the opposition. Modern consumers they were going to be exercising their choices, their freedom with a zapper. The campaign was personalised, bitter and guided by the leading newspaper group that has been adjudicated to have a dominant or monopoly position in Irish newspapers - The Irish Independent Group.

It is one of the inescapable facts of our existence that we live by images. The issue, however, is which images, drawn for which purposes, will proliferate. The decision in such matters is personal, in so far as a final personal choice is made. However, it is inescapably contextual and cultural also. Some choices are facilitated rather than others. There is a curious parallel for me in the destruction of the public spaces in Europe, sometimes in the name of urban renewal, and the commodification of the media. It is as if we might make a parallel between the spatial order of the city under pressure for different land uses and spectrum which until recent technological advances was scarce. As the mark of possession on the spatial order, or on the spectrum, becomes more prominent it assumes the status of a brand in a retail sense producing a set of seamless fantasies for a seamless collection of consumers.

In a paper to which I will refer later Professor Farrel Corcoran wrote of the voyeurism as to the criminal which can be exploited as a substitute for the news or current affairs. He describes three major network evening news programmes in 1995 broadcasting a total of 2,574 crime stories;

"A fascination with crime dominates both news and entertainment genres - the three major network evening news programmes in 1995 broadcast a total of 2,574 crime stories. Local news, too, is dominated by a nightly extravaganza of mayhem: fires, personal tragedies, train wrecks, highway disasters, interspersed with the terminal inanity of cloned information that passes for party political

debate. Television schedules flirt with soft porn, celebrate gross consumption, glorify guns and demonise all the wretched of the earth. The relentless earnings pressure of commercial broadcasting makes programming just another corporate operation, driven by the same demands of the financial market as steel making, banking or fast food merchandising."

Professor Corcoran saw as the source as the reduction of the standard among other things the fact that "too few people make decisions about what the population need to know, resulting in a one dimensional smooth edged cultural flow that colonizes the national symbolic environment".

I am not arguing for the return to a world that was simple in its class divisions, resolute in its Arnoldian assumptions. I am simply saying that if the public space, and public service broadcasting is part of it, is lessened, there will be an immense social loss at the level of integration, cohesion, and sense of community.

If there is a loss of discourse through public service broadcasting; If it is accompanied by low turn-out in elections, low political participation, the emergence of, as it were, an etiquette of being apolitical, then the confrontation between the beneficiaries and the losers of the markets will, in the decades to come be unmediated by institutions such as trade unions and political parties. Such confrontations, without a mediating discourse, will carry a far grater risk of violence.

Public service broadcasting is important then. It is important that it continue to enjoy wide spread public support. Indeed many of those who are opposed to the concept of the public service broadcaster are willing to retain the concept of public service broadcasting itself.

The definition of public service broadcasting and of the public service broadcaster is a matter of some importance. There is always a tendency for those who offer, usually under some form of licensing regulation, news, current affairs or weather, to say that this constitutes their public service contribution.

In Ireland, commercial radio interests have made a case in recent years for the licence fee being shared on such a basis. To me, the structure of the public space, across the programming schedules is what is important. The broadcaster has to be assessed by the totality and the philosophy of content. The issue is not one of having a sprinkling of one of the eight values we mentioned at the outset. It is how all of these are achieved continuously for a significant proportion of the public in a universal way.

One of the important benefits of having a vibrant public service broadcasting arrangement is that in addition to inviting citizens to experience the timeless, the universal, the unimagined, it is also a rich source of creativity - a creativity that is not confined to the broadcasting station or to one activity.

We have arrived at a situation in which it is perfectly clear that public service broadcasting will exist in future in a mixed model of broadcasting. If it is the strong partner in such a mixed model, if it itself values creativity and programme making as its principal definition of itself, it will have a positive effect as to standard on its partners within the mixed model. If it is the weaker partner it will seek to compete with what surrounds it and will embark, perhaps even imperceptibly, on a process of self commercialisation with the down grading of programme making and an obsessive, market led, concentration on programme acquisition and provision.

Time does not allow me to develop the institutional, organisational, implications of all of this. I believe, for example, that when independent commissioning is facilitated by a national broadcaster that this can be of benefit to both the commissioning authority and

the independent producer involved. It does, however, require an ethics of production, delivery and administration.

