

**abundance of culture . culture of abundance:
supporting creativity from the bottom up**

Response to a green paper¹

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In a family constellation workshop, clients come with a particular issue they want to address. The issues are often long-standing problems that plague a person's life, regardless of repeated attempts at change or developing insight.

In setting up a family constellation, a client chooses workshop attendees to represent members of his or her family, and then places them in relationship to each other, without comment, based on how it "felt" to be in the family. Despite not knowing each other or having much information about the family members or their relationships to each other, the representatives become a living model of the original family system. They begin to notice feelings and thoughts which reflect those of the actual family members.

The facilitator slowly works with this three-dimensional portrait of the family. First, the hidden systemic dynamic comes into clear view. Next, the facilitator seeks a healing resolution. Once a resolution comes to light, the client stands in her place in the constellation. The final step is for the facilitator to suggest one or two healing sentences to be spoken aloud or inwardly.

There is a wealth of anecdotal and case study reports that over time the new image of the family system - with belonging, balance and order restored - gradually melts the archaic image that supported the entanglement.

Source: <http://www.systemicfamilysolutions.com/introductionto.html>,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systemic_Constellations

Family systems therapy can be compared to an artform: it is performative, collaborative, and its domain is the imagination. It demonstrates the power of imagination: how rigidly it can freeze aspects of our reality, particularly with regard to relations, and how vital a force for change can be produced when movement is at work within imagination.

The artist offers certain gifts to the world, including an ability to perceive wholes, uncover the relationships between parts and whole, and to 'live' with competing or 'incommensurate' conceptions of the whole.

...many artists knowingly spend long periods of time on the frontiers of their own perception and cognition. What they find there often stretches our conventional notions of beauty, aesthetics, and even the fundamentals of expression.

Vijay Iyer, On Improvisation

Art = precise knowledge of how to cope with the psychic and social consequences of the next technology

Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media

¹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, GREEN PAPER: Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries, COM(2010) 183

Before they produce content or evolve form, artists offer the presence of other ways of seeing things. It is an integral part of their practice to develop what Joseph Beuys calls 'new organs of perception'. These alternatives of vision offer movement to a situation, and can stimulate growth and breakthrough i.e. innovation.

bridging 'incommensurable' worlds

The green paper recognises many facets of one trend:

- *The ability to create social experiences and networking is now a factor of competitiveness.*
- *the need to strengthen the link between education, training and CCIs ... and better synergies between the cultural sector and other sectors of the economy and stronger links between cultural and other relevant policies.*
- *build new bridges between art, philosophy, science and business.*
- *to recognise and support new ways of experiencing culture*
- *further interactions between different artistic and creative disciplines, (sub)sectors, economic fields and points in the production chain are needed. A more intensive, systematic, and wide-ranging collaboration between the arts, academic and scientific institutions should be promoted, as well as private-public initiatives to support artist-led experimentation.*
- *the setting up of meeting places and "laboratories" for user-centred and open innovation and experimentation, where various disciplines work together should be promoted; intermediaries or brokers between different sectors and disciplines should be encouraged.*
- *create more spaces and better support for experimentation, innovation and entrepreneurship.*

There is a palpable lack of understanding of what all this actually means: what constitutes such spaces, how can they best be operated, and what are the means and rules of access? Fortunately, there is a growing art practice that is devoted to the exploration of these very questions.

The word ecology immediately summons up the idea of negotiable relations, the idea of rights, responsibilities and participation and ultimately the idea of citizenship – local and global. ...

What is emerging and has to be supported is the model of the artist as negotiator, one who, by implication, with others, participates in negotiation in the social space.. ...

New forms, not only of production but also of post-production for it is, arguably, in the distribution space where the value of art is negotiated and created – where public value lies.

Declan McGonagle, [Art & Ecology: New Necessary Forms](#)

Ballett Frankfurt's Schmalclub & New Meaningful Public Space, and RICE collaborations with Social Services, in Germany; Exchange Dublin & Seomra Spraoi; Cork Caucus; Daghdha Dance Company's Framemakers in Limerick; Interface at University of Ulster in Belfast; Dissonancias in Spain... this list in no way encompasses the activity taking place, as **social sculpture** or **social choreography**, under the general notion that 'the work takes place on, in or about the social':

- discovering new formats for interaction between citizen and artist, between citizen and art, between creativity and the social;
- implementing initiatives that join the creativity of the person to the seen and unseen civic structures around them;
- recalibrating the lived connection between creativity, economics and politics;
- rewriting notions of community and civic responsibility.

