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**TOWARDS CULTURAL DEMOCRACY:
CONTRADICTION AND CRISIS IN BRITISH AND U.S.
CULTURAL POLICY 1870 - 1990**

CHRIS BILTON

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UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

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Summary

This study examines the theoretical contradictions of 'cultural democracy' in Britain and the United States. Cultural democracy here refers to the claim that community participation in cultural activities (artistic production and consumption) leads to participation in a democratic society. In Britain 'cultural democracy' has been associated especially with the 'community arts' movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

Using Gramsci's theory of 'hegemony' as a framework for analysis, I will argue that the theoretical inconsistencies of 'cultural democracy' in the 1970s and 1980s can be traced back to a fundamental contradiction in British and U.S. cultural policy, between 'materialist' and 'idealist' conceptions of culture. This contradiction has resulted in moments of crisis in British and U.S. cultural policy, followed by periods of 'unstable equilibrium'. In support of this argument I will focus on four of these moments of contradiction and crisis. First I will develop my hypothetical model of contradiction, crisis and equilibrium in relation to the British community arts movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Then I will apply this model to three successive 'moments of crisis' in British and U.S. cultural policy: the 'civilising mission' of the late nineteenth century public cultural institutions in Britain and the U.S., particularly the settlement house; the U.S. federal arts projects of the 1930s; dilemmas of access and accountability in recent media policy. I will conclude by exploring some alternative theoretical formulations of the relationship between 'culture' and 'community' and their possible application to cultural policy and cultural democracy.

Preface: Background to the research

This research project began with my interest in community arts and the so-called cultural democracy movement in Britain and Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. I wanted to examine the intellectual basis for the belief that a democratic, participatory artistic culture is the prerequisite for a democratic political system. The rhetoric of cultural democracy seems to have it both ways: on the one hand cultural elitism is seen as the inevitable consequence of social inequalities based on class and race, on the other hand participation in cultural activities is presented as the solution to social alienation and exclusion. The key question seems to be one of 'determination'; is culture 'determined' by social class, race, gender, geography, or is participation in cultural activities capable of transforming, even overcoming social divisions and a variety of social ills from voter apathy to rising crime rates? Behind the two positions sketched out here lie two conceptions of culture: the 'materialist' or 'Marxist' view of culture as part of the 'superstructure' determined, in the last instance, by the base of 'material relations', and the 'idealist' or 'culturalist' view of culture as a transcendent common good, a 'general perfection' in which and through which social class and social difference ceases to matter. Community artists seem to be idealists when describing their own work, materialists when describing the culture of the 'establishment'. This central contradiction has formed the starting point for my work.

I also wanted to challenge the perception that the cultural democracy movement represented a 'radical break' from the post-war policies of cultural democratisation. There is a danger here of consigning the movement to the

nostalgic list of heroic radical failures; thus according to one regional arts officer in the U.K, community arts ‘had its day’ in the early 1980s and is now a quaint anachronism. Yet ‘community arts’ has more in common with the nineteenth century ‘civilising mission’ and the merry England of the 1945 Arts Council than its supporters care to admit. The community arts movement is rooted in long-running dilemmas of cultural policy; these dilemmas will continue to be important even if the term ‘community arts’ has fallen out of fashion.

Finally, community artists and community arts and media activists are unusual in British cultural policy in that they actually seek to ground their work in a coherent theoretical analysis, even if that analysis is not always clearly articulated. I hope that in taking a theoretical approach to my subject I may stimulate some debate about the motives and objectives of community arts and cultural democracy.

On a personal level, this study has been an attempt to rationalise my own mixed feelings towards the community arts movement, based on my experiences first as a ‘community arts worker’ and then as an arts development officer in London in the 1980s and early 1990s. My conclusion has been that the internal contradictions and buried assumptions charted in this study may actually be the source of the movement’s dynamism; as soon as one faction claims to have discovered a ‘definitive’ strategy or rationale, the movement falls apart. By exposing the internal dynamic of ‘democratic’ and ‘democratising’ cultural institutions, I am not intending to offer a blueprint, only a plea for continuing experiment and debate.

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Notes on Text, References, Bibliography

Because I have used British and American sources, spellings of certain words (eg. theatre / theater, realise / realize) are not consistent; I have used the British spelling except in quotation from U.S. sources.

References within the text use the author-date format. I have used copyright dates rather than publication dates. In the case of some historical sources I have included original publication dates alongside the date of the edition to which I am referring, in order to place a work in appropriate context (eg. Habermas 1962/1992). References to UK publications include only the city of publication (eg. London); references to U.S. publications may include city and state (eg. Boulder, CO; Cambridge, MA) if there seems to be a danger of confusion between cities of the same name.

In the bibliography I have not separated out 'primary' and 'secondary' sources because in the case of my research such a distinction would be arbitrary. A single list should make it easier for readers to track down specific references from the text. I have also abandoned any attempt to separate works directly referred to in the text from 'background reading'; again the distinction seemed to be arbitrary and unnecessarily complicated. In one or two 'one-off' cases I have included a reference in the footnotes instead of the bibliography.

List of Frequently Used Abbreviations

ACA: Association of Community Artists / Association for Community Arts

ACGB: Arts Council of Great Britain

Arts Council: Arts Council of Great Britain / Arts Council of England.

BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation / Company

CEMA: Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts

CPB: Corporation for Public Broadcasting (US)

FAP: Federal Art Project

FCC / FRC: Federal Communications Commission / Federal Radio
Commission

FTP: Federal Theatre Project

GLC: Greater London Council

NEA: National Endowment for the Arts

NPR: National Public Radio

PBS: Public Broadcasting Service (US)

RAA / RAB: Regional Arts Association / Regional Arts Board

WEA: Workers' Educational Association

WPA: Works Progress Administration / Work Projects Administration

1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY: THE CRISIS OF CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

In this introduction I will establish the theoretical framework for this study, based on Gramsci's theory of hegemony as an 'unstable equilibrium' born out of contradiction and crisis. I will argue that Gramsci's theory of hegemony offers a convincing explanation both for the historical development and ideological inconsistencies of the British community arts movement in the 1970s and 1980s, and for other 'moments' of crisis in cultural policy in this study. I will then map the contradictions in cultural policy between 'idealist' and 'materialist' conceptions of culture, both in recent British cultural policy and among the competing theoretical positions of recent cultural studies and cultural theory. Finally I will return to the story of British community arts, examining how these various contradictory tendencies have played out over the last ten years.

* * * *

1.1 The historical pattern: contradiction and crisis

The orthodox history of British 'community arts' describes a golden age of cultural radicalism rising out of the counter-culture of the late 1960s and reaching its peak in the late 1970s. This ascendancy was followed by a gradual process of assimilation in the 1980s, leading to limited gains in official recognition and funding which were offset by marginalisation, depoliticisation and tokenism. As funding cuts began to bite in the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially at the local level, community arts organisations found themselves financially threatened and politically isolated¹.

¹ This is a summary of the argument put forward by Owen Kelly (1984). It also corresponds to the anecdotal received wisdom among many former and present-day community artists and arts officers.

The factual content of this history will be evaluated at greater length below. At this stage I want to consider the broad outline as a pattern containing certain assumptions. The pattern has three principal components: a crisis in the old order; the rise of the 'progressive' forces; the incorporation of these progressive forces in the old order, implying their eventual defeat or marginalisation. This pattern, as will become clear from other examples, represents a peculiar late twentieth-century perspective on the possibilities of social change². The period of crisis and the promise of renewal are trumpeted with self-conscious radicalism; the period of incorporation is greeted with disillusionment and bitter (self-) recriminations. The circular process is ultimately futile; the old order triumphs and we are back where we started.

The intellectual justification for this fatalism is a particular variant on Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. According to this view, 'hegemony' represents the dominant social group's political 'leadership' of society by non-political means. Even in the process of conceding ground to its opponents, the dominant social order extends its network of alliances and colonises new ideas from within; every step forward represents two steps backwards. I believe that this view of hegemony as a static system of power relations dominated by a single social class represents a misreading of Gramsci at the theoretical level. At the empirical level, this 'conspiracy theory' of cultural institutions as instruments of social control does not square with evidence that cultural policies and institutions tend to be driven by a shifting internal dynamic of conflicting objectives rather than a single monolithic point of view.

² Rosalind Coward associates this pattern with the British Left's view of socialist history as a succession of "periods of crisis and stabilization", a view she associates with a blinkered and outdated class analysis (Coward 1977, 82). The pattern can also be seen in psychological terms as evidence of the alienated personality of the radical, alternating between rampant optimism and bitter despair (cf. Lasch 1965).

There are three basic flaws in what I have characterised as the typical, 'orthodox' history of the community arts movement. First, the emphasis on the moment of crisis means that cultural democracy is 'periodised' as a fleeting historical event which 'had its day' in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is also defined geographically as a reaction to 'welfarism' and the Western European tradition of government intervention in culture since 1945. Secondly the idea of a 'radical break' suggests a polar opposition between the old order and the new, ignoring a common thread of contradiction and contingency which I believe to be a characteristic of 'democratising' cultural institutions and cultural policies. Thirdly, the moment of 'incorporation' exaggerates the coherence of the resulting cultural policy, which (at the risk of repetition) I regard as being made up of conflicting and competing elements rather than a single 'point of view' or ideology.

Instead of the historical framework sketched above, I want to suggest an alternative reading of the 'crisis' of cultural democracy in which cultural policies and institutions can be traced through a succession of contradictions and realignments. According to Gramsci, the gradual accumulation of certain "incurable structural contradictions" builds to a crisis, "sometimes lasting for decades" (Gramsci 1971, 177 - 178). These contradictions are incurable because they are rooted 'organically' in the fundamental (economic) organisation of society. During the ensuing period of crisis, competing factions attempt to construct a new consensus, based around their own interests. Although the consequent realignment may result in a new 'hegemony', it is premature to assume that the situation is resolved. The basic elements may have been rearranged, different views representing different factions may predominate, but the inherent contradictions and conflicts will remain suspended in solution ready to reemerge in the future. The contradictions are "resolved to a relative degree", only to recur through a series of "convulsions at

ever longer intervals" (ibid., 180). Furthermore the different stages in this process overlap, so that 'hegemony' is continually being undermined and renewed.

Gramsci's theory of hegemony as an 'unstable equilibrium'³ is based on a Marxist view of history as the product of a fundamental, 'organic' conflict between the classes under capitalism. Adapting this model to the field of cultural policy, I will begin with the hypothesis that cultural policy is the product of an analogous conflict between opposing factions with different aims, moulding cultural policies and institutions to their own interests. While a class analysis may throw some light on these oppositions, the internal dynamic of cultural institutions does not follow the predictable lines of social class. In the case of cultural democracy, the ultimate source of these conflicts is ideological, based on an 'incurable' opposition between two conceptions of culture. This fundamental opposition often takes unpredictable and deceptive forms, reflecting the slippery nature of ideological language, an institutional tendency to fudge or ignore conflicts of interest and a gap between the rhetorical aims of cultural policy and a hidden agenda of covert objectives⁴. However, the contradictory conception of culture discussed in the next section remains a constant source of potential and actual conflict.

Following this hypothesis, the crisis of cultural democracy will be examined as a continually unravelling crisis based on an 'incurable structural contradiction' between two opposing conceptions of culture. Using Gramsci's terms, we can expect this 'organic' contradiction to build to a moment of 'conjuncture' or 'convulsion', when the contradictions stitched together by a network of expedient compromises and alliances break into open conflict. Such a moment occurred with

³ "The life of the state is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups - equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point..." (Gramsci 1971, 182).

⁴ Cf. Kawashima 1995.

the community arts movement of the 1970s. It is an essential part of my argument that this was not an isolated event, and that the 'moment' of the 1970s was no more than the latest eruption in an ongoing crisis. Tracing the pattern further back, I will highlight other 'convulsions' in cultural policy, from the emergence of 'democratising' cultural institutions in the late nineteenth century to the 'moment' of the federal arts projects in the United States in the 1930s. In the transition from theory to practice, the contradictions implicit in the cultural democracy project and the search for a common culture are made manifest in institutional, factional, political and psychological conflicts. This enquiry will examine four such 'moments' of contradiction and crisis in cultural policy; the next three chapters are devoted to nineteenth century cultural institutions, U.S. federal arts policy in the 1930s and the media access movement in the 1970s and 1980s. In this introductory chapter I will continue my analysis of the 'moment' of cultural democracy and community arts in the late 1970s.

1.2 The Contradiction of Cultural Democracy

Having referred to an ideological contradiction in cultural policy between two theories of culture, in this section I will introduce these two conceptions and trace their impact upon the cultural democracy project.

The argument for cultural democracy in the late 1970s was premised on a belief that active participation in cultural activities would encourage people to take control over their own lives and communities. Cultural democracy was thus the harbinger of a genuinely democratic society, and art was seen as a catalyst for social change⁵.

⁵ See Simpson 1976, 1978; Kelly 1984; Braden 1978. Simpson even suggests that a direct correlation can be expected between a 'democratic' cultural policy and higher turn-outs in local elections.

Behind these assumptions lies a hybrid of Marxist cultural theory and the cultural idealism of Matthew Arnold. This hybrid brings together two conflicting conceptions of culture. On the one hand 'culture' is used in an expansive, anthropological sense to describe a whole way of life, the shared meanings and values of a community or class; at the same time, 'culture' is also used more narrowly to describe a specialised artistic tradition, at first growing out of the anthropological 'culture' and then gradually recognised as a distinct, autonomous sphere of 'art' (Williams 1958). The 'anthropological' or 'sociological' conception relates the work of artists and cultural institutions to the shared experiences of class and community; the 'idealistic' or 'aesthetic' conception of culture relates art to the specialised activity of artists within an autonomous artistic tradition.

These two conceptions correspond respectively to the materialism of Marx and to the idealism of Arnold and Leavis. Arnold described culture as "the study of perfection"; culture was thus raised to an ideal realm of "general perfection", within which all social discord, especially the discord of class conflict, could be dissolved in an appeal to "best selves" and the pursuit of perfection and harmony. Similarly Leavis described a "great tradition" of literature which transcended the constraints of time and place, forming a universal canon of great culture. This idealist tradition also drew on the Romantic conception of the artist as the unacknowledged legislator of mankind and the nineteenth century search for a common culture.

Orthodox Marxist theory on the other hand takes as its starting point the 'productive forces' of material production. In a capitalist society the class relationship between capital and wage labour forms a structural 'base', from which all other aspects of the social formation (the 'superstructure') arise. In Althusser's analogy, the economy is like the foundations and ground plan of a house; culture and ideology are

represented by the upper floors, determined “in the last instance” by the base (Althusser, 1970). In this crude ‘economist’ model, culture is thus determined by material forces. Far from leading social change, as in the idealist and Romantic traditions, culture is the product of social change.

The oft-lamented⁶ intellectual incoherence and political vagueness of the British community arts movement stems from a failure to reconcile these two theories of culture. In describing the benefits of cultural democracy, the community artists’ faith in the uplifting and transforming power of culture resembled the idealist tradition at its most mystical. In their attack on the cultural establishment, they drew on Marxist theory at its most reductive. The community arts movement was in effect invoking Arnold’s faith in culture, disguised in the language of Marx. Similarly the romantic image of the artist as (revolutionary) hero was dressed up in the reassuringly unromantic ‘Marxist’ language of class relations, history and social formation; perhaps this vocabulary struck a chord with community artists in the 1980s because it reproduced the pseudo-scientific, ‘economist’ jargon of funders, bureaucrats and politicians. However, there was little remaining of orthodox Marxism behind the language. In their assimilation of Marx and Arnold, the community arts movement turned Marx’s ‘base and superstructure’ model upside down. Thus the 1986 ‘manifesto’ for cultural democracy claimed that culture “is not simply the evidence of an unequal economic situation” but “its foundation” (Kelly et al., 1986). If this was Marxism, it was a heretical variant, branded by more orthodox Marxists as “culturalism”.

As the community arts movement began to mobilise in the 1970s, these ideological contradictions came to the surface. The initial assault on the British Arts Council’s post-war policy of cultural democratisation was in effect a Marxist critique of the

⁶ See Kelly 1984, Braden 1978; Kelly is especially damning.

idealist tradition. The Arts Council's promise of 'the best for the most' was exposed as representing a false consensus which served the interests of a socially dominant 'cultured' elite (the educated, white middle class) behind a rhetoric of classlessness and 'art for art's sake'. Dismissing the idealist concept of a 'universal' common culture, community artists differentiated between 'bourgeois', 'working class' and 'ethnic' cultures, where 'culture' was a product of social and economic relations.

In the next phase of the struggle, the competition for official funding and recognition during the late 1970s and 1980s, community artists reverted to the idealist tradition of art as a specialised activity requiring professional expertise and aptitudes. Forced to justify their status as artists, they fell into familiar problems of hierarchy, debating why one project, group or individual should receive funding over another. By 1980 the Association of Community Artists was being accused by some of its members of representing the professional interests of "a chosen few of funded practising community artists"; the claim to professional competence, specifically the demand for ACA "delegates" (representing whom?) to regional arts association funding panels, was seen by some as "potentially a threat to working class initiatives" (Ross et al. 1980, 13 - 16), while others claimed that the whole emphasis on 'community' had undermined the (Marxist) idea of culture as the product of class. There were signs of splits within the movement between funded and unfunded artists, between a rural emphasis on 'community' and an urban emphasis on 'class', between collective and individual working methods, between artists / amateurs and their 'clients'. Above all there were accusations of betrayal, based on a fear that the community arts movement had failed to live up to its principles and promises.

The latent contradictions in the cultural democracy project extended into the phase of 'incorporation' of community arts within official funding policies during the 1980s. Initially the Arts Council was reluctant to fund community arts on more than an

experimental basis. With the complicity of many community artists, the attempt to challenge existing definitions of 'art' and 'culture' became sidetracked into an argument over the relative degrees of merit and 'relevance' of different art forms; characteristically the Arts Council first addressed the problem of community arts funding through the 'New Activities Committee' (ACGB 1970). Responsibility for these 'new activities' was gradually passed to the expanding regional arts associations, on the grounds that they would be better equipped to evaluate the 'grassroots' nature of the community arts phenomenon. The regional arts associations enthusiastically complied with this effective partitioning of responsibilities, seeing in the nascent community arts movement an opportunity for expanding their own distinctive regional role. Local authorities were also drawn to the new movement, seeing in the community artists' desire to engage with excluded, marginal communities a reflection of the municipal responsibility to provide 'services' to those in need; community arts festivals and other large scale local events also satisfied local councillors' desire to engage with their constituents, providing a cheerful (and cheap) alternative to the more sober image of municipal provision.

Community arts funding policies in the 1980s thus became polarised between a search for aesthetic novelty ('new activities') and an instrumental cultural policy which placed art at the service of community development. While the Arts Council, abetted by the Association of Community Artists, remained preoccupied with the 'artistic' component of the 'community-arts' couplet, regional and local authorities used artistic projects as a mechanism to build a 'community' constituency. At the local authority level, 'community arts' was fast becoming a catch-all phrase, synonymous with 'local arts'. Local authorities favoured arts projects which supported other departmental priorities in the field of 'statutory' service provision⁷;

⁷ Despite lobbying, arts funding remains 'non-statutory'. This means that arts funding is not included in the local authority's 'Standard Spending Assessment' which determines the level of grant

increasingly community artists found themselves co-opted as surrogate youth workers, social workers, mental health workers, painters and decorators of a decaying infrastructure. At the local level 'community arts' had become primarily a matter of social policy, shaped by the imperatives of local service provision; at the other extreme, 'community arts' was also regarded favourably by the cultural missionaries of the Arts Council, as a grab-bag of aesthetic novelties and fringe activities, a suitable vehicle for 'outreach' to 'disadvantaged' communities who were not yet ready for 'real' culture but might yet be seduced by the bait of murals, street festivals and video cameras.