On September 26th 1996, Professor Farrel Corcoran delivered a paper entitled "The Future of Public Service Broadcasting in the Single Audio Visual Market" to an Informal meeting of Ministers of the European Union with responsibility for Culture and Audio Visual matters. Among the issues he dealt with was the issue of the European Broadcasting Union which had served to provide the widest possible provision of free to air broadcasting for its members by having an ability to pay clause.

"The Commission Decision of June 1993 ruled that the effect of the EBU provisions governing the joint acquisition of television rights to sport events was to strengthen the market position of its members to the disadvantage of private, commercial competitors, contrary to Article 85 (1) of the Treaty of Rome. Nevertheless, the Decision granted the EBU an exemption for a five year period under certain conditions, within the meaning of Article 85 (3) ("... allowing consumers a fair share of the resulting benefit..."). However, a subsequent action taken against this Decision by a number of private broadcasters resulted in a rejection in July 1996 by the Court of First Instance of the European Communities of the Commission's use of the concept of "particular public mission" in granting the exemption until 1998, in relation to the EBU's argument that was derived from Article 85 (3). In effect, the Court has annulled the Commission's 1993 Decision.

Whatever the legal outcome of the appeal in this case, the question for policy makers should be a citizen-centred one. Are the social benefits delivered to viewers by public service broadcasters action co-operatively in the EBU insufficient when balanced against the supposed harm inflicted on private broadcasters by barriers to entry constituted by public service broadcasters' join

acquisition of programming rights?"

Professor Corcoran went on to list a number of challenges to licence fee as income to public service broadcasters

- (1) "Private broadcasters from France, Spain and Portugal have lodged complaints alleging that consumer levies, direct subsidies or periodic capital injections confer unfair advantages on public service broadcasters. A decision against the use of licence fees would, of course, strike at the very heart of public service broadcasting. In response to the complaint, DGIV has commissioned a consultant's report, which has been distributed to Member States for comment, and will undertake a similar study of the licence situation in new Member States and EFTA States. Only then will it "encourage a debate on the way forward".

In the past, the Commission has approved "aid" to broadcasters as long as the aid is shown to be necessary for the promotion and/or preservation of European culture and its proportional to these goals. But arguing that licence fees are a form of "State aid" is fraught with dangers from a public service broadcasting point of view, if it means that cultural policy must always, ultimately, be subservient to competition policy and be "shoe-horned" only by way of exception to market rules. A more helpful approach is contained in the legal opinion tabled by ARD and ZDF in May 1996, prepared by Professor Thomas Opperman of Tübingen University, on how German broadcasters' receipt of licence fee income can be reconciled with European law on State aid. He argues that (a) licence fees cannot be regarded as preferential treatment, rather they represent

appropriate remuneration for provision of basic service (b) licence fees are not a form of State aid because they are not granted freely by the State, since they are unavoidable constitutional requirement in Germany (c) they are not allocated out of public coffers, but are a charge on the citizen not directly borne by the State budget within the meaning of Article 92 (d). Public service broadcasting is, in fact, in an unfavourable competitive situation compared to its private rivals, since it must allocate its resources in accordance with its remit, and this means that it cannot stake everything on audience ratings.

- (2) The European Radio Association has filed a complaint against public service radio having unfair advantage because of its "priority access to frequencies, larger number of transmitters and double funding".
- (3) Toy Manufacturers Europe, the toy industries lobby group, has lodged complaints against the Greek ban on toy advertising in daytime television and also against Sweden and Belgium, and promises to do the same against Ireland this Autumn. In the Irish case, RTE argues that its public service remit obliges it to take seriously research findings indicating that pre-school children do not understand the persuasive intent of advertising (the "caveat emptor" factor in selling) and therefore access to them by advertisers should be restricted.

Decisions on cases like these will determine whether the emergence of a single market will benefit producers alone, or whether the benefits will actually move from the level of corporate enterprise to that of the viewer. It is sometimes observed by academic researchers that there is a palpable bias against public service broadcasting, and the EBU in particular, perceptible in the very

organisational culture of the Commission, where the everyday discourse of even junior officers in some Directorates tends to assume that the very notion of public service broadcasting is an anachronism in today's media landscape. This bias is evident even in areas not directly concerned with broadcasting. In the ongoing debate in the Bangemann Forum on the Information Society, for instance, Mr. Bangemann has dissociated himself from the conclusions of Working Group V (the Cultural Dimension and Future of media) regarding the importance of a modern public broadcasting service for the development of an information society accessible to all.