This work is a weaving of the social, and a joining of the disparate sectors of society. It can contribute to debates about **Creative Citizenship**, is by its nature **cross-cultural and cross-generational**, and can perform as a kind of joining invention that **connects and integrates** the fruits of our radically specialised knowledge disciplines. It is the art of curating and choreographing spaces that support, facilitate, contain or contextualise creative endeavour. [*These do not need to be physical or permanent spaces, instead being defined by where and how people come together. More bottom up, less top down.* – Willie White]

- **ACTION POINT:** The most effective means of supporting cross-disciplinary traffic is to **recognise, appreciate and support** these kinds of social artistic activity. **New funding initiatives** can be developed specific to social choreography, and to its expansion in a variety of new directions, particularly towards industry and education, developing schemes that seek **innovative types of residencies within commercial and educational organisations**.
- **ACTION POINT:** Agencies need to **fund the artists and creative curators to develop the schemes themselves**. This reverses the current situation where funding bodies create the schemes and ask artists to fit within their outlines. **It's time to turn the format over to the artist.**

supporting artists

It is essential to **recognise the value of the vocational artist**. The vocational artist will achieve varying degrees of success with their work (measured in terms of artistic achievement, economic return or acknowledgement by peers and public) over the course of their lifetime. But at a certain stage in their careers, while they may have proved the seriousness of their intent, the quality of their work, and the soundness of their practice, they hit a wall. They are no longer young, and therefore do not qualify for many public and private initiatives that support the emerging artist. Indeed the current obsession with the new and the young produces a palpable rebound effect as artists move into the middle stage of their development, which can involve less 'dramatic' leaps in output, and coincides with personal life moments such as purchasing a home or starting a family. While Irish schemes like the *cnuas* recognise longevity and achievement, this middle period can be increasingly difficult to navigate for an artist, resulting in a loss of talent and experience to the field. [*the real threat is that untapped potential will remain untapped.* – Willie White]

- **ACTION POINT:** We can develop **innovative placements** inside state and commercial organisations, or educational institutions, where an artist established in their practice can continue to work, but can open their

‘antennae’ to the specific new field around them. Their work will then naturally carry traces that feed back to an organisation, there will be daily contact between the artist and other workers, and there is an obvious opportunity here for careful creative curation as mentioned above. **New formats of communication and exchange can facilitate exchange of ideas, practice and process between artists and organisations.**

- **ACTION POINT:** Other schemes such as **income guarantees** will safeguard the role of the artist, and the development of European Community-wide, easily-accessed support for travel is also essential. **Schemes such as Travel & Mobility and Go See Awards by their very nature facilitate communication and artistic exchange within and between member states.** They should be easy to get often, and can be underwritten by public-private partnership (utilising free capacity on public and private transport systems), making them relatively cost effective. It is important to **recognise the inherent value of travel to artists**, in gaining perspective from the local, making connections regionally, and replenishing the well of inspiration.

It is essential that we acknowledge the role that the Social Welfare State plays in maintaining artists in their practice.

- **ACTION POINT:** The creation of a special category of Social Welfare support, that enables mobility and affirms the social status of the artist, would go a long way to encouraging artists to contribute pro-actively, and without fear of a financial backlash, to the workaday world of commerce and industry.

creating capacity

Artists are often self-taught or auto-didactic. They frequently conduct hard research into materials, processes and technologies, and softer research on social, historical, or psychological questions, as well as being informed by a lifelong personal exploratory impulse. They combine in many instances intellectual, technical, imaginative and physical skills in supremely integrated and accomplished ways. As such they model the kind of learning patterns that promote creativity, dexterity, innovation, and continual education. [*Europe needs to move from a concept of education as the accreditation of citizens with vocational qualification towards a culture of pervasive capacity for learning* - Willie White]

- **ACTION POINT:** By creating ‘liminal spaces’ such as residencies, studios-within-schools, student run galleries, that bring the world of the artist into the educational institution, we can broaden the range of a student’s education, exponentially increase their firsthand contact with and understanding of art, and the depth of their ability to learn, to self-assess, and to integrate information as knowledge.

temporary conclusion: abundance|spilling over

An encounter with an artist can have subtle and virtually untrackable consequences. It might provoke, stimulate or catalyse. It may be an isolated but essential moment in a personal or organisational process that occurs over a long period of time, perhaps

years long. The encounter can affirm the creativity, individuality, worth and autonomy of a person, and regardless of whether that person's role in an organisation is deemed to be 'creative,' the effect can enhance their efficacy, stimulate their confidence, and support personal and professional development.

The quantification of these spill-over effects is challenging. It might involve indicators that relate more to self-esteem, job satisfaction, or quality of life and experience. Trends in bio-economics have led the way in developing statistical indicators that allow a more holistic picture of **an ecology** to emerge. It might be more fruitful for corporations, institutions, and nations to develop a self-image, and a means of self-assessment, that understands their organisational selves as 'ecologies.'

Ecology goes further, reaches further, and relates to the social organism's capacity for life, for this is a living being that we cannot today perceive with our ordinary senses, without practice.

Joseph Beuys, What is Art?