In 1990, in a classic piece of bureaucratic rationalism, Richard Wilding attempted to make explicit the structural polarisation of British arts funding in a government-commissioned report into national arts funding. Wilding proposed a reorganisation of the funding structure assigning the 'social' arts, in which the primary purpose was not artistic but social, to local and regional funding bodies, leaving the Arts Council free to concentrate on its original province of 'authentic' arts.

Wilding's modest proposal struck at the heart of the contradictory nature of community arts policy and was greeted with predictable outrage, especially by the regional arts associations. By designating a (relatively small) percentage of their respective budgets for what Wilding categorised as 'social' arts, the official arts funding bodies would be free to spend the remainder of their money without regard to tiresome 'social' issues such as equity, access, participation and diversity. Meanwhile the funders responsible for 'social' arts could relegate artistic considerations to the margin in pursuit of the principal aim of community development.

awarded by central government to top up local taxation. As a result, arts funding is regarded as 'optional' and is always vulnerable whenever the local authority is required to save money as a result of funding cuts or in the pursuit of a reduced local taxation level.'

The subsequent restructuring of funding responsibilities in the 1990s moved in the opposite direction from the partitioning of national-artistic and regional-social funding proposed by Wilding. 'Devolution' or 'delegation' of Arts Council clients to the regions, in their new incarnation as Regional Arts Boards, broke the Arts Council's monopoly on 'prestigious' clients and directly challenged Wilding's perception of the Arts Council as the sole arbiter of 'authentic' art. The newly delegated 'flagship' organisations brought a new glamour and corporate seriousness to the regional arts portfolio and increased pressure on regional resources previously enjoyed by pre-existing clients; community arts organisations found themselves sliding down the regional pecking order.

A related effect of the post-Wilding restructuring was an outbreak of demarcation disputes across the geographical borders of the funding system. Regional arts boards demanded 'regional significance', which for community-based organisations translated into a polycentric, one-off approach to arts development and a new generation of flexible, 'proactive' organisations replacing the old-fashioned, building-based, community arts centre. Meanwhile, local authority arts funders, under pressure as a result of reductions in government spending and changes in local authority finance, began to look askance at projects which extended beyond local borders and local tax payers; they also demanded value for money and a clear relationship to the local authority's corporate objectives, resulting in an ever tighter emphasis on 'service provision'. Squeezed from both sides, passed back and forth between local and regional funders in the mutual blackmail of reciprocal funding cuts, community arts organisations were obliged either to meet increasingly specific, quasi-contractual funding requirements at the local level, or to sacrifice their community-building, culturally specific functions in the pursuit of 'flagship' status at the regional level.

Running through this brief account of the rise and fall of community arts in Britain is the underlying contradiction between the two theories of culture from which the movement began. Ironically the community arts movement's initial 'success' in challenging the post-war Arts Council's 'art for art's sake' consensus resulted in a polarisation of the British arts funding system. This polarisation has undermined the funding base for community arts. At the local level, British arts funding is increasingly devoted to a purely instrumental view of cultural policy, based on the 'sociological' conception of culture as the product of a collective way of life; local arts funding is for the most part a vehicle for social policy or, since the late 1980s, for economic development. Local arts projects are funded or justified on the back of local service provision, urban regeneration programmes, local economic development schemes, even regional health funding. Meanwhile at the national and regional level, British arts funding is primarily driven by the idealist conception of culture as a transcendent common good, disconnected from considerations of social context or content. Caught between these poles, clinging to its contradictory ideal of culture as both the product of collective experience and the agent for collective transformation, the community arts movement can no longer expect either hand to feed it.

1.3 The Origins of Cultural Democracy in Britain

In this section I will argue that the ideological inconsistencies of the community arts movement outlined above were not new, but were closely linked to similar contradictions in 'official' post-1945 cultural policy. The advocates of community arts and cultural democracy in the 1970s, like all good polemicists, tended to overemphasise the newness of their ideas. One commentator even claimed that "the end of the epoch of the democratization of culture" can be traced to a 1972 Council

of Europe conference (Simpson 1976, 26). This 'periodisation' of the moment of cultural democracy was confirmed by the hegemonic view of social change as a succession of moments of crisis, radical breaks and incorporations. I have argued that Gramsci's description of a continually unfolding 'crisis' of contradictions and unstable equilibria provides a more convincing model for the real history of the community arts movement, as opposed to its rhetoric. The 'moment' of community arts in the 1970s developed out of 'organic' contradictions in cultural policy and can be traced back through earlier comparable moments of crisis. The ideology of cultural democracy was rooted in the traditions of cultural democratisation; the British community arts movement had more in common than it liked to admit with the British Arts Council.

The 1945 Arts Council's policy of 'cultural democratisation' was an ambivalent product of two opposing cultural traditions, the sociological view of culture as a 'whole way of life' and the idealist view of culture as a transcendent common good. The idealist tradition was a continuation of the nineteenth century search for a common culture. According to this tradition, Britain's cultural heritage represented a focal point for the aspiration of the British people's 'best selves', a classless common good, merging with a wartime mythology of social unity around quintessential British values. After the war the rediscovery (and reinvention) of a great national tradition of culture was part of the wider European process of national reconstruction⁸. In Britain, as in other European countries, this faith in culture translated into an emphasis on excellence and access. Access was interpreted to mean availability rather than education⁹, as if the bald offer of 'great art' would

⁸ French cultural policy in the 1950s, led by Andre Malraux, followed a similar pattern of Gaullist-inspired national reconstruction through the rediscovery of a national culture; by the late 1960s, Malraux's 'Maisons de la Culture' had come to symbolise the failure of a post-war strategy of cultural democratisation based on a merely physical / geographical notion of 'access' to the arts.

⁹ See Hutchison 1982, pp. 130 ff. Hutchison suggests that education slipped off the Arts Council agenda for cultural access during the 1950s partly as a result of growing unease over the paternalist implications of education as 'improvement'.

result in a mass rediscovery of a common cultural heritage. The result was a growing emphasis on centres of excellence in the most literal sense, from the long-standing national emphasis on London as a cultural capital to the more localised fetish for building arts 'centres', dating from the 'Housing the Arts' programme of the 1960s and continuing into the National Lottery arts building boom of the 1990s. It was the perceived failure of the 'excellence and access' strategy which was so vigorously attacked by the community arts movement in the 1970s; in Britain as in Europe, the half-empty temples of high culture and the statistical failure to trickle down to a truly representative, diverse audience (beyond an established constituency in the metropolitan middle class) stood as potent symbols of the hollow promise of the 'best for the most'.

Yet the Arts Council also grew out of another tradition of culture, represented in part by its wartime precursor, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA). Although CEMA anticipated the Arts Council's post-war drift towards professionalism, it was initially rooted in a characteristically British ideal of amateurism, the 'encouragement' of active cultural participants rather than 'access' for passive cultural consumers. The ideal of a participatory culture of local initiatives reflected an anthropological conception of culture as the common pursuit of a community; the wartime emphasis on 'pulling together' and 'making do' removed culture from its idealist pedestal and relocated it in the local, makeshift sphere of amateur dramatics and community singing. CEMA also drew on the impetus of the British adult education movement, capitalising on initiatives pioneered by the Workers Education Association, university extension and extra-mural studies programmes; for example, CEMA coopted a 1935 initiative from the British Institute of Adult Education, 'Art for the People', a popular experiment in staging free exhibitions and discussions in small towns and rural areas. In time CEMA surrendered most of its support for amateur arts and arts education to the

support of private organisations, principally the Carnegie Trust and the Pilgrim Trust. However, CEMA's origins indicated the existence of an alternative tradition of public support for the arts in Britain, based on amateurism, active participation, arts education and regional diversity. Many of the wartime innovations, for example the deployment of local 'animateurs' and 'music travellers', or the use of improvised facilities rather than purpose-built arts 'centres', anticipated the principles and practice of community artists thirty years later.

The Arts Council of 1945 was born out of these conflicting traditions. The drift towards professionalism and centralisation in the late 1940s resulted from a dialectical opposition between the ramshackle amateurism of early CEMA and pre-CEMA initiatives and the idealist tradition of culture as the production of great art by great artists. The shift in Arts Council policy in the early 1950s from regional diversity to national centres of excellence, from amateur participation to professionalism, from concern with audiences to the rival claims of artists, has been well documented (Hutchison 1982, Hewison 1995). What I wish to emphasise here is the dialectic between two conceptions of culture and the continuing existence of tacit contradictions in policy. This dialectic continued even after the Arts Council appeared to have committed itself to a narrowly idealist conception of culture, represented by a narrow and exclusive band of institutions, artists, art forms and audiences. The materialist conception of culture, in which artistic culture is the inevitable product of culturally specific social groups and 'ways of life', has survived as an implicit subtext in Arts Council policy, a latent contradiction which the community arts movement has been able to expose and exploit.

The survival of a regional component in official British arts policy provides an example of the resilience of this materialist tradition, rooted in regional diversity, active participation and cultural education. In 1945, John Maynard Keynes, the

Chairman of the newly-created Arts Council paid lip service to the wartime emphasis on a healthy regional diversity of cultures, claiming that the Arts Council's aim was not to impose 'metropolitan' standards of excellence, but to "let every part of Merry England be merry in its own way"¹⁰. In virtually the same breath he reminded listeners that "it is also our business to make London a great artistic metropolis, a place to visit and to wonder at". In the 1950/51 annual report the policy of "few, but roses" had explicitly become one of concentration and consolidation rather than decentralisation; in 1956 the Arts Council's regional offices, a remnant of CEMA's regional structure, were closed. Yet the regional structure survived on a voluntary basis with the creation of the first regional arts associations in the South West in 1956 and in the Midlands in 1958. These associations lay dormant, sustained through local 'art clubs' and a small secretariat, until the introduction of the 'systematic partnership' between the Arts Council and the local authorities for regional funding led to the growing importance of the RAAs in funding policy in the 1970s. Today the future of the Regional Arts Boards, established in 1990, ironically appears considerably more secure than that of the Arts Council itself.

Keynes' radio broadcast announcing the creation of the Arts Council in 1945 provides a further example of the Arts Council's continuing ability to stitch together opposing objectives in a seamless list of tacit contradictions. The latent contradictions between culture as a way of life and culture as a transcendent ideal have continued to be sustained through a series of dexterous couplets ('raise and spread', 'excellence and access', 'best for the most'), culminating in the concatenation of conflicting objectives strung together in the recent National Arts

¹⁰ John Maynard Keynes, 1945 radio broadcast (quoted in Hewison 1995, p. 44). 'Merry England' here is presumably taken to include Scotland and Wales, within what Hewison identifies as "a patronising view of what he [Keynes] imagined to be popular culture" (ibid., 45).

and Media Strategy (ACGB 1993)¹¹. The desire to be all things to all people, the myth of bipartisan political neutrality (the so-called ‘arm’s length principle’) and a bureaucratic tendency towards double-speak have combined to obscure any clear sense of official Arts Council policy. What emerges from the Arts Council’s history is a succession of overlapping contradictions never fully resolved, the site for a continuing struggle both within the Arts Council and outside it over the meaning of culture.

The drift towards a more narrowly idealist conception of culture in the 1950s, partly as a result of bureaucratic streamlining and growing financial responsibilities as much as any internal ideological conviction, stretched these contradictions to breaking point by the late 1960s. However, the community arts movement did not resolve these contradictions any more effectively than the Arts Council itself had buried the legacy of CEMA. Returning to Gramsci’s description of hegemony as a succession of ‘unstable equilibria’, it can be seen that the community arts movement did not invent a new radical critique of the Arts Council, it simply excavated the latent contradictions behind a seeming consensus. The basic component of these internal contradictions was a continuing argument over the meaning of culture; this fundamental ‘organic’ contradiction remained as part of the new consensus, a continuing source for internal factional disputes within the community arts movement in the 1980s and in official arts funding policy in the 1990s.

1.4 Theoretical Perspectives: The Culturalist Solution

In the next two sections, I will review some of the recent theoretical debates over the meaning of ‘culture’ in cultural studies. These debates, while they did not

¹¹ See for example the rehearsal of six different and largely incompatible definitions of ‘quality’ in the report (ACGB 1993, 50).

necessarily directly influence the community arts movement, nevertheless provided an intellectual rationale for the movement's contradictory ideals and assumptions.

Before the moment of direct confrontation between the old order and the new counter-hegemonic forces, Gramsci describes a 'war of position' in which competing parties lay the groundwork for the 'war of movement', constructing an intellectual position as the core for a new set of alliances and a new consensus. A comparable intellectual 'war of position' took place within the British Left which helped to prepare for the 'moment' of community arts in the 1970s. During the 1960s and 1970s a theoretical debate over the meaning of 'culture' resulted in a hybrid of orthodox Marxist materialism and cultural idealism. This intellectual compromise, labelled by some of its critics as 'culturalism', rearranged inherited theoretical contradictions into a new 'unstable equilibrium'. As with the contradictory intellectual position of those who advocated 'community arts' and 'cultural democracy', this equilibrium was continually vulnerable to factional conflict and a repolarisation of old positions.

Culturalism grew out of a dissatisfaction with the determinist categories of orthodox Marxism. This dissatisfaction passed through four phases. First British and European communists in the 1950s attempted to reintroduce an understanding of human agency and responsibility into the impersonal machinery of Stalinist 'Marxism'. Secondly, beginning from the opposite direction at roughly the same time, cultural critics and historians attempted to reconcile a culturalist variant of Marxism with idealist and empiricist methods of literary and historical analysis. Thirdly, political commentators of the 1960s and 1970s turned to Gramsci's description of cultural hegemony as a means of understanding the resilience of capitalism and the crisis of the left. Fourthly, the cultural studies movement of the late 1970s and 1980s increasingly preferred using the alternative or intermediate

categories of 'culture' and 'community' to describe popular culture and 'sub-cultures', superseding or modifying the traditional Marxist analysis based on class.

Disillusionment with the brutal certainties of Stalin reached a peak following the Soviet repression in Hungary in 1956. Confronted by an impersonal, mechanistic view of history which excluded (by force if necessary) the possibility for human agency, human responsibility or dissent, Western communists began in the 1950s to rediscover a more humanist Marx in the classic texts. In France, Louis Althusser would emphasise the "reciprocal action" between ideology and economic forces (Althusser 1970, 129 - 131) and describe the crucial role of subjectivity within this theoretical framework (ibid., 165 - 170). In Britain, the Marxist historian E P Thompson and the cultural critic Raymond Williams attempted to show how history was 'handled' through a mediating sphere of culture and experience. Thompson described his approach as 'historical materialism', basing his work on the 'dialogue' between individual behaviour and collective experience (Thompson, 1978); Williams referred to a tradition of 'cultural materialism', defined as "a theory of the specificities of material culture and literary production within historical materialism" (Williams 1977, 5). In support of this revisionist approach to Marxism, Williams and Thompson referred to letters written by Engels after Marx's death which implied that Marx's emphasis on the mechanics of base and superstructure had been interpreted too literally. According to Engels, ideology, culture and individual experience did after all enjoy at least a 'relative autonomy': "We make our history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions" (Engels, cited in Williams 1977, 84 - 7; cf. Thompson 1978, 50 - 70).

The humanist rehabilitation of Marx in the 1950s coincided with Williams' writings on culture and society (Williams 1958, 1961) which applied the principles of historical materialism to cultural production. Seeking to reconcile an idealist faith in

culture with a Marxist understanding of culture in the 'anthropological' sense as the product of 'material forces', Williams began to reexamine key words in the Marxist lexicon: 'base', 'superstructure', 'determination' (Williams 1971, 1973, 1977). Drawing on the Marxist literary criticism of Georg Lukács and Lucien Goldmann, Williams identified culture as both the product of material forces and as the aesthetic engine which acted upon human consciousness; in Marxist terms, art was removed from the determined sphere of culture and ideology and allowed into the determining sphere of productive forces. 'Determination' was taken to mean not an exact reproduction, but the exertion of pressures and the setting of limits; the rigid distinction between base and superstructure gave way to a concept of mutual interaction between different levels of experience. These concepts converged in Williams' formulation, the 'structure of feeling'.

Initially Williams defined the 'structure of feeling' as an "organising view" of the world arrived at by "individuals in real and collective social relations" (Williams 1971, 12), rooted in "a central system of practices, meanings and values" which "saturate" the way we live (Williams 1973, 8 - 9). Here Williams refers to the materialist, Marxist tradition of culture as the product of socio-economic relationships ('superstructure' and 'base' respectively). However, Williams went on to relate the 'structure of feeling' to the idealist tradition of culture. Within the 'structure of feeling' the great work of art (in the 'great tradition' of Leavis) enjoys a privileged role. Every culture consists of 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent' cultural elements, incorporated into a complex, interlocking whole (Williams 1977, 121 - 127). One of the properties of great art is to draw out the emergent cultural elements, by revealing "the maximum possible consciousness of the social group" (Williams 1971, 12). Williams' structure of feeling thus effectively encompassed two theoretical traditions of culture. Culture is the Marxist, anthropological structure determined (albeit loosely) by historical reality and collective experience; it

is also the individual work of art within that structure, capable of transforming our reality by revealing something at the fringes of our collective experience through an act of individual genius. Such acts of genius are “embedded” in “real social relations” (Williams 1977, 201 - 204) but do more than simply reproduce reality; art thus becomes both the barometer by which incipient social change can be felt and the lever by which change can be effected.

Williams’ integration of two cultural traditions and his understanding of individual behaviour as both cause and effect of collective experience provided a theoretical rationale for the cultural democracy ideal. Even if they had not followed through the details of Williams’ theoretical arguments, most community artists were aware of the dual meaning of culture and felt that their work was contributing to a process of social change as well as (or instead of) the production of art. However, the culturalist synthesis achieved by Williams and Thompson was precarious. As the ‘culturalist’ debate continued into the 1970s and 1980s, the formulations of culturalism appeared to split in two as the old contradictions reemerged.

1.5 Culturalism 2: Culturalist Optimism and the New Determinism

With the rediscovery of Gramsci by political theorists in the 1970s and the emergence of ‘cultural studies’ as a recognised discipline in the 1970s and 1980s, the culturalist revision of Marxism begun in the 1950s would ultimately lead Marxist cultural theory in two opposite directions¹². One route explored the seductive possibilities of a cultural sphere, cut loose from the constraints of Marxist determinism, where the rituals of cultural activism, subcultural style and academic theorising constituted a new form of ‘political’ resistance. The other direction

¹² For a summary of the British Left’s treatment of the ‘culturalist question’ between the 1950s and 1970s, see Johnson (1979). Johnson refers to the two factions described here as ‘culturalists’ and ‘structuralists’.

swung to the opposite extreme, reverting to a new form of ideological determinism, in which artistic culture and human experience were all determined 'in the last instance' either by 'economic forces' or by a variety of post-Marxist structures, including language, ideology, community, even 'culture' itself. I will refer to these two directions as 'culturalist optimism' and 'cultural determinism'; the fork in the road ultimately provided new routes back to the old contradiction between nineteenth century cultural idealism and Marxist determinism. It also pointed forward to the conflicting extremes of cultural policy which beset the community arts movement in the 1980s and 1990s.