I believe, that public service broadcasting, unambiguously funded by the licence fee - an important practical and emblematic bond with the citizen - can be a powerful space of creativity. The importance of creativity is enhanced rather than lessened in a model of mixed production. There is an interaction of standards that is most important for the overall quality of the broadcasting that emerges. It is from an atmosphere like this that many learn what they will later use for a source of innovation in the cultural industries. In this space it becomes clear that, rather than it being the case that we must wait for the surpluses of the economic space to allow cultural events to happen, and cultural products to emerge, it is the case that economics can be made human again by being made creative.

There was a time when the arts were not a specialist, separate activity, but the possession of every man and woman who partook of a culture - its stories, poems, carpentry, pots, utensils and so on. When the anthropologist Margaret Mead began her study of the Balinese, she attempted to explain to them the western view of art as a "heightened" representation of life. At first, they could not understand, for they had no

frames to put around their pictures. Eventually they followed her explanation - and, as soon as they did, told her "We have no art. We just do everything as well as we can". That world is now lost, but one of the aims of a comprehensive arts policy might be to combat the growing compartmentalisation of the modern economic systems and to restore expressive freedom to the individual, so that every man and woman can again be in some sense an artist. The arts administrator, like any true professional, moves to that ideal, if impossible, situations where his or her skills would no longer be necessary, because the arts would have returned to the wider practices of a fulfilled life. But how do we combat the detachment of the arts from the disciplines of economics, politics and philosophy? And how, in doing so, might we reconnect the conduct of economic policy to the ethical vision.

The world economy is ravaged by unemployment, especially among the young, many of whom are educated to unprecedented levels of knowledge which can find no outlet in salaried activity. This is an appalling waste of human potential and creativity - and this must be accepted as inevitable so as to satisfy the economic mechanism which seems to operate with complete indifference to the needs of the person. But economics was not always a dismal science. Its shapers believed that it had a moral imperative: to eliminate material insecurity and thus enhance the expressive freedom of peoples. For Adam Smith and Maynard Keynes, economics was the discipline which would protect that right. It may not be an accident that, through the quality of their prose, both men also have a claim to be considered as artists.

For too long, however, financial institutions have used their hegemony to set limits to policy in other areas, constantly diminishing the cultural space in which so much radical or innovative thinking is possible. One result has been a dire impoverishment of social philosophy: we no longer seem to be living in countries but in economies. It is not inappropriate to use the concept 'the depeopled economy' for such a development.

Another consequence of the fracturing of intellectual life has been the devaluation of play as a creative activity, for a consumer society is so goal-oriented that it has little use for any goal-free activity. Homo economicus feels justified by his products, whereas play is concerned with means rather than ends, with the quality of an action rather than its results. Hence the major contradiction of our economic arrangements: that a society based on the negation of the play-element presents itself as uniquely able to deliver play - but only as an experience of consumption. In the process play has been placed in the service of something which is not at all playful, being narrowed, some would say degraded to the level of specialized work.

This degradation is only possible in a society which has lost an ancient wisdom which taught that play, far from being a deviation from the workaday norm, is the basis of all culture - that everything is learned first by play and that man is more human when playing; a society that has lost a powerful symmetry with nature and allowed itself to become a receiving space for the consequences of science and technology and society rather than moulding them in the service of humanity. We need to recover that wisdom and that symmetry, to reverse the cultural process: to show that as soon as people assume their own freedom and seize it, their work takes on the aspect of play.

Such an infusion of creativity into the economic space could not just transform the meaning of work, but also help to renovate the conduct of economics, restoring its humanist dimension. This will have to be done with the aid of the new technologies and in the context of a global network of services, markets and commodities. A simplistic call for a folk revival will not suffice.

Let me give some practical examples from the world of economics as we know it. One of the scandals of applied economics is the unpreparedness of middle management for

change. Minds which for decades have ceased to ask why they do what they do have doomed themselves to mere systems maintenance. If one reads the pages of Sit Down And Be Counted one sees an example of this in the confrontation between the system maintainers and the radicals. For bureaucrats that very lack of creativity which seemed to insulate them from controversy or painful debate has been exposed in all its inadequacy by the challenge of the new technology and the information super highway. System adaptation in a system in crisis is markedly insufficient.

Such a scenario is never wholly surprising. After all, the sheer volume of facts to be digested by the students of so many professional disciplines leaves little time for a deeper interrogation of their moral worth. The result, however, has been a generation of technicians rather than visionaries, each one taking a career rather than an idea seriously. The lack of imagination in much middle management is only symptom. the answer must be reform in our educational methods, so that students are encouraged to ask about 'know-why' as well as 'know-how'.

Once the arts are restored to a more central role in educational institutions, the long-postponed debate about the ethics of economic systems might begin and there could be a tremendous unleashing of creative energy in other disciplines too. It's no secret that the heroic period of productive capitalism is over: The enterprise economy is somewhat stalled, to judge by the millions for which it has no immediate use. It is also painfully clear that we are all caught in a reactive relationship with the economic cycle - not masters of it, but mastered by it. A new source of ethical authority is needed. In the medium term we may need to accept creativity as one of the factors of production in economics.

Most great advances in knowledge have come from acts of initial dissidence, made by someone brave enough to question the prevailing code. That act of dissent, even in the

fields of science and technology, can often be rather artistic in nature: a hunch, an instinct, which may take years of hackwork to confirm. But the great scientific inventors of our modern world, Copernicus and Kepler as well as Smith and Keynes, were in that deepest sense artists. And they were productive.

The trite old mercantile image of the artist as a parasite, living off the surplus of more developed societies, needs to be rejected. Every artist, however humble, is a useful producer, and many great artists help to create the environments in which men and women of the future will live. A figure such as W.B. Yeats did not define creativity in solely personal terms: his project was a search for a unified culture, offering a 'fit' between socially defined goals and the expressive freedom of the individual. Now that information technology has become more calibrated to personal and domestic use, this ideal may seem more feasible. The solitary thinker at the keyboard may be able to launch counter-initiatives unthinkable to the worker who once stood on the production line.

The 'fit' between personal and social fulfilment is never easily achieved. Keynes wisely observed that a reliance on market forces would never, of itself, have guaranteed the development of roads, street lighting, and so on. Some government intervention is needed in areas of public utility. This is also true of the arts, especially in smaller countries whose private industries are never wealthy enough to offer major subsidies. Even in the massive United States, this can be so: American drama, even when written by radicals like Arthur Miller, remained old-fashioned in form because it was at the mercy of market forces. Yet, if government subventions become pervasive, they can smother creativity and compromise independence, something which happened in the countries of the Eastern Bloc before 1989. I am convinced that we need regulation in the digital age if there is to be the diversity that the technology promises. The twin tendencies of unregulated concentration of ownership and fragmentation of audiences promises

disaster. There will be of course, always, a need for broadcasting, while being provided for from the licence fee, for example, to have its freedom respected if it is to achieve its critical role in society.

The need is for an arm's length relationship between "the state of the arts" and "the arts of the state": otherwise self-censorship may ensue, the avoidance by artists of political topics which would embarrass the authorities, and the alternative pursuit of purely private themes. The balancing of these forces must include a separation of realms, and a recognition that that which seems audacious today may appear commonplace very soon.

As Scott Fitzgerald sadly joked: "an artist writes for the youth of today, the critics of tomorrow and the schoolmasters of ever after".

The State's role is neither neutral or residual but if it is to be interventionist that intervention should be in a manner that confers freedom with responsibility.

The vital importance of youth in all this is obvious. Subventions are often helpful in launching careers which, later on, acquire a momentum and self-sufficiency of their own. This is precisely the reverse of the "learned dependency" which critics of government spending repeatedly claim to find among the chronic unemployed. And this is why Yeats was right to describe artists as producers, making a huge impact on their communities.

A report early in the 1990's by Coopers & Lybrand on the Employment and Economic significance of the Cultural industries in Ireland has given us an idea of just how great that impact really is. Among the Reports principal findings were the following:-

1. The cultural industries in Ireland give employment of 33,800 people.
2. The value of the cultural industries amounts to IR,441m per year.
3. Some 88% of income is earned by way of direct trading activity, and only 12% is provided by way of grants.