The theoretical possibilities of culturalist optimism and cultural determinism were immensely appealing to cultural theorists and producers, since both directions appeared to invest their activities with a renewed 'political' seriousness and self-importance. However, both routes were theoretical cul-de-sacs, leading away from the dynamic interactions traced by Williams and Thompson towards a self-conscious theoretical sterility. Poised at the crossroads lay the political writings of Gramsci, rediscovered by the British Left in the 1960s, and the cultural studies tradition pioneered by Stuart Hall in the late 1970s. However, whereas Gramsci and Hall, like Williams and Thompson, were interested in the interaction between cultural and material forces, many of their disciples split into the opposing camps of culturalist optimism and cultural determinism, each claiming Marx and Gramsci as one of their own.

Writing in the 1920s and 1930s, Gramsci, like Williams and Thompson, was consciously attempting to disentangle Marx from orthodox Marxism. The revolutionary fatalism of Marxism had failed to explain both the resilience of capitalism and the failure of the proletariat to seize the revolutionary moment in the years after the first world war. Gramsci identified the success of the ruling class

with a combination of coercion and consent maintained through a network of class alliances and a broad range of superstructural institutions spanning the fields of education, language and culture.

Pieced together after his death from fragmentary letters and notebooks, Gramsci's ideas were subject to considerable reinterpretation by his translators and editors. The first British and American editions of Gramsci appeared in 1957, following the post-1956 backlash against Stalinism. His work also benefited from the "indirect brokerage" of Thompson and Williams in the late 1950s and 1960s and was initially "interpreted mainly in a culturalist way" (Forgacs 1989, 74 - 77). After 1968, a more radical, younger Gramsci was discovered with a greater emphasis placed on state coercion and revolutionary politics than on the gradualist, culturalist version of social change. In the 1980s, Stuart Hall pointed to Gramsci as a political strategist, describing the need for the British Left to build alliances and work across a broad front instead of remaining trapped in the introverted posturing of revolutionary theory.

There thus emerged from Gramsci's original political writings two distinct schools of interpretation (cf. Mouffe 1979, Forgacs 1989). The 'culturalist' camp saw Gramsci as a 'theoretician of the superstructures'; the revolutionary kernel in Gramsci's writing, specifically his insistent emphasis on underlying class relations, was buried in the amorphous superstructure of cultures and communities, disconnected from their roots in class. Here games of stylistic, cultural and linguistic subversion were played out in a floating world of culture without reference to the realities of class relations and economic inequality. The 'determinists' reacted against the 'post-Marxist' heresy of 'culturalism', referring back to the framework of class relations; from here the concept of hegemony was elided into a conspiracy theory of cultural institutions, as noted earlier in this introduction. Gramsci's

complex analysis of the process of hegemony was here reduced to a theory of static power relations in which social control fell to a single dominant group.

In the late 1970s, Stuart Hall turned to Gramsci in order to explain the crisis of the Left and the appeal of Thatcherism in cultural terms (Hall 1988). The old categories of class and the predictable constituencies of the two main political parties had undergone a decisive shift. Thatcherism had taken advantage of this crisis, using a set of popular British values (thrift, hard work, insularity, law and order, self-righteousness) to “remake common sense” (Hall 1988, 8); the Left had meanwhile been left stranded in a reductive political rhetoric tied to an outdated, static analysis of the class struggle. Using Gramsci’s theory of ‘cultural hegemony’ as the key to an interlocking pattern of class alliances, belief systems and constituencies, Hall emphasised that Thatcherism’s power was based in its ideological effect and its cultural hegemony.

What Hall, following Gramsci, managed to retain in his description of cultural hegemony, was an understanding that hegemony was based around “the decisive nucleus of the economic” (Hall 1988, 170). The categories of class, economic differences and “material interests” were profoundly important to Hall, but they were “always ideologically defined” (ibid., 261); in the case of Thatcher’s economic policy for example, “there is no point giving people tax cuts unless you also sell it to them as part of a ‘freedom’ package” (ibid., 274). The ‘nucleus of the economic’, like the ‘objective core’ of Gramsci’s theory referred to by David Forgacs, tended to be forgotten by many of Hall’s successors in the cultural studies field. The ‘culturalist’ legacy resulting from Hall’s rediscovery of Gramsci was the emergence of a new generation of cultural criticism emanating from the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies, where Hall was the Research Fellow before he succeeded Richard Hoggart as acting director in 1968.

Initially the centres's principal theoretical sources were a sociologically inflected Leavisite idealism, inspired by the 'culture and society' tradition of Hoggart and Williams, and a culturalist Marxism influenced by Williams, Hall and Gramsci. These influences were reflected in the joint stewardship of Hoggart and Hall. For both Hoggart and Hall, the experience of class was refracted through individual consciousness, family, culture and tradition; the centre therefore aimed to study 'culture', especially popular culture, both from an anthropological / sociological perspective and in the literary / idealist sense. While Hall arrived at this culturalist perspective from a Marxist background, Hoggart's interest in popular culture was driven by an essentially conservative, Leavisite concern for an idealised common culture, threatened by the defensive conformism of the British working class and the "syndicated ordinariness for the millions" produced by the entertainment industry (Hoggart 1958).

Given the centre's interest in popular culture and the mass media, a third theoretical influence was the development in media studies of 'audience theory', an awareness of how audiences decode and reinvent media messages. An important source for this perspective on mass media and entertainment, albeit seldom directly acknowledged, was Marshall McLuhan (1964). McLuhan's 'medium is the message' was an extreme culturalist inversion of Marx's material base and cultural superstructure. McLuhan described a world in which technology (the form or medium by which information is passed) defined human consciousness; thus, for example, "Print created individualism and nationalism in the sixteenth century" (McLuhan 1964, 19). This technological determinism bypassed Marxist perspectives on class relations and the material realities of cultural production; according to McLuhan, the inequalities between the consumers and producers of the culture industry, the spectre of media manipulation, the corporate skyscrapers looming over

the global village, could all be disregarded. McLuhan's rhetoric and his reputation as a scion of the 1960s counterculture were seductive; analysing the media as an autonomous, self-creating system, no longer determined by the machinery of corporate manipulation and consumer impotence, allowed an optimistic vision of liberation and consumer sovereignty.

Extrapolating from an expansive or "discursive" version of Gramsci's cultural hegemony concept¹³, from the 'culture and society' writings of Williams and Hoggart, from McLuhan's influence and the discovery of 'audience theory' in media studies, and from Stuart Hall's analysis of culture and ideology, it became possible to construct a highly optimistic, 'culturalist' reading of popular culture. By focusing on the way popular culture is consumed, appropriated and transformed by its users, writers associated with the Birmingham cultural studies school were able to describe a 'symbolic' form of rebellion, in which "commodities can be symbolically repossessed in everyday life, and endowed with implicitly oppositional meanings, by the very groups who originally produced them" (Hebdige 1979, 16). Thus young people could "obliquely" challenge cultural hegemony through an ironic, stylistic subversion of the social roles assigned to them (Hebdige, 1979) or by reshuffling the messages sent out through the mass media into 'new' forms that were "relevant to them and anchored in their own lives" (Willis 1990).

The cultural studies tradition thus made possible a self-deluding culturalist optimism in which a whole series of cultural revolutions could take place in the stratosphere of 'deviant' and 'subversive' readings of popular culture. The battleground for the class war had been shifted from Marx's base of productive relations to the realm of the superstructures. While this optimism may have been a welcome corrective to the

¹³In a "fully discursive" position, cultural 'discourse' is cut loose from its determining causes and effects; anything goes. While Hall emphasised that ideological effects were complex and multiple, he nevertheless insisted that dominant ideologies set limits on what could be articulated (Hall 1988, 9 - 10).

cultural pessimism of Adorno's description of the culture industry as an exercise in mass self-deception, there was nevertheless something self-deceiving and self-important in this belief in the subversive potential of popular culture, investing the cut of a lapel or the subtext of a soap opera with a quasi-revolutionary significance. The problem with these acts of subcultural subversion or 'bricolage' was that they remained purely symbolic; as Hall noted, although the subcultural strategy of 'resistance through rituals' might "win space" within the dominant culture, it was "fated to fail" because it failed to engage with the structural problems (the Marxist 'base') of unemployment, educational disadvantage, low pay (Hall et al. 1976, 45 - 47). It similarly failed to account for the privileged position enjoyed by dominant institutions (eg. mass media conglomerates) and social groups (the well-educated, the wealthy, the powerful) who consistently set the agenda in the process of cultural production, even if that agenda was occasionally subject to minor 'subversions' at the fringes.

To be fair to Willis and Hebdige, neither was wholly convinced by the revolutionary content of their own arguments. Quoting Sartre, Hebdige acknowledged that subculture constituted only a marginal form of resistance, "the small movement which makes of a totally conditioned social being someone who does not render back completely what his conditioning has given him" (Hebdige 1979, 138 - 9; 167 fn); this was little more than a blurring at the edges of Marxist orthodoxy, an acknowledgement that the determining influence of productive relations and the dominant culture are "handled" through human experience (cf. Thompson 1978, 164). In a similar coda at the end of his book, Willis likewise drew back from the posture of cultural revolutionary, recognising that these gestures towards rebellion through subculture may simply "accommodate power or find myriad compensations for suffering it - and so help to reproduce it by default" (Willis 1990, 156). Behind these celebrations of sub-cultural subversion, Hebdige acknowledged "a kind of

romanticism” (Hebdige 1979, 138); Willis meanwhile confessed to suffusing every area of social practice with “an historical romantic glow of creativity” (Willis 1991, 153). The reference to romanticism brings us full circle to the nineteenth century. We have travelled from Marx, through a selective reading of Gramsci into the ‘culturalist illusion’ of making cultural practice the means of social transformation. In effect, we are back with the transcendent idealism of Matthew Arnold in which a few ‘aliens’ can stand aloof from the determinations of class and material reality and create a better world through an abstract, classless indeterminate world of culture.

Ironically, the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies and the ‘culturalist’ tradition also came under attack from the other direction, for remaining devoted to an outdated, Marxist analysis of culture in terms of class (Coward, 1977). While some of the later work coming out of the centre spiralled into culturalist romanticism, Hall himself continued to emphasise the connections between culture and class. Williams had earlier described “the facts of the economic structure and the consequent social relations” as “the guiding string on which a culture is woven and by following which a culture is to be understood” (Williams 1958, 269). This umbilical attachment to class relations was retained by Hall in his concept of a relationship between subcultures and a ‘parent culture’, determined by “material and social class position and experience”; class thus formed a “determining matrix” from which there could be no escape (Hall et al. 1976, 12 - 15). From this perspective Hall claimed that “cultures always stand in relations of domination - and subordination - to one another...” (ibid., 12). As Coward notes, this assumption led to a belief that working class sub-culture was automatically ‘subversive’ or opposed to the dominant ‘bourgeois’ culture; working class culture is “one step on the road towards socialism” (Coward 1977, 84). This belief in the revolutionary potential of working class culture was another source of culturalist optimism; by describing ‘working class culture’ as a class phenomenon, culturalism discounted the possibility that the

culture enjoyed by the working class (or any class) might be passive, depoliticised or even actively oppressive.

Having promised a synthesis of idealist and materialist perspectives to describe the interactions between material social conditions and cultural production, the Birmingham school ultimately split into two opposing positions. These theoretical positions failed to make the connection between culture and democracy sought by the community arts movement. 'Culturalist optimism' allowed the spectacle of culture to fill the screen, blotting out the determining realities of political and economic power. The liberating possibilities of culture thus promised to transcend the inequalities and privileges of social inequality; yet this liberation was limited to the theoretical sphere, with little impact outside its own 'language games'. The 'cultural determinist' perspective simply replaced the economic determinism of Marx with determinism by culture or ideology. Here the possibilities for social change were defined by larger 'structural' patterns, with the isolated cultural action or project condemned as ephemeral or irrelevant; one could only wait for the 'structures' to wield their magic and wait for the revolution. What both these perspectives lack is the sense of a dynamic interaction between cultural activity, social conditions and human behaviour, as described by Williams, Gramsci and Hall. This absence explains their intellectual sterility.

Meanwhile, the orthodox 'determinist' view of culture as a product of class had enjoyed a revival in the 1960s as the credibility of 'neutral' cultural institutions came under attack. By the late 1960s the role of cultural institutions in public life was no longer regarded as politically neutral, still less as altruistic. American university departments, French maisons de la culture, the British Arts Council and the BBC were taken to task by civil rights activists, student protesters, community artists and media activists. Cultural institutions which had claimed since 1945 to be the

disinterested providers of culture for all were stripped of their paternalistic, liberal pretensions and revealed as the contentious symbols of the national establishment, charged with reinforcing the social and cultural authority of a white, middle class social elite.

The political protests of the 1960s and 1970s in Britain and America fed into the 'culture wars' fought over college curricula in the 1980s. Schooled in these debates, the new generation of commentators cast a sceptical eye over the sacred cultural institutions of the past. Many of the new generation of cultural commentators were self-consciously revisionist, reacting against a liberal orthodoxy which had complacently viewed cultural reform as a 'heroic' progression towards a classless common good. The new critical orthodoxy was partly a matter of academic 'positioning', with the academic emphasis on originality encouraging commentators to contradict their predecessors¹⁴. It also drew on contemporary polemics to present an ahistorical caricature of the past. Disillusionment with the rhetorical claims of American social reform in the 1960s, from Kennedy's New Frontier to Johnson's Great Society, led to a 'revisionist' attack on the moral high ground of American liberalism, the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt's Square Deal, Wilson's New Freedom and Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal (Weinstein 1968, Kolko 1963, Margolies 1963, Mowry 1971). In Britain community artists referred dismissively to 'nineteenth century' art forms and institutions as if the entire century had been annexed by the Victorian middle class (Braden 1978, Kelly 1984). Here the determinist view of culture as a class product resulted in an orthodoxy no less limiting than the heroic simplicities of its liberal predecessor or the blind optimism of its culturalist counterpart.

¹⁴ For a good example of this 'positioning', see the preface to Dee Garrison's account of nineteenth century libraries (Garrison, 1979) or Anthony Platt on the nineteenth century 'invention of delinquency' (Platt 1969).

The effects of this revisionist history of middle class cultural reform will be considered in the next chapter. First I will conclude this chapter by considering how the perspectives of academic culturalist optimism and cultural determinism have fed back into recent community arts policy.

1.6 From theory to practice: culturalism and community arts

The failure to bridge the theoretical divide between culturalist optimism and determinism was mirrored in the breakdown of the community arts movement and the emergence of conflicting approaches to community arts policy and practice. Cultural determinism eventually led into a purely instrumental approach to cultural policy, while culturalist optimism encouraged artists to skate over the social and economic context of their work in a celebration of artistic freedom and consumer sovereignty. These perspectives converged in the new rationale for cultural policy as a vehicle for economic development in the late 1980s.

Cultural determinism affected community arts practice as a self-conscious insistence on the class component in working class and middle class culture. The community arts movement's attitude to working class culture was coloured by a faith in the innate 'anti-bourgeois' radicalism of the working class. This belief that cultural needs were 'determined' by class blocked out other versions of community identity (eg. race, gender, sub-culture) resulting in a simplistic template of 'community needs' and a kind of revolutionary fatalism; the working class would spontaneously 'produce' an authentic 'working class' culture of its own, once space and resources were made accessible. The determinist perspective also resulted in a crude hostility to the 'bourgeois' culture of the middle class, represented by the Arts Council. Because many community artists were themselves middle class, this hostility turned in on itself. Artists learned to resent their own privileged, 'cultured' backgrounds

and sought to bury this 'bourgeois culture' in the 'authentic' culture of the working class community; I will return to this theme of middle class guilt and self-abnegation in chapter 2 when I examine the psychology of the nineteenth century settlement worker.

Two consequences followed from this insistence on class determinism. First, many of the cultural resources intended to empower a fictive 'politicised working class' were co-opted by middle class activists. Secondly, the faith in 'spontaneous' or 'natural' working class cultural expression and the guilty class associations of 'bourgeois' culture made animateurs reluctant to 'impose' middle class cultural values on their working class clients. Consequently animateurs attempted to lead from the back or to become invisible (Simpson 1978). In denying their role as artistic leaders, community artists described their work in resolutely non-artistic terms, either in the technical jargon of 'skills development' and 'training', or in the political language of 'empowerment' and community or social development.

This vocabulary was perfectly attuned to the bureaucratic language and non-artistic objectives of funders. Whereas community artists used this language to indicate the broader social aims of their work, the funding bodies, especially local authorities, referred to their primary interest in 'service provision'. Community artists thus played into an 'anti-cultural', instrumental approach to cultural policy in which art was simply the means to an end, a vehicle for the delivery of statutory services. As community artists became increasingly dependent on local authority funding, the instrumental vocabulary seeped into their grant applications and policy statements; community arts organisations scrambled to make impossible commitments to the funders' demographic, geographical and social priorities. The artistic component in community arts had shrunk to the wrapping on a package of services delivered at the behest of the funder, described by one community arts pioneer as 'psychedelic

elastoplast'¹⁵. In the 1990s the funders' introduction of performance indicators and 'quality assurance measures' has increased the emphasis on the social priorities of community arts work, the artistic component remaining elusively unquantifiable.

Culturalist optimism was directly opposed to these determinist assumptions, denying the importance of social class in culture and encouraging an uncritical faith in cultural activities as inherently liberating. Among community artists this faith took three related forms. First there was a generalised faith in culture as a universal panacea for a plethora of social problems; as already noted, this faith was a throwback to nineteenth century cultural idealism and romanticism.

Secondly there was a faith in new forms of culture, especially the new technologies of video and television; this reflected the emancipatory rhetoric of culturalist writers like Willis and McLuhan, coupled with an infatuation with the limitless potential of technology, even though (often precisely because) the new media and the new jargon were only dimly understood. In a 1980 article criticising Belgian community video workers, Mattelart and Piemme attacked the "culturalist illusion" at the heart of the cultural democracy movement. The video workers' faith in culture was, they suggested, a specifically middle class malaise, and of little relevance to their working class 'clients'. Community media had failed to achieve its goal, "a rejuvenation of democracy by the media", because of its credulous faith in the panacea of new technology, based on a belief that the new media could "bypass the effects of productive relations on the social body". The vocabulary reflected the writers' Marxist scepticism regarding the possibility of culture or technology (mere

¹⁵ "The worst demand is for psychedelic elastoplast where we are expected to patch up all the social ills in their neighbourhood and provide massive turn-on entertainment more likely to benefit an administrator's career than the community itself". (Interview with John Fox in *Engineers of the Imagination: The Welfare State Handbook*, ed. Tony Coult & Baz Kershaw (London: Methuen, 1983))

'superstructure') having any real effect on essential economic and social power relations (Mattelart and Piemme, 1980).

Thirdly culturalist optimism shaded into a faith in the market, especially in the popular cultural industries of television and popular music. Again this faith was driven partly by a blind faith in new technology, partly by a continuation of the romantic attitude to class; television and the music industry represented not only 'new' cultural forms, but also the adopted culture of working class youth, hence automatically preferable to the antiquated 'bourgeois' cultural forms of the nineteenth century. Perhaps too there was a reaction against the latent snobbery of an older generation of culturalist advocates for cultural democracy. For Simpson (1976) and Hoggart (1958), a participatory culture was the best defence against the encroachment of a mass-produced global consumer culture. For Paul Willis (1990) cultural emancipation could only come through the "contradictory empowerment" of the market and the "symbolic creativity" of the creative consumer. Willis epitomises the hallmarks of culturalist optimism, the trembling excitement at new technologies only dimly understood, the 'romantic glow' suffusing the cultural choices of working class youth, leading towards a reluctant surrender to the 'hidden hand' of the market¹⁶.