4. Cultural businesses employ slightly more women than men with a balance of 54% and 46%.
5. Almost seven out of every ten jobs in the cultural sector are full-time, mostly on a contract basis.

As these figures indicate one can have the enormous benefits of the cultural industries and inject creativity from the space of culture into the economy practically and theoretically construed.

In conclusion then, there is a new communications order on our planet, but one which works in a very uneven and unfair fashion. The great majority of the world's citizens are reduced by it to the condition of consumers - and what they mainly consume are visual images, sometimes woeful misrepresentation of themselves, coming from one particular part of the planet, the United States, and indeed from just one subsection of the that mighty country. Some peoples, notably the French have understandably sought to challenge this hegemony, to extend their own cultural space in the face of this invasion. But even their efforts, assisted by the cordon sanitaire of a distinctive and formidable language, have met with only partial success.

The choice is as to whether we become the consumers of images in a passive culture or the makers of images in an active culture in a democratic society. It will ultimately prove futile to seek to create boundaries, barriers and check-points in an age of transnational electronic media. The more optimistic approach is to invent and create alternative films, music, books, which can appeal over the heads of current market-leaders to the youth of America, many of whom are as likely as their European counterparts to tire of the prevailing blandness. The more unified and homogenous our political structures become, the more will people turn to indigenous cultures for an expression of themselves.

However, this will not be easy. In Ireland too, as commercialism in radio, and more recently in TV, asserted itself, one could see the ethos changing along a line of self commercialisation. Many, for example, are unhappy at the existence of advertising for children but, nevertheless, they are anxious to retain the advertising income from this source.

The incredibly difficult task of satisfying advertisers with ratings, while retaining a commitment to programming quality, is getting more difficult all the time. Sporting rights of course, have become a matter of such fierce competition by satellite purchasers that the general access of citizens to significant sporting events cannot be any longer taken for granted. A minority of events may be protected but the reality is that something even as basically social as sport may be changed fundamentally as it becomes a television commodity. The case has been made, of course, and needs to be made again and again about the importance of media education in generating a critical capacity which all citizens need in a world in which consumption of the media is becoming more central to their lives.

Professor Benjamin R. Barber in his book 'Jihad V's. McWorld' published in 1995. provides a description of the alternative to a diverse world which he calls McWorld;

"McWorld is a product of popular culture driven by expansionist commerce. Its template is American, its form style. Its goods are as much images as material, an aesthetic as well as a product line. It is about culture as commodity, apparel as ideology. Its symbols are Harley-Davidson motorcycles and Cadillac motorcars hoisted from the roadways, where they once represented a mode of transportation, to the marquees of global market cafés like Harley-Davidson's and the Hard Rock Cafés where they

became the icons of a lifestyle. You don't drive them, you feel their vibes and rock to the images they conjure up from old movies and new celebrities. Music, video theatre, books and theme parks - the new churches of commercial civilization in which malls are public squares and suburbs the neighbourless neighbourhoods - all are constructed as image exports creating a common world taste around common logos, advertising slogans, stars, songs, brand names, jingles and trademarks. Videology is fuzzier and less successful in instilling the novel values required for global market success."

I am indebted to the distinguished former newspaper editor from Stockholm Arne Ruth for the first reference I heard to professor Barber's book. If I might return for a moment to the possible connection between culture and violence, I note what Professor Barber has to say of the conversion of the impulse for identity from innocence to hatred of the stranger:

"What ends as Jihad may begin as a simple search for a local identity, some set of common personal attributes to hold our against the numbing and neutering uniformities of industrial modernization and the colonizing culture of McWorld".