Willis's arguments were echoed by cultural policy makers, especially at the local authority level (cf. Wynne 1992). The GLC Cultural Industries Strategy concluded that "the only way for the public sector to have an impact 'both on economic and employment patterns and on 'culture' in its broadest sense' would be to intervene 'through and not against the market'"¹⁷. The urge that community artists learn to

¹⁶ "There may well be a better way, a better way to cultural emancipation than through this continuous instability and trust in the hidden - selfish, blind, grabbing - hand of the market. But 'official art' has not show it yet. Commercial cultural commodities are all most people have. History may be progressing through its bad side. But it progresses". (Willis 1990, 26).

¹⁷ Bianchini, Franco (1989): "The Arts and the Urban Regeneration Process in 1980s Britain" in *The Culture Industry*, ed. Derek Wynne (1992)

seek empowerment 'through, not against the market' dovetailed with urban attempts at industrial and economic development by cultural means and the 'cultural industries' strategy of cities like London and Sheffield in the 1980s.

Culturalist optimism, like cultural determinism, thus encouraged community artists to become complicit in cultural policies which were only marginally concerned with cultural democracy. The empowerment afforded to the cultural consumer was, as Willis acknowledged of a contradictory and marginal nature; on offer was not "the power to set the cultural agenda" which remained in the hands of the programmers and producers, only a more limited "choices over choices" from a fixed menu designed around the imperatives of corporate marketing and advertising (Willis 1990, 159). The primary aim of local authority cultural industry strategies was the creation of an industrial infrastructure. While this might trickle down into local employment and local business opportunities for a lucky few, it would be pointless to look for any radical transformation of the economic realities of the industry; real power would remain concentrated at the corporate level, and consumer sovereignty was unlikely to extend beyond the remote control button. 'Empowerment' remained trapped in the realm of cultural consumption, with few material consequences in the wider world of economic and social disenfranchisement, restricted to self-referential language games, the deconstructions of media studies and kitsch consumerism.

The theoretical tendencies to 'culturalist optimism' and 'cultural determinism' within the community arts movement represented a tacit admission of defeat, retreating from the connection between art and social change which lay at the heart of the cultural democracy ideal. The cultural determinists had lost faith in the potential for 'bourgeois' art to engage with the material realities of working class life; cultural activity was thus reduced to a form of irrelevant window dressing, while the real social and economic transactions were conducted elsewhere. The culturalist

optimists had begun by celebrating cultural emancipation, but this optimism was only made possible by turning a blind eye to the overarching mechanisms of social and economic power and ‘bypassing’ the Marxist belief in social change as a material process. In time this faith shrank to the credo of consumer sovereignty and the celebration of a cultural consumerism which had no meaning outside its own introverted ‘cultural’ sphere. As the economic rationale for cultural policy gathered momentum in the late 1980s, cultural policies rooted in instrumentalism and consumerism continued to marginalise community arts organisations. However, this marginalisation had begun with the theoretical contradictions of ‘culturalism’ and the inherited contradictions of ‘cultural democracy’ discussed in this chapter.

* * * *

Cultural democracy is premised on a belief that culture can be both the product and the producer of social change; however, once tested by practice, the inherent contradictions in this position unravel and the relationship between culture and social change breaks down. The question remains whether the contradiction between idealist and Marxist conceptions of culture is indeed ‘incurable’.

To answer this question we first need to establish the theoretical rationale for cultural democracy. This rationale is rooted in the ‘cultural materialism’ of Williams, Hall and Gramsci and the ‘reciprocal action’ between material base and cultural superstructure. Hall, paraphrasing Marx, states that “men and women make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please” (Hall et al. 1976, 11); their ideas and values are shaped by history and their shared culture, individual experience and works of art in turn shape history. Cultural expression is thus framed by economic and social factors but it is also capable of advancing new ideas and interpreting a given reality in unexpected, even revelatory ways. Culture is

embedded in the various 'structures of feeling' (rooted in social class, tradition, family, community) which shape our experience of the world; the interchange between individual and collective experience, and between different, overlapping 'structures of feeling' is what makes up our experience of culture.

It is this interaction between different levels of experience which distinguishes the cultural materialism of Williams, Hall and Gramsci from the 'optimist' and 'determinist' extremities of culturalism considered above. If there is to be a connection between culture and democracy, our conception of culture must encompass a dynamic, mutual interaction between artists and society, between individual and collective experience and between the mutually transforming potential of both cultural ideals and material social conditions.

While this position is tenable in theory, in practice it results in a continuing tension between contradictory assumptions and beliefs. At certain moments, the inherent contradictions which drive cultural policies and institutions break into open factional conflict and a crisis occurs. In the remainder of this study I will focus on three such moments of contradiction and crisis, in which the 'incurable contradiction' between two conceptions of culture emerges in cultural policy, is partially resolved into an 'unstable equilibrium, then forms a new polarisation which will be challenged at the next moment of crisis.

Geographically, I have considered cultural policies in both Britain and the U.S., partly because I want to challenge the assumption that the story of 'cultural democracy' is a specifically British or European phenomenon. U.S. cultural policy has been described as "pluralism by default" (Mulcahy 1987, 330), almost a non-policy; direct federal subsidy for the arts, via the National Endowment for the Arts,

is minimal by European standards and may become non-existent in the near future¹⁸. In Britain the ideal of cultural democracy has become embroiled in a series of skirmishes over government funding; while these battles are of immense practical importance to the artists and organisations concerned, cultural democracy is not just about winning a share of subsidy or overturning the 'arts establishment'. In the U.S., concerns of access, accountability and equity have been no less important despite the relatively minor role of the federal government in supporting the arts. Cultural policies in Britain and the U.S. share similar roots, especially in the nineteenth century when U.S. educational and cultural institutions were still linked with the legacy of colonial rule; while institutions and policies have developed differently, the 'incurable contradiction' between materialist and idealist versions of culture has remained constant, producing a similar set of dilemmas in cultural policy, including the cultural democracy question.

Historically, I have begun in the late nineteenth century where I believe the pressure to 'democratise' culture through public or 'free' institutions resulted in the first of my moments of crisis (chapter 2). The nineteenth century was the source for the basic ideological contradiction which runs through to present day 'democratic' cultural policies, between cultural idealism and 'materialist' or 'utilitarian' positions. This contradiction extended to the conflicting psychological drives of the cultural worker; the alienation of the nineteenth century cultural worker may throw light on the motives of contemporary community artists. In the next chapter I examine the U.S. federal arts projects of the 1930s (chapter 3). Here, nineteenth century cultural idealism converged with a new, more overtly 'materialist' tradition. The federal arts projects represented both a fresh eruption of the 'incurable contradiction' of late

¹⁸ Of course the federal government does give a very substantial indirect subsidy to arts organisations in the form of tax exemptions for private funders. Also, while the NEA continues to be on a knife edge, State Councils for the Arts continue to provide support for the arts; New York State Council for the Arts actually outspent the NEA in the 1960s and recently announced a 15% increase in state arts funding. However, the NEA continues to be the only vehicle for a national cultural policy, and continues to be 'at risk'.

nineteenth century cultural democratisation, and anticipated the promises and problems of late twentieth century 'cultural democracy'. They also challenged the stereotype of U.S. cultural policy as a matter for private patronage, anticipating such grand cultural experiments of European government funding as Jack Lang's French Ministry of Culture in the 1980s. Finally I examine the emergence of 'community media' in Britain and America in the 1970s (chapter 4); here the legacy of past contradictions is placed in the context of the theoretical issues discussed in the introduction.

By examining these 'moments' where different beliefs and ideals came into open conflict, I hope to highlight some of the specific areas of contradiction within cultural institutions and in the related fields of ideology, educational policy, cultural policy, artistic practice and individual psychology. At the same time I hope to show how the equilibrium between these contradictory forces has been shaped by a continuing pattern of contradiction, crisis, incorporation and renewal.

2. THE NINETEENTH CENTURY CIVILISING MISSION: A STUDY IN CONTRADICTION

In this chapter I will apply the theoretical model of crisis and contradiction developed in the introduction to an analysis of 'democratising' cultural institutions in the late nineteenth century. These institutions represented a concerted attempt to make middle class culture available to working class consumers. It would be an exaggeration to say that this phenomenon was invented in the late nineteenth century; there were of course precedents in the utilitarian attempts at working class improvement in the 1830s through institutions such as the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and the Mechanics' Institutes (Kelly 1977, 115 - 128; Kett 1994, 102 - 140), and the democratising popular education movements in the U.S during the Revolutionary period in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Cremin 1977, 36 - 38; Kett 1995, 32 - 34). Similarly there was also an earlier generation of cultural and educational institutions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century directed primarily at middle-class 'self-improvement', from gentlemanly historical and philosophical societies and the American Lyceum to semi-private museum collections and libraries where entrance was restricted to scholars and sophisticates. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, these earlier sporadic attempts to make 'culture' available gave way to a more comprehensive movement for cultural reform. The fact that this movement was born out of widely contrasting precedents points to some of the underlying contradictions which will be examined in this chapter.

The 'democratising' cultural institutions of the late nineteenth century also reflect forwards in history to contemporary versions of 'improving' democratic culture, from the BBC and the Arts Council to the plethora of educational and outreach

programmes attached to contemporary cultural institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. I will in the remainder of this study be referring back to the late nineteenth century as the period when the contradictory search for a 'democratic' culture began to take shape. The basic elements for the later 'moments' of contradiction in cultural policy in this study, including the ideological contradictions, psychological conflicts, the dynamics of social class, in some cases even the financial and institutional infrastructure, can be traced back to the 'moment' of cultural reform in the last part of the nineteenth century.

* * * *

2.1. The 'moment' of cultural reform 1870 - 1910

In the last thirty years of the nineteenth century there was a rapid expansion in 'public' cultural institutions in Britain and the U.S.. British and U.S. libraries were being founded at an increasingly rapid rate through the 1870s and 1890s (Kelly 1977, 16; Garrison 1979; Kett 1994, 205 - 208). The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston were both chartered in 1870, Henry Cole's South Kensington museum complex in London was founded in 1883. The first settlement house in Britain was founded in London in 1884, followed by the first U.S. settlement house in New York in 1886.

These new institutions sought to make 'culture', specifically the culture of the economically and politically powerful, available to the new working class, on the premise that increased access to culture would produce a social benefit, described variously as 'educating', 'uplifting', 'improving', 'softening' or 'civilising'. In this chapter I will attempt to unravel the intentions behind the new cultural institutions in relation to a 'crisis' in the meaning and purpose of middle class culture.

When discussing the middle class 'civilising mission' it is important to recognise that this 'mission' was driven by competing, sometimes contradictory intentions, and that the 'middle class' (still at the time a relatively new term) consisted of competing factions, not a unified class interest. There were two competing approaches to cultural reform in the new institutions. One approach, reacting to a perceived breakdown in the social order, centred on the search for a 'common culture' as the key to social harmony between classes. The other approach sought to make culture socially 'useful' by applying cultural solutions to practical social problems, from industrial design to political and social reform. These competing approaches were based on competing idealist and materialist conceptions of culture; in turn these competing conceptions grew out of 'liberal' and 'utilitarian' traditions in middle class higher education.

In the last quarter of the century these factions converged in a fragile consensus, as illustrated by the temporary coalition between parliamentary reformers, industrial philanthropists and cultural missionaries responsible for the British public library. However, the civilising mission represented an 'unstable equilibrium' vulnerable both to external pressures (for example, the changing market demand for libraries and museums) and to internal dissent (for example the self-doubt of the settlement worker). As the consensus which held the civilising mission together began to unravel, inherited contradictions regarding the meaning and value of culture resurfaced.

In order to explore this process of unfolding contradictions, I have chosen to focus on the nineteenth century settlement house. The settlement house brought university-educated young men and women into direct contact with working class communities in the poorer districts of British and U.S. cities at the turn of the

century. More blatantly than the museum or the library, the settlement house sought to take the 'culture' of the middle class to the urban working class and the immigrant poor.

The settlement house exemplified the contradictory nature of that 'culture'. Firstly, the settlement worker combined a faith in the transforming power of culture with a desire to be socially useful, reflected in the combination of artistic or educational activities with practical attempts at community development or social reform; conceptions of culture as 'uplifting' or 'useful' frequently came into direct conflict. Secondly these conflicts were dramatised at the subjective level; the settlement worker's search for useful culture was rooted in a sense of alienation and the uselessness of her own 'culture'. I will argue that these conflicts were partly the result of contradictory tendencies in higher education, in particular the contested value of the classical, liberal arts 'cultural' curriculum in the ancient British universities and the U.S. women's colleges.

Before examining the 'culture' of the settlement house, I will begin by tracing some alternative views of the nineteenth century civilising mission and develop my argument that the 'moment' of cultural reform was a crisis in Gramsci's sense, the cumulative outcome of contradictions and factions in the nineteenth century middle class conception of culture (section 2.2). In the following section (2.3) I will relate these contradictions to competing traditions in middle class university education and the extension of educational 'privileges' to the working class. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the settlement house, but the arguments are intended to apply to the broader project of nineteenth century cultural reform.

2.2. The Conspiracy Theory of Cultural Democratisation

In this section I will review two opposing tendencies among commentators on the nineteenth century civilising mission. On one side, writers like Thomas Kelly (1970, 1977) and Edward P Alexander (1983) see the nineteenth century cultural institution as the product of genuine altruism. This altruism is seen as the property of individuals, not the product of collective middle class virtue or self-interest. Thus Kelly suggests the 1850 Public Libraries Act derived from “the enlightened goodwill of a *sector* of the ruling class” (Kelly 1977, 3 - my emphasis). The principal advantage of this view, which I will refer to as the heroic tendency, is the recognition of individual agency and separate ‘sectors’ of opinion within the middle class; its principal disadvantage is the refusal to examine collective self-interests behind the altruistic facade.

Other commentators have noted that the new cultural institutions were not just the result of individual initiative or of an eccentric, ‘enlightened sector’ of middle class opinion. Behind the individual curators, visionary legislators and entrepreneurial pioneers described by Alexander (1983), Kelly (1977) and Orosz (1990) stood a coalition of middle class philanthropists, board members, parliamentary supporters and local rate-payers. Where the heroic tendency sees the nineteenth century cultural institution as the result of heroic individual effort, their sceptical opponents see the workings of class politics. This view, which I will refer to as the ‘hegemonic tendency’, extends the analytical terms from individuals to collective interests. However, the danger of the hegemonic tendency is that it lumps these various class interests together in a single category, referred to generically as ‘middle class opinion’ or ‘middle class cultural hegemony’. Again the tendency is towards simplification; instead of the heroic individual we are offered the middle class conspiracy theory. Neither tendency seems capable of recognising the existence

of competing individual and collective intentions within and outside the new institutions, the gap between intention and execution, and the fact that institutional policy is subject to internal faction and external circumstance.

The hegemonic tendency corresponds to the determinist view which sees cultural democratisation as a tactic in the class struggle. As noted in the introduction, the view of cultural institutions as instruments for class hegemony and ideological domination was the dominant paradigm in cultural studies during the 1970s and 1980s, reacting against the empirical, culturalist school of the previous generation. The hegemonic critique of cultural democratisation was thus a conscious act of intellectual 'positioning'; accordingly, Dee Garrison in the introduction to her study of American libraries positions her work in reaction against the complacent, 'heroic' view of the librarian as an enlightened social missionary (Garrison 1979). As this class-based analysis represents the dominant paradigm, I will devote most of this section to a review of the 'hegemonic' critique of nineteenth century cultural institutions.

In its cruder forms, the hegemonic tendency views the 'democratising' institutions of the late nineteenth century as a form of middle class conspiracy. The first version of this conspiracy theory concentrates on the uses of nineteenth century cultural institutions as agencies of social control, deployed by the middle class elite to soothe dissent, dissolve anarchic threats to the social order and cultivate an efficient workforce. The second version argues that cultural institutions represented a Trojan horse of middle class values, invading the hearts and minds of the working class and displacing an alternative, subversive tradition of indigenous working class culture. Both versions tend to reduce the combination of internal and external elements which drive a cultural institution to a single controlling interest, such as the board members of the organisation or the political legislature. As a result the competing interests

and objectives at play within the institution are glossed over and the adaptations to external changes in the cultural market are ignored.

The 'social control' argument invests the new cultural institutions with a unity of purpose, together with a degree of influence over their imagined constituency, which they did not possess. Nineteenth century advocates of museums and libraries intended that the new cultural institutions would provide two basic forms of social control. The first function was as a kind of virtual police force, reinforcing the moral and social order; culture would 'soften' the masses, imbuing a proper respect for the Victorian virtues. The second function was as a utilitarian regulator of the economic order; introduced to culture, the British workman would become more efficient and productive. The idea of 'social control' allowed these arguments to work in concert within a loose coalition; however, the British Parliamentary debate over the 1850 Public Libraries Act revealed a basic split between one faction concerned primarily with the worker's virtue, the other with his productivity. Accordingly Parliament was informed that the library was a means of "economic betterment", "social reform" and "a means for the prevention of crime" (Kelly 1977, 26); an earlier Select Committee had even suggested that libraries and museums might curtail "the prevailing vice of intoxication among the labouring classes of the United Kingdom" (Kelly 1977, 7).

This list of hopes and promises made possible a coalition of supporters in Parliament; it also facilitated support at the local level, where libraries depended on philanthropic contributions (both for building costs and for books and magazines) from industrial benefactors, and on the backing of a majority of ratepayers. At first, the libraries were supported by the professional classes and clergy as a means for moral and social 'improvement', but opposed by "landlords and shopkeepers" who feared potential interference with their trade; however, in order to win the electoral

majority required by Parliament and the financial support of local industrialists, the libraries began from the late 1860s to emphasise their utilitarian function as engines of educational progress over their 'moral' function (Kelly 1977, 30 - 31). The libraries were obliged to cultivate the support of patrician and philistine elements in the nineteenth century middle class; accordingly they became the servants of two masters, seeking to satisfy competing claims for moral or social improvement and economic betterment.

The attempts to win the support of different constituencies forced the new cultural institutions to make ambitious and sometimes self-defeating promises. Conflicts over the institution's internal mission were inevitably reproduced in doubts over its external market. The intended 'working class' market for the nineteenth century cultural institution was vaguely conceived by its middle class supporters. While the arguments for moral improvement conjured up a constituency of criminals and drunkards, industrial philanthropists like Carnegie were concerned primarily with the able and industrious who would climb the ladder from rags to riches. Meanwhile many working class users regarded the new institutions with suspicion; in the U.S., some working class organisations actively resisted the new Carnegie libraries, remembering the clashes between Carnegie and the steel workers.

At the same time a new market for culture was emerging among the lower middle class, including teachers, shopkeepers, clerks and skilled artisans. Attendance statistics at the libraries, the Mechanics' Institutes, university extension classes, settlement house 'clubs' and museums confirm a growing dependence on white collar clerical and service staff, not the vague working class constituency imagined by their middle class benefactors¹⁹.

¹⁹ For library attendances in the UK and US, see Kelly (1977, 82 - 3) and Garrison (1979, 50). For the Mechanics' Institutes, see Kelly (1970, 198 - 99); Inkster (1985). For the settlement house, see Meacham (1987, 122 - 123).

The new market for culture capitalised on the appetite for self-improvement within a relatively new social sector. In the U.S., Richard Hofstadter estimates that “the new middle class of technicians and salaried professionals, clerical workers, salespeople and public service personnel” grew by “almost eight times” between 1870 and 1910, as against an overall population increase of about two and one third times (Hofstadter 1955, 215). In Britain, this upwardly mobile ‘white collar’ constituency not only attended the new cultural institutions but provided an outlet for the expanding market in high-circulation, low-cost fiction, and in ‘general interest’ periodicals such as ‘Titbits’ (established in 1881), of the type satirised by Gissings in *New Grub Street*. Paul DiMaggio and Michael Useem argue that “cultural differentiation” through the purchase of cultural goods (CDs, classical concerts, museum visits, etc.) is especially important for the ‘new’ professions, “jobs for which no clear technical criteria of evaluation exist” (DiMaggio and Useem 1982, 185 - 186). The teachers, shopkeepers and clerks who made up the emergent white collar ‘new middle class’ of the late nineteenth century appear to fall into this category of indeterminate, insecure professions; belonging neither to the property-owning middle class nor the industrial working class, this new sector of the population sought to compensate for its cultural rootlessness with a reassuring cultural distinction. They were hungry for the trappings of middle class cultural refinement rather than for earnest ‘self-improvement’; the new, cultural institutions responded to this demand by diluting their educational mission with a general interest programme, ‘education as entertainment’²⁰.

A similar market trend affected nineteenth century popular education. Educational institutions like the British Mechanics’ Institute and the American Lyceum and

²⁰ The American appetite for ‘self-culture’ is well documented by Kett (1994). For similar trends in British educational and cultural institutions, see Kelly 1977, 82 - 83; Jarausch 1983, 25 - 28; Kelly 1970, 212.

Chautauqua, designed to propagate 'useful knowledge' to the working class, were coopted by the white-collar appetite for 'self-culture' (Bode 1956; Case 1948; Kett 1994, 143 - 179). In the U.S. both the Lyceum and the Chautauqua were initially grounded in a programme of self-improvement and popular education. The Lyceum was created in 1826 as a Massachusetts-based "Society for Mutual Education"; like the Mechanics' Institute, it was intended to provide practical information to working men but by the 1860s it had been transformed into a commercial lecture and entertainment circuit, providing a bowdlerised version of middle class culture to small town America. The American Chautauqua followed a similar trajectory, beginning as a "Sunday-School Teachers' Association" on the shores of Lake Chautauqua in New York in 1874, and maturing into a kind of open university for Middle America²¹; however, in 1903 the first of the travelling 'tent chautauquas' began repackaging this educational programme as a travelling circus of culture, with salesmen touting a fixed programme of music, lectures, theatre and variety acts, sold 'wholesale' to town chautauqua committees. When the town committees refused en masse to book the 1925 chautauqua programme, the new market for culture was abruptly exposed as an exploitative fraud; the appetite for self-improvement had been exploited by showmen and hucksters dressed in the trappings of 'culture' and 'self-improvement'. Once the illusion cracked there was no product left to sell.

The successful confidence trick of the tent chautauqua salesmen of the 1900s and the Lyceum Bureaus of the 1860s depended on an association between a generalist, 'cultural' education and the acquisition of aristocratic social status. According to Joseph Kett, both the Lyceum and the Chautauqua derived from the eighteenth century British and American literary and philosophical societies, rooted in "a culture of gentlemanly self-improvement that flourished in the eighteenth century"

²¹ The Chautauqua University was established in 1883 and pioneered the use of correspondence courses. The continuing popularity in the U.S. of cultural self-help programmes of the type pioneered by the Chautauqua suggest that American cultural anxieties continue to be ripe for exploitation.

(Kett 1994, 15). Thomas Kelly claims a similar tradition behind the British Mechanics' Institutes (Kelly 1970, 115 - 117), contradicting the conventional historical view that the Mechanics' Institutes originated in the utilitarian tradition of industrial education in the 1830s, the 'diffusion of useful knowledge' to the working class (Inkster 1985, 6; Roderick and Stephens 1985, 21). The origins of this connection between educational generalism and aristocratic social status will be discussed in the next section.

Given the internal confusion of aims within the social control mission, the uncertainty of their market, and their growing reliance on a lower middle class constituency, the new institutions began to concede their initial missionary claim of reforming the working class. The shift from a mission-led to a market-led policy was apparent in the librarian's gradual surrender of moral authority over the reader in the late nineteenth century, reflected in changing attitudes to the 'great fiction question'. At first British and American librarians attempted to steer the reader away from fiction, demand for which always outstripped supply. In the United States tactics included 'literary guidebooks' in the 1880s which steered the reader through the immoral maze of fiction, and the 'two book' ticket which effectively used popular fiction as the bait for more worthy non-fiction titles (Garrison 1979, 68 - 72, 89 - 91). With the introduction of 'open shelf' access in the 1890s and the introduction of the Dewey Classification System, Melvil Dewey effectively resigned a major part of the library's social control mission, grudgingly conceding the reader's right to "get their own meat or poison"²². Professionalisation reinforced the shift in the librarian's function from self-appointed cultural gate-keeper to service-provider. The establishment of national library associations in the 1870s and the introduction of professional training in the 1890s reinforced the new

²² Melvil Dewey, quoted in Garrison (1979, 96). Open shelf access was pioneered in Britain by James Duff Brown in the Clerkenwell Library in 1893, but did not become general until 1919 with the removal of the rate limit, allowing libraries to replenish book stocks; it seems that many British librarians were worried that the public might steal their books.

professionalism of the librarian²³ . A new generation of librarians appeared more concerned with the organisational goals of efficiency and competitiveness than with the missionary aims of moral uplift and economic betterment. The growing interest in attendance and lending statistics, and the professional emphasis on customer service, which replaced the paternalistic emphasis on the formation of 'character', reflected this shift. Many of the more enterprising British libraries, such as Liverpool in the 1880s, extended their activities to include societies, clubs and university extension classes, while others provided smoking and recreation rooms (Kelly 1977, 95 - 97). The transition to the modern 'demand-led' library indicated the extent to which the 'social control' mission of the library, as for other cultural institutions, gradually gave way to the municipal function of service provision by the turn of the century.

Here the new libraries and museums followed the lead of the Mechanics Institutes in the first half of the century. The attempt to interest the working class in a middle class idea of cultural 'improvement' was a failure; as with the Lyceum and the Chautauqua, the new institutions were increasingly reliant on a socially diverse, 'white collar' constituency whose primary desire was to be entertained, but who wanted their amusements to be dressed up in a generalist 'cultural' context which promised respectability and self-improvement. The 'social control' function of the libraries was thwarted by conflicting missionary intentions and by a failure to retain the interests of their vaguely conceived 'working class' constituency. Far from providing a mechanism for social control, libraries and museums thus found themselves, in order to survive in a competitive market, increasingly controlled by consumer demand.

²³ The American Library Association was founded in 1876, the British followed in 1877. The new profession of 'library science' was created "almost singlehandedly" in the United States by Melvil Dewey in the 1890s and reflected his interest in "scientific management" and the 'Efficiency' movement

The 'Trojan Horse' version of the conspiracy theory follows the logic of Engels' argument that the Mechanics' Institutes were "established in order to halt the independent workers' education movement" (Inkster 1985, 7). The imposition of utilitarian mass education and 'useful knowledge' from above was a direct attempt to displace a thriving network of radical working class culture (cf. Worpole 1984). There are four problems with this 'Trojan Horse' theory. First of all it exaggerates the strength of the radical independent working class cultural tradition; for example while there was an independent, informal network of libraries in Britain before the 1850 Public Libraries Act, including libraries in public houses, Chartist reading rooms and union and labour libraries, the total book supply remained "very inadequate" according to Kelly, "especially for the poorer classes" (Kelly 1970, 176). Secondly it assumes that the decline of that tradition was caused by a conscious policy on the part of the new cultural institutions; again this underestimates the effect of the 'new market for culture' referred to above, and the possibility that the radical strain of working class literature, like the civilising mission of the reformers, was swept aside by consumer demand. Thirdly, it assumes that the new cultural institutions were successful in influencing the working class; as I have suggested, the new cultural institutions, like the Mechanics' Institutes before them, were not primarily patronised by the working class. Fourthly and most problematically, the Trojan Horse model requires a unity of purpose among the disparate supporters of the new cultural institutions which simply did not exist.

Other critiques pursue a more sophisticated line of argument but nevertheless retain traces of the hegemonic tendency. For example Paul DiMaggio (1986a) suggests that the new cultural institutions did not attempt to impose a civilising missionary idea of culture on a working class who were unlikely to take the bait. Instead, cultural 'publicity' was directed at the rising middle class; the 'civilised' patrician

minority displayed their values to those in the social stratum immediately below, reinforcing their claim for cultural leadership whilst simultaneously extending their constituency just far enough to guarantee their continuing legitimacy. Joel Orosz describes this strategy as “widening the base of the elite” (Orosz 1990, 69); the old “respectability” (the old pre-industrial middle class) was politically isolated and threatened by the growing influence of the industrial (non-hereditary) middle class and needed to reassert its dominance through culture.

Unlike the other cruder ‘hegemonic’ critiques of cultural institutions, DiMaggio’s constituency-building model is based on an awareness of the conflicting elements within the nineteenth century middle class and the internal dynamic within cultural institutions between the entrepreneurial pioneers, professional staff and board members. Despite these qualifications, DiMaggio suggests that Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts and Symphony Orchestra were determined by the intentions of Boston’s ‘Brahmin’ elite; he also implies that the non-profit system of organisation represented a conscious attempt by this elite to establish a cultural monopoly from which ‘popular’ cultural forms were excluded. However, once we accept that cultural institutions are characterised by a multiplicity of internal factions and missionary goals, and that these conflicting missionary intentions are further compromised by the financial imperatives of the market place, it becomes increasingly difficult to insist on a single intention stemming from a single governing interest.

The heroic and hegemonic tendencies focus on the intentions of the new cultural institutions, not their effects. The civilising mission is presented as the product either of a handful of pioneering individuals pursuing universal enlightenment, or of a unified middle class pursuing ‘cultural hegemony’. Yet the ‘causes’ of the

‘civilising mission’ were not so straightforward, nor were they straightforwardly reproduced as ‘effects’.

Judged on its outcomes, the ‘civilising mission’ was remarkably ineffective. First of all, as noted above, competing missionary intentions undermined any coherent sense of mission or target audience. As the new cultural institutions carved out their niche as municipal service providers and competitive cultural attractions, the vague and contradictory missionary intentions were submerged in the institutional logic of market survival. Their audience was increasingly the ‘white collar’ lower middle class; their mission was to provide this audience with a satisfying but not over-taxing mix of education and entertainment.

Instead of being the driving force of the new institutions, the ‘civilising mission’ became part of the marketing strategy. A lightweight, undemanding version of ‘education’ and ‘improvement’ became a means of stimulating (but not necessarily satisfying) the lower middle class appetite for self-improvement; meanwhile ‘educational seriousness’ was dusted off to impress municipal funders. Earlier in the century the entrepreneur and ‘museum master’ Charles Willson Peale pioneered this dual strategy at his Philadelphia Museum. Visitors to the museum between 1794 and 1827 were primarily from the “high non-manual occupations” (Brigham 1992, 84 - 87). The museum provided this audience not only with lectures and scientific demonstrations but a succession of bizarre attractions, from Peale’s mammoth skeleton (the ‘carniverous [sic] elephant of the north’) to Signor Hellene’s one-man band and the ‘Learned Dogs’ introduced by Peale’s sons (Alexander 1983, 58; Alderson 1992, 49 - 65). Meanwhile Peale continued (unsuccessfully) to lobby the municipal, state, even the federal governments for public money, projecting his museum as “educationally serious” and stressing its function as a “school for civic responsibility” (Brigham 1992, 79 - 80; Orosz 1990, 49).

Peale's quirky mix of "scientific information and rational amusement" was before its time and the museum eventually went out of business in 1850. What Peale grasped was the market potential of 'education', both as a form of niche marketing designed to flatter and amuse his white collar constituency, and as a form of corporate marketing designed to impress potential funders. Ironically his competitor, Phineas T Barnum attempted something similar in New York in the 1860s, proposing an educational emporium designed to capitalise on the new market for culture in the upwardly mobile lower middle class and on the 'civilising' intentions of philanthropic supporters. In the end Barnum failed to convince his financial backers of the project's potential; Barnum was after all perhaps more convincing as a showman than as an educator (Orosz 1990, 227). Peale's misfortune on the other hand was that he arrived too early to capitalise on the nineteenth century civilising mission. Later in the century, his combination of corporate high seriousness and education-as-entertainment would surely have found favour in the new cultural institutions. Peale also anticipated the market position of today's museum education programmes (Zolberg 1986), combining a high-minded corporate image of community service and outreach (designed to impress corporate and municipal funders) with a user-friendly appeal to the middle class cultural consumer (not the 'working class' non-attender featured in the mission statement).

Trapped in a cause and effect model of cultural analysis, the heroic and hegemonic tendencies take the 'civilising mission' of the nineteenth century cultural institution at face value, overestimating its coherence and effectiveness. Consequently they fail to account for the contradictions and compromises which emerged through the cracks in institutional policy. The libraries and museums of the late nineteenth century, like the mechanics' institutes in the 1830s, encompassed a variety of missionary intentions which were adapted to meet consumer demand, in particular

the lower middle class appetite for 'self-culture'. In order to understand the contradictions behind the middle class 'civilising mission' and the new appetite for cultural self-improvement, it is necessary to examine the conflicting traditions of nineteenth century education.

2.3. Education and Social Class in the Civilising Mission

I have referred to a 'coalition' between competing strands within the nineteenth century middle class. In this chapter I will argue that competing versions of the 'civilising mission' were rooted in nineteenth century educational theory.

Behind nineteenth century idealist and utilitarian ideas of 'culture' lay a collision between two educational traditions, the 'liberal education' of the old elite universities and newer forms of 'utilitarian' professional, vocational and technical education. The genteel faith in a neutral, 'classless' culture was informed by liberal education's faith in a fixed body of knowledge, preserved and perpetuated through the prescribed 'classical' curriculum; similarly the idea that art and culture should serve a useful purpose in the economic order can be traced back to the utilitarian educational tradition's emphasis on 'useful knowledge' in the 1830s and the attempt to educate the several classes and professions according to their station in industrial society. The rapid expansion of higher education in Britain and the U.S. during the last quarter of the nineteenth century brought these conflicting ideas about education and culture into direct competition²⁴. The resulting synthesis of idealist and utilitarian educational traditions in higher education, which I will refer to as the search for 'useful culture', would have a critical influence on the new cultural institutions, and more especially on the new cultural workers.

²⁴ See for example the exchanges involving J S Mill, T H Huxley and Matthew Arnold in the 1870s and 1880s (Sanderson 1975, 122 - 141).

‘Liberal education’ in the first half of the nineteenth century referred to a ‘gentlemanly’ tradition of generalist education, with a narrow, fixed curriculum based on close study of the classics, directed towards the discipline and adornment of the mind, not towards any profession or career (other than the clergy or government). This tradition was rooted in a medieval, feudal society and preserved in Oxford and Cambridge University and in the American ‘colonial’ colleges (Harvard, Yale, William and Mary), the so-called ‘ancient universities’²⁵. It was also closely tied to the church; until the 1850s, Oxford and Cambridge students were subjected to a religious ‘test’ designed to weed out non-Anglican ‘dissenters’ and the American colleges were each attached to religious denominations. Liberal education in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was designed to serve the needs of the ruling class, firstly by providing a generalist ‘mental discipline’ suitable for future legislators, secondly by perpetuating a body of ‘useless knowledge’ which, by its very impracticality, became a badge of status for the ‘gentleman’ intent on a life of leisure and refinement. The primary beneficiaries of the liberal education tradition in this period were the landed gentry and the sons of clergymen; the majority of British graduates (about two thirds) joined the clergy²⁶, while some joined the government (including a majority of the American Founding Fathers and of British parliamentarians).

By the 1870s, the liberal education tradition was in retreat on both sides of the Atlantic, as the utilitarian demands of an industrial society gradually penetrated the old academic institutions. The new utilitarian tradition was driven by three developments. Firstly, there was a recognition, both in the established universities

²⁵ In Britain this phrase is primarily used to refer to Oxford and Cambridge, officially the only universities in Britain pre-1800. I have extended the term to include the old ‘colonial’ colleges and the newer ‘Ivy League’ colleges in the United States, all heavily influenced by the Oxbridge model. The University of Durham should also be included in this category. On the other hand the University of London (1828) and Owens College in Manchester (1851) qualify as ‘new’ universities; both were radical departures from Oxbridge and signalled the beginnings of the so-called ‘university revolution’ discussed below.

²⁶ This estimate based on Oxford and Cambridge Universities (Sanderson 1975, 17).

and in the newer colleges of the need for specialist professional and technical training to meet the specialised needs of a manufacturing economy and ‘scientific’ approaches to farming; the new British civic colleges and American land grant colleges of the 1870s²⁷ can be seen, at least in part, as a direct response to these specialised, technical needs. Secondly the German research university inspired a new professionalism and a shift in power from the collegiate hierarchy to the faculty ‘professoriat’; this encouraged British and U.S. universities to replace the generalist cultivation of the gentleman-amateur with a new emphasis on scientific and ‘applied’ research. Thirdly, there was a commitment to ‘democratise’ education, reflected in reforms in secondary and adult education as well as in higher education; at Oxford and Cambridge secularisation was accompanied by an expansion of educational opportunity for the new middle class²⁸. These three trends converged in the massive expansion of higher education in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; university enrolment more than tripled in Britain and the United States between 1870 and 1900, and the expansion of non-university higher education was even more rapid²⁹. The synergy between higher education and industry was reflected both in the involvement of industrial benefactors in the foundation and funding of the new institutions in the 1870s, and in the emergence of new faculties and specialisms (eg. metallurgy, chemistry, electronics) which complemented local industry (Sanderson 1975, 10 - 12; Hofstadter 1952).

One version of history describes this transition as the ‘university revolution’, with a new era of utilitarian expansion sweeping aside the outmoded, preindustrial tradition

²⁷ The Land Grant Act (the Morrill Act) of 1862 granted public land to each of the states, proceeds from which were to be used for “the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life” (Hofstadter and Smith 1961, 568)). The foundation of the civic colleges in the early 1870s was directly related to a desire to improve the competitiveness of British industry (Sanderson 1975, 143 - 4).

²⁸ Oxford and Cambridge ceased religious ‘testing’ of students in the 1850s. The opening of recruitment of working class and middle class to British and American universities in the late 19th century, following Germany’s lead, is described by Jarausch (1983, 23 - 28).