We live in a Europe that at the time of the ascendancy of the Right championed deregulation and in an extremely ideological way announced that the hidden trend of the market would guide us. Barber in his book had described the character of such a period:

"...the absence of common will and that conscious and collective human control under the guidance of law we call democracy (...) They both make war on the sovereign nation-state and thus undermine the nation-state's democratic institutions. Each eschews civil society and belittles

democratic citizenship, neither seek alternative democratic institutions. Their common thread is indifference to civil liberty. Jihad forges communities of blood rooted in exclusion and hatred, communities that slight democracy in favour of tyrannical paternalism or consensual tribalism. McWorld forges global markets rooted in consumption and profit, leaving to an untrustworthy, if not altogether fictitious, invisible hand issues of public interest and common goods that once might have been nurtured by democratic citizenries and their watchful governments. Such governments, intimidated by market ideology, are actually pulling back at the very moment they ought to be aggressively intervening. What was once understood as protecting the public interest is now excoriated as heavy-handed regulatory browbeating (...) Today ... we seem intent on re-creating a world in which our only choices are the secular universalism of the cosmopolitan market and the everyday particularism of the fractious tribe".

Professor Barber's analysis may be somewhat apocalyptic but it does stress the important issues of identity and diversity.

The fact that Irish people use English is often cited as increasing our vulnerability to Anglo-American mass culture. This is so, but it also increases our opportunities in the vast English-speaking market, the most affluent in the world. There is, also, a huge Irish constituency overseas to which works like Dancing at Lughnasa or films like The Commitments have appealed. Time does not allow but let me suggest that identity is continually being constructed and reforged and sometimes with the most exciting results in the interstices of the migrants' world.

Our present challenge, however, lies in choosing, whether, the technology will be used to

assist a clarification of such issues or obliterate them.

With digitalization comes an entirely new set of policy decisions which policy makers cannot avoid. For example, there will be competition between political providers as to mode of delivery. It will be important to insist that content is even more important than capacity. The debate cannot afford to be exclusively technical except at a huge democratic cost. Blurring the values content of the new revolution suits the conglomerates who benefit from a concentration of ownership as much as it weakens citizenship. The shared space will come under threat and we should remember the injunction of one great writer on broadcasting - "We humanise what is going on in the world and within ourselves only by speaking of it and in the course of speaking about it we learn to be human". We live by stories and the principles by which stories are selected, the skill with which they are told, and their resonance or otherwise in our own culture is a fundamental democratic concern.

In a recent Report to the Joint Committee on Heritage and the Irish Language of the Irish Parliament I set out the issues that had to be decided as I saw them. These included:

- *Universal Access - which means would best approximate it?
- *The contextualization, or separating out, of entertainment as an aspect of broadcasting.
- *The distribution of spare spectrum;
- *The timing of analogue switch-off;
- *The nature of Electronic Programme Guides;
- *Content - the issue of appropriate regulation;
- *The number of channels to be allocated;
- *The position of existing licence holder for cable and satellite;
- *The European context, particularly in relation to Television Sans Frontier;
- *Tiered subscriptions which I saw as creating a new circumstance for the

public service broadcaster should it continue to be the sole beneficiary of the broadcasting licence;

*The nature of the 'must carry' obligation;

*Local television;

*Interactive services;

*Digital radio;

In August of this year my successor announced that the Government had approved the drafting of legislation in relation to broadcasting including a decision to allow the speedy and effective introduction of Digital Terrestrial Television in Ireland.

We will this Autumn debate the legislation but I believe there will be a consensus that the issues are too important to leave to the market. This is an attitude I believe shared by most thoughtful authors on the subject for example Andrew Graham and Gavyn Davies in their Broadcasting Society and Policy in the Multi -Media Age suggest that;

"What public policy, therefore, requires is a positive force that would:

- act as a counterweight to the private concentration of ownership
- deliver national coverage so as to counteract fragmentation of audiences;
- provide a "centre of excellence" which both makes and broadcasts programmes;
- be large enough to influence the market and so act as the guarantor of quality;
- widen choice both now and in the future by complimenting the market through pursuit of public service purposes.

The best way to provide this positive pressure is via public service broadcasting

(not as a substitute to the commercial sector but as a complement to it).

The conclusion of this part of the argument is that, while a public service broadcaster, such as the BBC, has no right to exist, there are purposes for its existence. Moreover, contrary to the conventional wisdom, the new technology increase, rather than decreases, the need for such a broadcaster".

In the end we are left with the conclusion that we should use the new convergence in technology to give a leadership role to public service broadcasting in a mixed model. We should do that, and fund it through the licence fee, and rejecting populist arguments to the contrary, issue an invitation to the alternative to populism - an active citizenship that will enable us to feel at home in our world. [END]