²⁹ Figures derived from Jarausch (1983, 12 - 18).

of liberal education (Hofstadter 1952, Sanderson 1975). Another version focuses on the traditional university as a last surviving bastion of the 'liberal' education tradition, as with Mina Carson's description of the nineteenth century American university as "the only remaining locus for the preservation and propagation of that refinement fostered by familiarity with the Western cultural tradition" (Carson 1990, 20). In reality the transition was not characterised by a radical break between 'old' and 'new' universities, but by a merging of 'liberal' and 'utilitarian' traditions which affected both the traditional universities and the new civic colleges. A new equilibrium developed in which liberal education remained as a strong 'residual' element, utilitarian education had become the 'dominant' rationale, while a hybrid movement towards 'useful culture', can be seen as the 'emergent' ideology, growing out of these competing traditions. This merging of traditions, reflected in the 'emergent' search for 'useful culture', was a major source of the contradictory versions of the 'civilising mission'. The search for 'useful culture' differed from the purely utilitarian view of culture because access to culture was assumed to have intrinsic benefits beyond its instrumental functions; at the same time, 'useful culture' differed from the idealist faith in a 'common culture' because its supposed benefits were to be applied to 'practical' tasks, not just to the cultivation of character and moral improvement.

In the last thirty years of the nineteenth century the merging of 'liberal' and 'utilitarian' educational traditions affected both the 'old universities' and the new civic colleges. Despite their links with industry and agriculture, the 'new' British civic colleges and American land grant colleges of the 1870s retained a residual faith in the old classical curriculum. In the U.S., the Land Grant College Act did not exclude "scientific and classical studies" from its remit, and some of the Act's primary beneficiaries were in fact the traditional universities (eg. Yale). In Britain the civic university colleges continued to provide the rudiments of a generalist

‘liberal education’ alongside specialised vocational training (Sanderson 1975, 145 - 146); a ‘balanced’ curriculum was one of the conditions for achieving an independent university charter. In the old universities a practical, vocational emphasis was attached to the classical curriculum. Oxford and Cambridge began introducing the natural and social sciences in the 1870s. Harvard introduced an ‘elective’ system in 1869, allowing students to choose their areas of specialisation and recognising the place of scientific subjects on the curriculum (Hofstadter & Smith 1961, 601 - 624). There was no clean break between ‘liberal’ and ‘utilitarian’ education, only differences of emphasis and different configurations of the same basic elements.

Traditional liberal education tradition remained especially strong in three areas. Firstly, the established universities (Oxford and Cambridge in Britain, Harvard and the Ivy League colleges in the United States) remained defiantly attached to the old classical, humanist curriculum despite ‘progressive’ changes of the type noted above; this resistance stemmed from vested interests and internal politics as much as any intellectual position (Sanderson 1975, 5 - 6). Secondly, some of the “small colleges, closely related to churches” in the United States also resisted reform (Hofstadter 1952, 50), again partly as a result of their religious affiliations rather than any attachment to the liberal education ideal. Finally the expanded area of women’s higher education, especially in the United States, maintained the ‘genteel’ tradition of ‘culture studies’ into the late nineteenth century. This ‘genteel tradition’ was partly an extension of traditional ‘womanly’ gender roles as teachers, educators and cultural guardians within the family (Conway 1974, 3 - 4); more importantly, women sought an outlet in a quasi-domestic sphere of culture in the absence of vocational opportunities elsewhere (ibid., 8 - 9). Politics and industry remained virtually exclusively the preserves of men; thus, according to Dee Garrison, “the

division of labour produced by industrialism assured the feminization of American culture” in the late nineteenth century (Garrison 1979, 12).

Instead of abandoning the classical curriculum, these institutions emphasised its social utility and vocational applications. Oxford and Cambridge defended the vocational utility of an unreconstructed classical curriculum, securing a virtual monopoly on the civil service examinations as a result. The American women’s colleges of the 1870s, whilst mimicking the classical curriculum of the older male elite colleges of the east coast, emphasised the utility of this curriculum in preparing the female student to uphold the ideal of “true womanhood” both in the home and in society as teachers and missionaries; Smith College (founded 1875) hoped its graduates would influence society by “forming manners and morals, moulding society, and shaping public sentiment”, while the founder of Wellesley (also 1875) described higher education as “putting on God’s armour for the contest” in preparation for a life of “noble usefulness” (Rousmaniere 1970, 50 - 51). Thus while these new institutions continued to emphasise the value of liberal education, they did so in terms of its social purpose; ‘culture’ was to be made useful in the home and the school, ‘religion’ was to be applied to practical social problems.

One way of making the cultural curriculum of liberal education socially useful was by applying it to the acculturation of the working class. The universities found a new social purpose by redirecting the liberal education ideal towards the civilisation and uplift of the working class. The university extension movement, originating with Oxford and Cambridge in the 1870s and reaching a peak in the 1890s, offered ‘liberal studies’ to those unable to afford further education (Kelly 1970, 222 - 238). A parallel attempt to apply the fruits of a liberal education to the cultivation of the working class developed out of the American women’s college. The first generation of women graduates emerged from the new women’s liberal arts colleges established

after the American civil war in the 1870s, inspired both by an ideal of culture and by a desire to be socially useful. They sought fulfilment in the socially oriented professions (teaching, social work, missionary work and cultural guardianship) which remained the only career options open to them in the outside world³⁰. Like the originators of British university extension, the graduates of American women's colleges sought to offset the perceived redundancy of their educational inheritance by redirecting this inheritance towards the acculturation of the urban poor, especially the new immigrant communities. The idea of 'useful culture' thus spilled out of the academy into new attempts at working class education.

The emergent ideal of 'useful culture', born out of the opposition between utilitarian and idealist conceptions of education and culture, was thus expressed in the trajectory both of the institution's extramural activities and in the individual graduate's career path. Firstly, the surviving centres of 'liberal education' (the ancient universities, American's women colleges, religious seminaries) either instigated or collaborated in the construction of institutional outlets through which the fruits of a liberal education could be 'applied' to the business of administration, education and social reform. Secondly the cultured graduates of these universities themselves attempted to apply their educational inheritance to a career of social reform. At both levels 'useful culture' can be seen as a response to internal demand (the search by institution and graduate for a 'useful' vocational role) as much as it was a response to the plight of the poor.

It is possible to trace three distinct tendencies within nineteenth century higher education, each with a stake in the late nineteenth century 'civilising mission'. The first faction included the remnants of the landed gentry and the clergy. Schooled in the old classical curriculum at the ancient universities, they retained a more or less

³⁰ According to Jill Conway "approximately sixty to seventy percent of the first generation of graduates from women's colleges did not marry and many pursued specifically identifiable careers".

undiluted faith in a 'common culture' as the key both to social harmony and individual character; this same common culture also underpinned their own elite status, shoring up cultural distinctions even as their political and financial reserves diminished. While this faction represented a 'residual' minority, they retained disproportionate influence, especially in Parliament, in the U.S. Congress and in the clergy; their primary contribution to the new cultural institutions was their political influence. The second faction, representing the 'dominant' element, included industrialists, factory owners and businessmen. This faction included both graduates of the 'new' technical and vocational colleges and self-made philanthropists who had helped to create them. They saw culture's importance primarily in economic terms. Culture was a useful commodity which could improve the quality of industrial design and raise the efficiency of the workforce. They contributed to the new cultural institutions financially.

The third 'emergent' faction was a product of the new emphasis on 'useful culture' in the old universities and women's colleges. While the idealistic young graduates of Oxford and the female graduates of Vassar, Smith and Wellesley had been profoundly influenced by the cultural core of the 'liberal' curriculum, they had also learned to distrust culture as an end in itself, seeking to offset their perceived 'uselessness' by plunging into a socially useful, practical vocation. The liberal-utilitarian debate in British and American universities paved the way for the new public cultural institutions by creating this pool of culturally disaffected, culturally educated, reform-minded workers. Alienated from their class, their culture and their family, these cultural workers sought an outlet in the warm glow of 'community' and plunged into the work of social reform by cultural means. However, the buried contradictions of their educational inheritance would erupt in their new role as cultural missionaries. In the next section I will examine this contradictory creed of 'useful culture' in the context of the nineteenth century settlement house.

2.4. The Settlement House: from ‘useful culture’ to ‘neutral space’

In the previous section I described a widening gap between a classical ‘liberal’ education and the industrial economy’s demand for ‘useful’ vocational skills. Responding to the threat of redundancy (literally and metaphorically), the classical liberal educators sought to justify their work in terms of a hybrid ideological concept, the search for ‘useful culture’. A new generation of graduates inherited the liberal-classical faith in a transcendent ‘common culture’, tempered by a sceptical, utilitarian view that culture was ultimately useless when confronted by real social problems. In the nineteenth century settlement house the idea that culture could and should be socially useful was stretched to breaking point, and the latent contradictions between two belief systems erupted in institutional conflicts over policy and psychological conflicts over motives and ideals.

The first settlement house, Toynbee Hall, was founded in London’s East End in 1884 by the Reverend Samuel Barnett. At Barnett’s invitation, a group of idealistic Oxford graduates settled in a house in London’s East End and attempted to live among the urban industrial poor in a spirit of friendly neighbourliness. This individual human contact with the ‘residents’ would, it was hoped, result in the moral, spiritual and cultural uplift of their new ‘neighbours’. Activities at Toynbee Hall included university extension classes, debating clubs, art exhibitions and visits to ‘friends’ in the country (Barnett 1888). From this beginning other British settlements followed, including Oxford House (established 1885); the first American settlement house followed in New York in 1886. The emphasis was on individual human relationships, not philanthropic good works.

The 'university settlement idea' was born from the connection between Barnett, an Oxford-educated clergyman, and Balliol College Oxford. The settlement house was rooted in Barnett's insistent belief that the problem of poverty could be 'solved' in cultural terms; seeking to promote a 'common culture' as the solution to social breakdown, Barnett identified this 'common culture' with the habits of thought and behaviour fostered by a classical liberal education, specifically with the 'culture' of the Oxford graduate. Despite the emphasis on 'practicable' interventions, notably in researching and publicising the conditions of poverty and in pushing for social legislation and improved municipal provision, Barnett emphasised that poverty was not simply an aggregate of material wants. In common with other late nineteenth century 'charity reformers', Barnett mistrusted the 'dole' of organised charity; handing out money to the poor had not solved the problem of poverty, moreover its distinctions between the 'worthy' and 'unworthy' poor appeared cruel and arbitrary. The distribution of 'relief' funds, while relieving the conscience of a few rich benefactors, was often either ineffective or counterproductive for most poor recipients³¹.

Rejecting this purely economic version of philanthropy (and ignoring any larger economic analysis of poverty as a product of industrial capitalism), Barnett focused instead on the 'cultural' condition of poverty and its debilitating effect on the individual's 'character' and capacities. At the individual level then, the problem of poverty was to be addressed in 'cultural' terms, by restoring dignity, independence and self-respect to the working man. Having diagnosed the cultural roots of poverty among the poor, Barnett also identified poverty with the 'cultural' failings of the

³¹ Henrietta Barnett described the harmful effects of 'penny dinners' for poor children; these effects included deflating the local economy, lowering wages and undermining family life. In similar vein Samuel Barnett warned that short term, indiscriminate relief efforts would undermine long term attempts to rebuild poor communities: "The flood of charity, like a torrent, swept away the tender plants which the stream of charity had nourished" (Barnett 1888, 19 - 20; 36 - 37)

rich, partly in such vices as greed and waste, but more especially in their destruction of community. The urban middle class had deserted the city and the urban poor; Barnett urged these “wealthy middle class deserters from the commonwealth” to “take up again their civic responsibilities” (Meacham 1987, 40). The renewed ‘connection’ between rich and poor would be made at a personal level between the settlement residents and their poor ‘neighbours’, held together by a common culture.

The ‘common culture’ of the settlement house was to revolve around the ‘universal’ values of liberal education, the curriculum of classic texts and the cultivation of mental discipline; university extension classes and related ‘clubs’ featured prominently in the Toynbee Hall programme. The settlement house’s roots in liberal education were apparent in the career paths of the settlement ‘residents’. In Britain the first settlement houses were occupied by male Oxford graduates schooled in a tradition of ‘manly Christianity’; here the genteel tradition of religion and liberal education was rooted in the British public schools, refined and developed by the Oxford colleges (especially Balliol), which according to one commentator owed as much to Thomas Arnold, the headmaster of Rugby School, as to Matthew Arnold, the writer of *Culture and Anarchy* (Meacham 1987, 1 - 9). In the United States, the first generation of settlement workers were primarily the female graduates of the new women’s liberal arts colleges (Rousmaniere 1970, Carson 1990 20 - 26); they also tended to come from strongly religious, middle class family backgrounds (Kalberg 1975), and had in some cases attended religious ‘seminaries’.

The influence of the traditional liberal university on the nineteenth century settlement house in Britain and the United States has been well documented (Trolander 1987, 11 - 20; Meacham 1987, 50 - 56; Carson 1990, 198). If anything this influence has been overstated, with the settlement house presented as a last bastion of liberal culture transplanted into working class neighbourhoods and the

settlement workers' faith in culture taken at face value. In fact the settlement movement's relationship to liberal education was tempered by contradictions and compromises. Within the settlement house attitudes to culture were polarised between the two generations. Barnett represented the older generation's unconditional faith in culture, inherited from Oxford and the liberal education tradition. Part of this inheritance was a 'residual' patrician subtext which belonged to liberal education's feudal, genteel past, reflected in a fascination with the aristocratic trappings of cultivation and refinement and certain ingrained habits of hierarchy. The younger generation of settlement workers had their own educational inheritance, schooled in the 'emergent' search for a 'useful culture'; this led to a profound scepticism at the apparent 'uselessness' of culture when faced with real social problems, as expressed by the young William Beveridge at Toynbee Hall and by Jane Addams at Hull House in Chicago.

The residual patrician associations between 'culture', liberal education and social class can be traced in the settlement's attachment to middle class artistic 'taste' and to the 'extracurriculum' of collegiate living. Barnett's wife, Mrs. Henrietta Barnett, embroidered his cultural idealism with more specific descriptions of the uplifting power of art and music; the Toynbee Hall search for community was expressed through specific cultural forms, as in Mrs. Barnett's description of pictures as "stepping stones towards the truer life" and music "which more than anything else helps to smooth away class as well as other inequalities" (Barnett 1888, 124; 87). Here the pursuit of a classless culture based on 'general perfection' shaded into more specific prescriptions of middle class culture through 'at home' musical evenings, visits to galleries and outings to wealthy friends in the country. The 'culture' of the settlement house also reproduced the atmosphere and habits of an Oxford college, with its rigid internal hierarchy, its emphasis on individual conversation rather than

collective negotiation and its imposing design and architecture, in a manner likely to exacerbate class differences rather than dissolve them³².

The emergent neo-utilitarian strand of liberal education, the search for 'useful culture' challenged Barnett's faith in culture from the opposite direction. Younger Toynbee Hall residents doubted the relevance of 'culture' to social reform; in 1903 the young William Beveridge dismissed the idea that "colossal evils could be remedied by small doses of culture and charity and amiability" and claimed to distrust the "saving power of culture and mission and isolated good feeling as a surgeon distrusts 'Christian Science'" (Meacham 1987, 137)³³. In the United States, Jane Addams identified one of the 'subjective' drives of the settlement worker as an attempt to escape from the atrophying uselessness of a life of 'cultivation'³⁴ and described the young college-educated woman's keen "sense of futility, of misdirected energy" in the "pursuit of cultivation" and her "moral revulsion against this feverish search after culture" (Addams 1910, 44, 46). According to Addams, the American settlement worker was both the product of a liberal education and in revolt against it.

The common culture of the settlement house was thus an amalgam of residual associations and emergent discontents. At Toynbee Hall, the conflict between Barnett's patrician confidence in the saving power of culture and Beveridge's uneasy scepticism and self-doubt never reached a point of crisis. Perhaps because Toynbee Hall was so closely modelled in the image of Barnett and of Oxford, it never fully transcended its original status as an eccentric experiment in communal living. The

³² Thus Meacham describes "public school notions of authoritarian high-mindedness and disinterested service", transferred to Toynbee Hall via Balliol, and "habits of mind and action whose theatrical artificiality inhibited true connection" (Meacham 1987, 7; 50).

³³ Meacham however also points out that Beveridge's claimed 'distrust' of culture needs to be taken in context, in a letter to his parents reassuring them of his 'practical' future career plans.

³⁴ This theme was developed in Addams' 1892 lecture, "The Subjective Necessity of Social Settlements". The lecture was included as a chapter in *Twenty Years at Hull House* (Addams 1910, 68 - 76) but was originally published in November 1892.

alternative, non-cultural approaches to social reform sought by Beveridge, R H Tawney and the younger generation of Toynbee Hall residents were only expressed outside the confines of the settlement house; for Beveridge himself, Toynbee Hall constituted a form of postgraduate education before embarking on the real business of social reform as a senior civil servant and politician. This educational function, giving the nation's future ruling class a first-hand experience of the reality of poverty, would emerge as perhaps the single most important legacy of the nineteenth century British settlement house. In 1911, Beveridge characterised Toynbee Hall as "a school of post-graduate education in humanity" (Briggs & Macartney 1984, 70); in 1932, Henrietta Barnett commented on "the swarming men now in the high places of this country who owe all their knowledge of the working classes to their Toynbee Hall days" (Briggs & Macartney 1984, 27). However, Toynbee Hall itself, in common with the other British settlement houses, had little direct influence upon social reforms either at the local or national level. This inertia stands in marked contrast to the American settlement house.

In the American settlement house, the latent tensions between the older generation's liberal-educated faith in culture (represented by Barnett) and the younger generation's uneasy search for useful culture (represented by Beveridge) reached a crisis point. Firstly, the American settlement house was primarily concerned with immigrant communities; confronted with sharply differentiated ethnic and religious cultures, the universality of an Oxford tutor's private rooms seemed increasingly suspect. Secondly, the dire state of local government in many American cities encouraged many settlement workers to take an active part in local political and social reform; direct involvement in social reform bypassed the old faith in reform by cultural means. Thirdly, the self-doubts over the 'uselessness' of culture expressed by Beveridge were exacerbated for the predominantly female American settlement worker by gender; the inadequacies of a purely cultural approach to

social problems were complicated by the 'feminisation of culture', by 'role conflicts' over the place of women in society and by what Jane Addams described as the 'family claim'. These three distinguishing features are considered below.

The period of large-scale immigration to the United States, following the end of the American Civil War and preceding the introduction of the quota system in 1919, happened at roughly the same time as the American settlement movement's period of ascendancy. The American settlement house came to be defined by its distinctive contribution to the 'Americanisation' of European immigrants, to the extent that many Americans today believe that the 'settlement house' title refers to settlement by immigrants rather than by middle class 'residents'³⁵. Where British settlement workers had regarded London's East End as a cultural vacuum waiting to be filled³⁶, the American settlement workers were inclined to treat immigrant customs and traditions with respect. Ironically this respect was partly inspired by a classical education which revered Greece, Rome and the Italian Renaissance as the cradle of civilisation; thus while Jane Addams remained either dismissive or fearful of indigenous working class culture, she was able to compare an elderly Italian woman to a work by Michelangelo (Addams 1910, 139). The American settlement house also had to compete with ethnic and religious societies catering for immigrants; to win the immigrant's loyalty the settlement house had to show a modicum of respect for immigrant culture.

In Britain the settlement house worked alongside municipal authorities in pursuit of Barnett's 'practicable' reforms; eventually the settlement house would prove of only marginal significance as the reform process was taken over by newly

³⁵ This became apparent in discussing the contemporary settlement movement with various agencies in 1995/6.

³⁶ See for example Henrietta Barnett's musings on "the extreme dulness of the lives of the poor" in "At Home to the Poor" (Barnett 1888, 76 - 95). The middle class hostess is advised to fill the "barren" minds of her guests with music, art, and good table manners.

professionalised civil servants. In the United States there was no guarantee that reformers' demands would be taken up by government; the settlement house, along with the 'muckraking' campaigning journalists and other 'Progressive' reformers spent much of their energies working against, not with, a local government machine they saw as corrupt and ineffective. Thus while Jane Addams envied London its City Council and praised London's civic amenities of 1896 as being "at least a decade and a half ahead of Chicago" (Addams 1910, 153 - 154), her British visitors complained of the "lack of political machinery adapted to modern city life" in Chicago (*ibid.*, 170). Settlement concerns for the welfare of workers and families inevitably escalated from local political skirmishes to campaigns for federal legislation, abetted by a sympathetic President³⁷. In order to bypass the corrupt 'machine' of ward politics, American settlement workers became increasingly involved in federal committees and enquiries (from the National Child Labor Committee to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). The intractability of local politicians even led some settlement houses, notably Hull House and Henry Street, to put up candidates for political office and other municipal functions³⁸. Settlement workers could not afford to take the machinery of political reform for granted (Addams 1910, 130); constant vigilance was needed to ensure "the more consistent enforcement of existing laws and their advance" (*ibid.*, 170).

Given the symbiotic relationship between Toynbee Hall, Oxford University and the upper echelons of the British civil service, it is no surprise that the British settlement house was willing to entrust its reforming mission to the professionals. American

³⁷ For example, see Davis's account of Hull House's involvement in the 1904 Chicago stockyards strike. The settlement workers raised money for the strikers but resolutely opposed violence. The strike eventually failed, but Hull House's continued advocacy of the workers' case led to a government investigation into the meat-packing plants instigated by Roosevelt (Davis 1967, 112 - 122)

³⁸ See for example Addams' electoral struggle with the corrupt Alderman Johnny Powers (Addams 1910, 183 - 185), her successful bid for the local garbage collection contract against a corrupt administration (*ibid.* 164 - 170), her tenure on the Board of Education from 1905 (*ibid.* 189 - 195).

settlements, by contrast, found in the absence of an accountable municipal political mechanism a reason to exert growing political influence. While many of the first American settlement houses were directly inspired by Toynbee Hall³⁹, the American settlement house thus developed its own distinctive identity as an engine for practical reform. The practical turn of the American settlement house was emphasised in the definition offered by Greenwich House in New York: "A settlement aims to get things done for a given neighborhood" (Woods & Kennedy 1911).

Alongside its relationship with immigrants and its emphasis on practical reform, the third distinctive feature of the American settlement house was its predominantly female character. Female residents and volunteers far outnumbered men in American settlements, whereas many British settlements (especially Toynbee Hall) retained the flavour of a male Oxbridge college. In Chicago in 1911, combining figures for all religious and non-religious settlements, approximately 72% of all residents and 77% of all volunteers were women⁴⁰. Women also formed the majority in the most influential Chicago settlements, ranging from Hull House (61% of residents, 67% of volunteers) to the Chicago Commons (89% of residents, 93% of volunteers). In contrast, out of 435 residents in all British settlements in 1913, only approximately 57% were women while Toynbee Hall, the largest and most influential of the British settlements had a staff of 20 residents and 200 non-residents, all men⁴¹. Women were also prominent in the American settlement movement's leadership. Their influence extended through other related agencies, such as the women's trade union movement and investigative bodies such as the National Child Labour Committee. In contrast, the British settlement movement

³⁹ The first settlement house, the Neighborhood Guild founded by Stanton Coit in New York in 1886 was directly inspired by Toynbee Hall. Jane Addams and Robert Woods, two of the settlement movement's leading advocates, were both visitors and admirers of both Toynbee Hall and the Reverend Barnett.

⁴⁰ Proportions based on figures from Woods and Kennedy (1911)

⁴¹ Proportions based on figures from Picht (1914, 99 - 104)

revolved around the leadership of Samuel Barnett and the influence of the male Oxbridge college.

Emancipated by education but still constrained by family expectations and limited career opportunities, young college-educated women felt the 'burden' of liberal education more keenly than their male counterparts. In her 1892 lecture on "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements", Jane Addams claimed that these women were forced to "bear the brunt of being cultivated into unnourished, oversensitive lives" and to endure "a fatal want of harmony between their theory and their lives" (Addams 1910, 68). Prepared by her upbringing for a life of "useless" refinement as a 'woman of culture', the college-educated women nevertheless sought a life of social service. Yet her career options were limited not just by social conventions but by family expectations; in the young woman who was "taught to be self-forgetting and self-sacrificing" and who at the same time was held back by "the family claim", could be seen "all the elements of a tragedy". (Addams 1910, 71). In the mind of the college educated woman, the conflicting ends of liberal education and social usefulness vied for predominance.

According to Christopher Lasch, Addams' decision to found Hull House in 1889 stemmed from a subjective sense of "revulsion" against her family, class and culture, sparked by her visit to Europe in 1888 (Lasch 1965, 25 - 29; Addams 1910, 51 - 53). During this visit, Addams would later write of experiencing "a sense of futility, of misdirected energy, the belief that the pursuit of cultivation would not in the end bring either solace or relief" (Addams 1910, 44). Three years later, in "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements", Addams linked her own personal sense of futility with the situation of other educated young women: "We have in America a fast-growing number of cultivated young people who have no recognized outlet for their active faculties" (Addams 1910, 71). "This young life",

seemed to Addams “as pitiful as the other great mass of destitute lives” (Addams 1910, 72). The settlement’s promise of “social and individual salvation” (Addams 1910, 76) was thus extended not just to the urban poor but to the college educated woman. The settlement would provide the necessary ‘outlet’ for her active faculties by applying her skills to real social problems, while the settlement’s quasi-domestic context and its emphasis on ‘culture’ would satisfy the claims of her family, her class and her ‘cultivated’ background.

These three developments in the American settlement house, the largely immigrant constituency, the involvement in local reform and the self-doubt of the female settlement worker, reinforced the American settlement worker’s loss of faith in the evangelical common culture preached by Barnett and Matthew Arnold. One solution to this crisis of faith was a gradual shift away from the ideal of a single common culture towards a pragmatic multiculturalism. Instead of inviting their neighbours to submerge their differences in culture, American settlement workers attempted to create a neutral zone within which different cultures and communities could interact.

The shift in emphasis was reflected in a change in the definition of ‘culture’. Barnett had sought to create a common culture as “common ground for all classes” (Barnett 1888, 103); here culture was a unifying common good, rooted in the ‘great tradition’ of the liberal arts curriculum. The American settlement house sought to provide a space for different ‘cultures’; culture was here used in the anthropological / sociological sense, as a distinctive ‘way of life’ for different ethnic and religious communities.

Following what Kett calls her “decade-long dalliance with Arnoldian culture” (Kett 1994, 181) Addams became interested in a new educational philosophy she described as “socialized education”. Hull House’s post-1900 educational programmes were

clearly influenced by John Dewey's view that education should be adapted to the needs of the workplace and of the student, reflected in the trends towards "domestic training" and "trade teaching" and Addams' argument for "correlating the schools with actual industry" (Addams 1910, 244 - 251). A similar shift took place in Hull House's cultural programmes. Initially these activities, like those of Toynbee Hall, had revolved around music and art exhibitions; an art gallery was established in 1891 and a music school in 1893. Over the next ten years these classes were replaced by new participatory programmes such as the Hull House Labor Museum and the Hull House Players in which culture was rooted in immigrant traditions and practical tasks. The Hull House Labour Museum sought to reconnect Americanised children with the craft traditions of their immigrant parents through practical demonstrations, making the point "that culture is an understanding of the long-established occupations and thoughts of men, of the arts with which they have solaced their toil" (Addams 1910, 141). The new cultural programmes emphasised both the roots of culture in everyday life and the applications of culture to everyday problems. Thus music was seen as a means of exploring cultural differences and reviving folk traditions, while theatre was "a reconstructing and reorganising agent of accepted moral truths", testing ideas by connecting them with experience (Addams 1910, 217 - 218; 223 - 224).

Hull House's cultural programmes sought to create an idealised version of American society, a neutral zone within which diverse cultures could find expression and interact with each other. Many American settlements were explicitly committed to a policy of religious and ethnic tolerance ('amicable relations') among different immigrant groups; according to a 1911 survey, among the institutions catering for the assimilation of immigrants, "the settlement house was unique in that immigrants of all nationalities were welcome to come together" (Woods and Kennedy 1911, 10). More than half of the 34 settlements in Chicago were non-religious, compared with

just three out of 27 settlements in London⁴². The American settlement house thus aimed to create a neutral (secular, tolerant, dispassionate and apolitical) forum within which different 'cultures' (different ethnic groups, religious affiliations, 'ways of life' and artistic traditions) could freely develop and interact.

By establishing itself both as a 'neutral resource' for immigrant communities, and as a 'spearhead' for social reform, the American settlement house transcended the more limited cultural project of the British model. By 1913 there were still only 46 settlement houses in Britain, mostly (approximately 60%) concentrated in London; according to a contemporary witness the movement had failed to build on its founders' initiatives and was enduring a period of crisis (Picht 1914, 129). Estimates of the number of settlements in the United States at this time range from around 200 to around 400; moreover, while the growth of the British settlement movement appeared to be levelling out, in the United States the number of settlements more than doubled between 1905 and 1913. While large numbers of settlement houses were concentrated in the large cities of the Northeast and Midwest, especially New York and Chicago, they extended across 109 towns and cities within the continental US and 33 states (including Hawaii)⁴³. The settlement movement's political influence also appeared to be at a peak, with many of its planned reforms included in the Progressive Party platform in Roosevelt's 1912 presidential campaign.

Despite this success story, American settlement workers were not entirely comfortable in their new role. In particular the ideal of a 'neutral' cultural space was problematic; the strategy of cultural neutrality perhaps owed more to the 'subjective' needs of the alienated middle class settlement worker than to the 'objective' needs of her working class neighbours. In the next section I will review

⁴² Source Woods and Kennedy (1911), Picht (1914).

⁴³ Source: Woods & Kennedy (1911), Picht (1914), Trolander (1987).

this critique of cultural neutrality and its relationship to the settlement worker's own problematic search for 'useful culture'.

2.5 Neutrality and Sacrifice in the American Settlement House

In the previous section I traced the American settlement house's trajectory from promoting a 'universal' common culture, based on the idealist assumptions of liberal education, to the creation of a 'neutral' zone within which different community 'cultures' could interact. In this section I will outline why I believe this assumption of neutrality was problematic, both in its ideological assumptions and in its effects on the relationship between settlement residents and 'neighbours'. I will also argue against the 'sociological critique' which sees the tactic of neutrality as a subtle means of reinforcing middle class hegemony, arguing instead that the search for neutrality was driven by the settlement worker's own contradictory ideological assumptions and her 'subjective' sense of alienation from her class, culture and background.

In the 1960s the assumed cultural 'neutrality' of the American settlement house was questioned by sociologists including Herbert Gans and Saul Alinsky (Gans 1962, 1964; Trolander 1987, 140 - 153), who suggested that the tactic of neutrality had effectively reinforced middle class 'cultural hegemony'. There were three strands to this attack. Firstly Gans suggested that the nineteenth century settlement house, for all its neutrality, had retained its aura of middle class cultural privilege and appealed especially to a section of the immigrant poor who were prepared to "learn how to become middle class"; settlement workers had been blind to the alternative cultures of the slum-dwellers and had sought to change them, not to understand them (Gans 1964, 4 - 5). Secondly, according to Alinsky and other 1960s sociologists, the political 'neutrality' of the contemporary settlement house amounted to a form of

conservatism which denied the legitimacy of class consciousness and class struggle in the 1960s 'war against poverty' (Trolander 1987, 145 - 151); it had also prevented the settlement from taking effective action in the struggle for black civil rights (Trolander 1987, 94 - 108; 184 - 187; Karger 1987, 1114 - 120). Finally Gans suggested that the settlement's pursuit of a "warm and cohesive neighborhood" was itself a middle class construction; here 'cultural neutrality' meant cutting off the ethnic and family ties on which urban working class communities depended (Gans 1964, 6). One of the functions of the settlement house was to break up these loyalties, replacing "the peer group society" with a new orientation towards participation in "purposive groups", and replacing the ethnic and family loyalties of the immigrant with a neutral, disinterested form of American citizenship (Gans 1962, 148).

The sociologists who criticised the settlement house in the 1960s related the twin doctrines of cultural and political neutrality to the self-interest of the middle class. The critique grew out of the 'revisionist' attack on cultural institutions as centres of middle class cultural hegemony in the 1960s and 1970s, rather than any historical context; Gans, Alinsky and others were using the settlement movement's past to attack policies of the present. The key to their argument was that 'neutrality' had reinforced middle class political and cultural 'hegemony'. Their criticisms shared the 'hegemonic' tendency to reduce the civilising mission to a mechanical reproduction of class interests. While I share many of Gans' criticisms of the counterproductive effects of 'neutrality' on the settlement's relationships with the neighbourhood, I believe that the search for neutral space derived from the settlement worker's revulsion against middle class culture rather than her secret alliance with political and industrial elites.

Undoubtedly the American settlement worker's cult of neutrality prevented her from engaging with or understanding working class cultural and political aspirations and forms of organisation. Jane Addams, like most settlement workers, remained highly critical of the 'subcultural' activities of the young urban working class which revolved around the saloon and the dance-hall; the settlement house offered 'wholesome' alternatives where alcohol was banned and sexual contact (except in a controlled, demure environment) was discouraged (Wald 1915, 177 - 180). Critics of the settlement's 'class' bias go on to suggest that Addams and other social reformers, in failing to recognise distinctive urban 'sub-cultures' were attempting to impose "normative behaviour" on the urban ethnic poor (Huggins 1971), and that by effectively 'criminalising' certain popular activities they were "defining and regulating the dependent status of youth" (Platt 1969, 176 - 177; 99). However, we should be wary of sentimentalising autonomous working class sub-culture as a site of cultural resistance. Rather than imposing an oppressive moral and cultural code, the settlement house was challenging an exploitative sub-culture in which the 'dependent status of youth' was manipulated through prostitution and alcoholism. Far from imposing normative behaviour, the settlement house attempted to preserve and perpetuate immigrant cultures at a time when 'Americanisation' in the school and the workplace meant abandoning the old immigrant culture in order to embrace the new country's language and business practices.

Politically, the neutrality of the settlement house came under attack from two directions. Firstly, Huggins noted the settlement's failure to engage with the political 'sub-culture' of the ward machine (Huggins 1971, 178 - 179). Secondly, Saul Alinsky criticised the settlement house's "slow, consensus, establishment-oriented methods of achieving social change" which attempted to defuse the class and race antagonisms which formed the basis of working class political activism; in contrast, Alinsky advocated a 'conflict-based' approach to community empowerment

which deliberately stirred up class antagonisms as the catalyst for collective direct action (Trolander 1987, 145 - 151).

Again the settlement policy appears to have been pragmatic rather than normative, based on the apparent needs of 'neighbours' rather than the need to uphold middle class political or moral standards. The settlement house opposed the machinery of ward politics because while the political 'boss' distributed short term favours to his constituents, he was not interested in long term reform. The refusal to take sides in industrial disputes was tempered by indirect support for striking workers, as with Hull House's provision of food and money for strikers' families in 1890s Chicago, the support for unionisation and the presence of individual settlement workers on picket lines. However, Jane Addams remained appalled by the "wretched human waste" of the strikes, and pointed out the backlash against strikers in the form of blacklists and broken promises as well as the nervous exhaustion of strike leaders (Addams 1910, 128 - 129). She refused to take sides, claiming that "the labour movement" represented "a general social movement concerning all members of society and not merely a class struggle" (ibid., 125). She argued that the settlement movement could achieve more practical good, through advocacy and through national and local investigations into labour conditions than through direct action (Addams 1910, 133). This pragmatism was vindicated by some notable successes, especially in the campaign against child labour (Davis 1967, 127 - 131).

While Addams' refusal to take sides may have disappointed some of her more radical colleagues, there is no evidence that Hull House's non-confrontational approach to industrial disputes was part of a middle class conspiracy. Addams continued to maintain links with organised labour despite the defections and threats of some middle class funders (Addams 1910, 133 - 134; Davis 1967, 106 - 108). Her resolutely non-partisan approach left the settlement house "under suspicion by

both sides” (Addams 1910, 131). Typically, personal relationships were valued above political loyalties; in one instance, Julius Rosenwald, a factory owner, sent his chauffeur to drive Grace Abbott, a Hull House resident, to a meeting of garment workers, en route to picket Rosenwald’s factory (Davis 1967, 108). Addams herself, in common with other Progressive era social reformers, attempted to reduce political theories to moral distinctions and personal choices (cf. Hofstadter 1955, 243 - 254).

The sociological critique of the settlement house appears justified in arguing that the tactic of neutrality prevented settlement residents from engaging with the real political and cultural needs of working class communities. However, they appear to have been similarly detached from the interests of factory owners and middle class philanthropists. In the remainder of this section I will argue that the settlement house’s assumption of political and cultural neutrality was driven not by loyalty to middle class norms and values, but by the individual settlement worker’s sense of alienation from the political and cultural values of the middle class.

Outwardly, the settlement house was indeed a middle class institution. The early settlement houses were unabashedly ‘for, not of’ the neighbourhood. Even the architecture of the settlement houses, built in the ‘old English’ style which clashed with the surrounding neighbourhood, conspired to give the impression of an island of middle class refinement (Trolander 1987, 20). The rooms were furnished with expensive furniture, photographs of Europe and “all those adjuncts which the cultivated man [sic] regards as good and suggestive of the best life of the the past” (Addams 1910, 57). Despite a degree of embarrassment, Addams herself continued to live ‘naturally’ by employing servants (Carson 1990, 59 - 60). However, inwardly, the settlement workers’ relationship to middle class cultural and political norms was more complicated.

The settlement house allowed the college-educated woman to escape from traditional gender and class roles, while its lingering cultural attachments allowed her to remain not wholly cut off from that life of useless refinement she sought to escape. While the furnishings of the settlement house remained to remind her of the middle class family home she had left behind, the real motive of the settlement resident, according to Addams, was to escape the constraints of her familial, cultural and social position. The residual cultural trappings may have represented a guilty subtext of privilege, but the settlement resident had consciously positioned herself outside the sphere of the nineteenth century middle class.

Cultural and political neutrality must therefore be seen not as a conspiracy for middle class hegemony, but in relation to what Lasch calls “the estrangement of intellectuals, as a class, from the dominant values of American culture” (Lasch 1965, xv). This estrangement had its roots in education. In Jane Addams’ 1892 account of the ‘subjective necessity for social settlements’ (Addams 1910, 68 - 76), the college-educated woman had inherited a sceptical mistrust of the older generation’s genteel middle class faith in culture; the ‘idealist’ faith in culture was challenged by a ‘utilitarian’ desire to be socially useful and by a guilty sense of the ‘uselessness’ of art and literature when confronted with the reality of poverty. By plunging into the relentless practicality of the settlement house, the college-educated woman could escape from the gilded cage of ‘useless’ culture and the ‘family claim’. The settlement house’s ‘neutral’ community, in which religious, ethnic and cultural ties were consciously set aside, thus provided the settlement worker with a therapeutic refuge from her private sense of estrangement.

In Addams’ autobiography, the search for a surrogate to replace the religious and moral values of her youth verged on the neurotic. Brought up under the strict

influence of her father, her childhood was dominated by a religious consciousness of sin and guilt and an “excessive sense of responsibility” (Addams 1910, 4 - 6). In the “black days which followed the death of my father” she claimed to have entered “a state of nervous exhaustion with which I struggled for years” and to have been “absolutely at sea so far as any moral purpose was concerned” (ibid., 32 - 41). It is tempting to resort to a Freudian interpretation for Addams’ psychological state. According to Christopher Lasch, her father’s death triggered a personal breakdown lasting for six years which culminated in her visit to Europe and her decision to cast off the burden of ‘useless’ cultivation (Lasch 1965, 25 - 29). However, Addams also related her youthful confusion to her educational and religious background.

Exposed to the missionary idealism of a religious education at Rockford Female Seminary, Addams sought refuge in “premature pragmatism” (Addams 1910, 35 - 37). Baptised as Presbyterian, she began instead to search for a Positivist “cathedral of humanity” (ibid., 47); later in the ethnic and religious diversity of the tenements she would find what she sought, “the beginnings of a secular religion” (ibid., 23). Her early loss of faith in Christianity was repeated in her loss of faith in Arnoldian culture during her trip to Europe as a young woman. This loss of faith later extended into politics, with Addams unable to accept the political theories of the Socialists, even as she “longed for the comfort of a definite social creed” (ibid., 111). Practical tasks and faith in community provided a secular surrogate for her lost faith in religion, in the cultural idealism of Arnold, in politics. She compared herself to the clergyman who found in organised labour a quasi-religious alternative to religious faith, “an opportunity for sacrificial effort” (ibid., 114).

Addams’ upbringing was typical of the college-educated women who committed themselves to settlement work and social reform (Kalberg 1975; Rousmaniere 1970). According to Addams a liberal arts education amounted to a burden which

“only served to cloud the really vital situation spread before our eyes” (Addams 1910, 43). Accordingly the settlement house’s ‘neutrality’ allowed the college-educated woman to escape the ties of middle class culture and family life while granting her a vicarious share in the diverse traditions of her new working class ‘neighbours’. Firstly, in the settlement’s atmosphere of multicultural ‘cooperative living’ residents ceased to be burdened by an awkward sense of their own privileged middle class, ‘cultured’ status⁴⁴. Secondly the settlement house satisfied the educated woman’s “great desire to share the race life”, offering an illusion of communal warmth in place of the estrangement and isolation typically felt by a middle class woman among the poor (ibid., 69).

From the perspective of the settlement resident the ‘neutrality’ of the settlement house community was an appealing prospect, offering a refuge from her inherited ‘role conflicts’ amid the warm glow of communal living. It also offered a means of channelling confused and frustrated religious impulses and culturalist ideals into practical, non-ideological tasks, an exchange of ‘works’ for ‘dogma’ (Addams 1910, 114; Wald 1915, 277).

From the perspective of the settlement house’s clients, this neutrality raised a number of problems. First of all, as Gans notes (1962, 1964), the ‘neutral’ community or the settlement house was premised on the abolition of those attachments of race, religion, class and culture on which the various communities of the urban ethnic poor depended; they were invited to abandon these older forms of community in order to subscribe to a free-floating community of ‘neighbours’ or ‘citizens’ which may or may not have existed outside the imagination of the settlement residents. Secondly the settlement house’s assumption of political and cultural neutrality prevented it from aligning itself with any particular group. This

⁴⁴ In contrast, Addams appears to have found her relationships with Hull House’s domestic staff excruciatingly awkward (Carson 1990, 59 - 60).

inability to distinguish between different levels of need and different political interests undermined the settlement house's credibility and effectiveness and was the source of the settlement house's later 'blind spot' on civil rights in the 1930s and 1940s which prompted much criticism in the 1960s (Trolander 1987, 94). Finally, for all its 'neutrality', the settlement house favoured a kind of individualism, appealing primarily to those clients who felt themselves, like the settlement residents, alienated from the culture of their class.

Faith in religion or in culture was transferred to faith in an abstract, neutral community. This 'neutral' community, removed from any specific culture, class, religion or ideology, was a creation of the settlement worker's own imagination, designed to fulfil her own psychological needs. The settlement house's basic operational unit was the urban 'neighbourhood'; as Gans notes, from the perspective of the working class, whose community was bounded by a network of family and ethnic communities, the community defined by 'neighbourhood' did not exist (Gans 1964, 6). 'Neighbourhood-building', inspired by nostalgic images of the village parish or the democratic town-meeting in a small New England town (Woods 1892, 336; 1923, 133 - 163), became something of an obsession for the American settlement worker. Yet the modern city with its diversity and inclusiveness refused to behave like a committee of parish elders or a meeting of local landowners, operating around a consensus of shared values and aims.

The settlement version of community was shaped by the settlement worker's sense of alienation, disconnection and the absence of ideological, cultural or religious convictions. Accordingly, the primary constituency of the settlement house consisted of those who shared the settlement worker's neurotic sense of social alienation. The settlement house's 'neutral zone' was most appealing to "people who were marginal to the peer group society" (Gans 1962, 159). Like other cultural

institutions (libraries, museums, university extension), the settlement house's cultural programmes thus tended to attract an upwardly mobile sector of the lower middle class; working class users saw the settlement house primarily as a 'market-oriented' provider of social services and kept their distance accordingly (Gans 1962, 153). Those 'marginal to the peer group society' included especially the younger generation of 'Americanised' immigrants, with whom the settlement workers felt a special affinity. According to Addams, Hull House was to be a "refuge" for "people of former education and opportunity who have cherished ambitions and prospects, but who are caricatures of what they meant to be" (Addams 1910, 60). Addams is here referring to the latent potential of her working class 'neighbours'; however, she could equally have been describing her fellow settlement residents.

The settlement workers were not attempting to impose a 'middle class' cultural heritage on the poor, nor to dupe the workers into political inertia under the guise of 'non-partisan' negotiation; rather they were attempting to mould their working class 'neighbours' in their own 'non-partisan' image, as rootless, practical citizens in pursuit of a common good. In order to enter the idealised community of the settlement house, the settlement resident sacrificed the ties to her culture, her class, her community. The denial of her middle class cultural heritage represented a declaration of independence and a ritual act of self-abnegation. Self-sacrifice was the key to beloved community, sweetness and light. She expected her neighbours to follow her in this ritual self-immolation and was surprised when they refused.

Hull House's strategy of 'cultural neutrality' could not continue to exist in a social vacuum. In the period leading up to American entry into the first world war, the outside world's demands made themselves known in the closed world of the settlement house and the fiction of cultural neutrality was broken.

2.6. Culturalism and utilitarianism: the Settlement Movement 1900 - 1919

I have suggested that the settlement house's pursuit of 'useful culture' was shaped by the contradictory legacy of idealist and utilitarian educational traditions. The inherited idealist faith in a universal 'common culture' was contradicted by a pragmatic acceptance of different 'cultures' (in the anthropological / sociological sense); the culturalist ideal was tempered by a desire to be socially useful. In the settlement house these contradictions were temporarily suspended in the 'unstable equilibrium' of 'useful culture' and cultural 'neutrality'. However, in the next phase of development, the different tendencies within the cultural reform movement would regroup and repolarise in response to a series of external 'conjunctures'. In the first decade of the twentieth century, these external factors for the American settlement movement included the growing professionalisation of social and cultural workers, the threat of American involvement in the first world war and the emergence of a reformist 'Progressive' agenda in the two national political parties. In this section I will describe the collapse of the settlement house's 'unstable equilibrium' and a renewed eruption of the contradictory ideological attitudes to culture which had been simmering below the surface.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, it is possible to trace two tendencies in the American settlement movement's attitude to culture. One tendency saw culture primarily in relation to a collective way of life rooted in different ethnic traditions; 'culture' was thus seen in terms of 'Americanisation', the attempt to preserve and reconcile different 'cultures' within a composite American national identity. A second tendency saw culture in terms of individual talent, unfettered by any considerations of ethnic context or tradition. Where previously these two ways of thinking had existed side by side, in the first decade of the twentieth century there emerged a split between a neo-utilitarian cultural policy based on service delivery,

which used culture to deliver practical reforms and social services, and a new generation of settlements providing specialised artistic training, which would allow the individual talent to rise through the ranks of the poor. The emergence of separate social service and artistic training functions in the settlement movement drew upon the latent contradictions between 'utilitarian' and 'Arnoldian' habits of thought instilled in the settlement worker's education and similar ambivalences in Barnett's settlement mission. Barnett had argued that individual contact between the working man and the man of culture was the route to individual salvation; he had also argued for the 'common culture' of the neighbourhood, a collective common good translated by the American settlement as an argument for practical social reform.

Specialised 'cultural' settlements, such as the Boston Music School Settlement (1910) and New York's Third Street Music School Settlement (1904) were dedicated to the talented individual, not a collective 'common' culture; the Third Street Music School promised "to lead no one astray into the profession of music who is not gifted with sufficient talent and industry to accomplish the long-continued necessary work which such a choice of profession imposes" (Woods and Kennedy 1911, 218 - 219). Other settlement houses established specialist cultural programmes such as the Neighborhood Playhouse, established by Henry Street Settlement in New York in 1914; such initiatives became part of the 'little theatre' movement of amateur and community theatres in the first part of the twentieth century, following a cultural agenda separate from the settlement's social programmes. Meanwhile the main body of the American settlement movement was increasingly concerned with practical tasks, especially the 'Americanisation' of immigrants, acting as an unofficial agency for government policy. Entering Hull House's third decade (1909 - 1919), the demands of professionalisation, of wartime mobilisation and of government policy combined to reinforce the cruder utilitarian elements within the settlement movement

and to marginalise the culturalist ideals of the older generation of settlement workers, including Addams herself.

Initially the settlement movement had prided itself on its its amateur ethos; friendship, cultural activities and human contact provided were valued above professionally administered material relief. Jane Addams praised Toynbee Hall as being “free from ‘professional doing good’” (Carson 1990, 48). Yet the American settlement house had always been more concerned with ‘professional doing good’ than its British counterpart; the harsh winter and the economic slump of 1893/4 had reinforced the importance of material relief over cultural missionary work. As Allan F Davis noted of Hull House, “it was difficult to sponsor lectures and art exhibits or to promote reform while people were starving” (Davis 1967, 20). The new professionalism was encouraged by the growing dependence on official sources of funding (as opposed to philanthropic individuals) which stressed accountability and measurable results, and by the emergence of professional training and professional associations. The National Conference of Settlements (later the National Federation of Settlements) was founded in 1908; a ‘school of applied philanthropy’ began as a summer school in 1898 in New York, later the New York School of Philanthropy, leading to a full-time course, established in 1904. Finally professionalisation was a continuation of the settlement resident’s rejection of her traditional role as a ‘woman of culture’; instead of the well-meaning amateurism and cultural uplift of the middle class philanthropist, she sought accreditation in official professional status, underwritten by professional qualifications and sound, ‘scientific’ principles.

The new generation of settlement workers were graduates of a specialised vocational training which emphasised specific marketable skills, unlike the generalist college education of their predecessors; in Carson’s phrase, the “gift of culture” had been replaced by the “gift of expertise” (Carson 1990, 136 - 138). While ‘welfare

professionalism' did not become the norm in the US until the 1930s, the younger generation of settlement workers were increasingly sceptical of the 'cultural' response to poverty, pointing instead to the 'environmental' realities of economic power and social circumstances. One effect of the new professionalism was to make settlement houses more 'problem oriented', moving away from their traditional generalist, 'whole community' approach. The increased competition for funding also led to greater professionalism in the operation and presentation of programmes. In the 1920s the national executive of the settlement movement was forced to choose between the expansive spiritual mission of the past and a new emphasis on local service delivery; by the 1930s most of the old guard had passed on and professionalisation was more or less complete, laying the foundations for the "comprehensive services" provided by the settlement house today

Professionalisation had a similar impact on the other cultural institutions referred to in this chapter. DiMaggio has described the rise of the professional cultural worker in the nineteenth century American museum, partly in response to the need for improved financial and organisational management (DiMaggio 1986a). The effects of professionalisation on the new generation of librarians and the shift towards 'service provision' was noted earlier (section 2.2). In Britain the professionalisation of the civil service provided a new emphasis on professional qualifications and legislative reform, characterised by Beatrice Webb's call for "grown men" not "clever school boys" to tackle social problems (Meacham 1987, 96). The effect was to marginalise the amateur, 'culturalist' approach to reform championed by Samuel Barnett at Toynbee Hall. Beveridge's own career reflects this transition from amateur cultural worker to a professional bureaucratic elite; the eventual creation of the welfare state simply confirmed the extent to which the 'problem of poverty' had been nationalised as a government concern.

The beginning of war in Europe in 1914 was described by Addams as a personal defeat (Addams 1930, 119). As the United States began to prepare for the possibility of war, the settlement house's socio-cultural missionary work was increasingly turned to wartime ends. The area of work most affected by the threat of war was the settlement house's 'Americanisation' of immigrants. Here again, the effect of growing external pressure was to drive the settlement into a purely instrumental function, replacing its earlier idealist attempt to create a common culture with a narrower objective, the 'regimentation'⁴⁵ of a diverse civilian population under the banner of national unity. The 'multicultural' policy of Americanisation through mutual respect and interaction between cultures, as it had developed at Hull House, was in many settlement houses replaced by a more aggressive approach, which effectively translated 'Americanisation' to mean the repression of immigrant cultures and the promotion of American nationalism. Immigrant communities found themselves under suspicion as "nests of dissipation, of contagious disease, of crime, of disloyalty, of espionage, of actual resistance to the Government" (Woods 1923, 213 - 217)

Wartime Americanisation of immigrants exposed the dark side of the settlement house's unconditional faith in 'community'. In 1921 Robert Woods, the director of Boston's South End House noted the emergence of "a wholly cosmopolitan composite with little or no regard to what America has been or now is", suggesting that this multicultural mosaic was "in root and branch un-American" (Woods 1923, 269). The reference indicated how far Addams' cosmopolitan internationalism had fallen from favour. Addams would later be attacked for her pacificism and her membership of the board of the American Civil Liberties Union and described her feeling of being "officially outlawed" (Addams 1930, 135 - 138). Meanwhile Woods, whose rise in the settlement movement paralleled Addams' fall, wrote of

⁴⁵ "The Regimentation of the Free" was the title of Robert Woods' 1918 chapter on wartime immigration policy quoted in the next paragraph (Woods 1923, 207 - 219).

“the elimination of the feeble-minded strain from our National stock” (Woods 1923, 217) and argued for “the more effectual segregation of the unfit” (ibid., 128); the “best results” in the search for “common ground” between human beings would come from “instilling into the minds of the newcomers and their children American political ideas and American national loyalties” (Woods 1923, 58). The common culture of ‘Americanisation’ had become a form of American nationalism with no room for the ‘unfit’ and ‘feeble-minded’; the anti-immigrant backlash continued after the war with the quotas imposed under the Immigration Act and the deportation drives of 1919 and 1920.

The settlement worker’s contribution to the Americanisation process was from the outset a contradictory one, caught between a desire to steer the immigrant towards a vaguely conceived ‘universal’ common culture, a desire to help the immigrant succeed in American society by assimilating American language, customs and values, and a desire to preserve and perpetuate the integrity of immigrant cultures. The contradictory nature of ‘Americanisation’ is summarised by Mina Carson as “an ultimately untenable equilibrium between cultural autonomy and social assimilation” (Carson 1990, 109).

Along with the professionalisation of social work and the exigencies of war, a third and related factor in the transformation of the settlement movement was the emergence of social reform as a concern for local and national government. The emergence of the Progressive party in 1912 represented for Jane Addams, as for other social reformers, a high point in their hopes for a radical transformation of American society (Addams 1930, 32 - 41). Even after electoral defeat, the Progressive platform of social platform influenced the agenda of both the Republicans under Taft and the Democrats under Wilson. However, the result of the incorporation of Progressive principles into national politics was not the radical

transformation of society envisaged by the social reformers (Kolko 1963; Weinstein 1968; Margulies 1963). At the national level reform was undertaken in a piecemeal, fragmentary fashion, epitomised by the anti-trust legislation begun by Roosevelt and continued by Wilson (Kolko 1963, 113 - 122; 206 - 208). At the local level, the settlement movement's wider-ranging commitment to social reform became attached to a narrower agenda of civic improvement. Addams would later complain that far-reaching social reform was inhibited by a post-Bolshevik fear of radicalism and the limited ambitions of local government (Addams 1930, 153 - 154); political reform was replaced by service provision, for example the establishment of municipal dental clinics (*ibid.*, 156).

Again the anti-reformist 'backlash' which set in after the war and the superficial reforms achieved by the Progressive movement merely exposed the political limitations of the settlement movement's 'neutral' stance. While Addams complained in 1930 that Progressive reforms lacked any grounding in "social theory", she herself had twenty years expressed her preference for piecemeal practical reform over the "abstract notions" and political "enthusiasms" of the political theorist (Addams 1910, 105 - 116). The settlement workers had, as noted in the previous section, consistently avoided political analysis and confrontation; the suspicion of political theory and the attempt to reduce political interests to moral distinctions, the tendency to solve political conflicts by appealing to personal character and the refusal to 'take sides' in political conflicts based on a higher rationality (Roosevelt's 'Rule of Reason') all combined to inhibit a comprehensive approach to reform. When the Progressive movement applied the same logic to national politics the results were inevitably ineffective (Mowry 1949, 248 - 249).

The American settlement movement period of retrenchment beginning around 1912 and continuing into the 1920s were thus not simply the result of professionalisation,

the threat of war or the Progressive ascendancy. These external factors merely precipitated an internal tendency towards political conservatism and cultural utilitarianism which had been a part of the settlement movement from the outset. Traces of the settlement house's inheritance of 'utilitarian', anti-culturalist habits of thought resurfaced as service delivery replaced social reform and the complex give and take of 'Americanisation' gave way to a crude regimentation of immigrants according to 'patriotic' American principles. Meanwhile faith in the saving power of culture was transferred to an attempt to rescue a few talented individuals by providing them with specialised training, granting them privileged access to the brave new world of the cultural elite. These developments were born out of the 'unstable equilibrium' of the settlement house's cultural and social objectives. The resulting policy shift established the settlement house's identity in the twentieth century as a social service agency, with a few residual cultural trappings tacked onto a primary concern with 'comprehensive social services'.

2.7. Contradiction and crisis: the cyclical pattern

In this chapter I have argued that the civilising mission grew out of an internal contradiction in the nineteenth century middle class attitude to culture. This contradiction was shaped by two competing traditions of nineteenth century education. The new generation of graduates who went to work in the settlement houses and libraries in the last quarter of the century inherited from their liberal arts education an idealist faith in a 'common culture' as the key to social harmony and individual character. At the same time they inherited a utilitarian scepticism concerning the 'uselessness' of culture and sought to channel culturalist ideals into practical, socially useful vocations. The product of this internal contradiction was the search for 'useful culture' in the nineteenth century settlement house.

The libraries, museums and settlement houses of the late nineteenth century were shaped by a similar set of internal contradictions, between the desire to use culture to 'improve' individual character and the desire to produce a more productive and respectful workforce, between the pursuit of collective reform and individual redemption, between an idealist 'common culture' and a materialist pattern of plural cultures determined by different ethnic and socioeconomic groups. These competing internal objectives and beliefs were reflected in a fragile consensus between competing factions of the middle class mobilised in support of the new institutions, each attempting to mould institutional policy to suit their own agenda. This pattern of internal contradiction and faction, contrary to the 'heroic' and 'hegemonic' accounts of singular heroic vision and unified class interest, made the new institutions inherently unstable and subverted attempts to pursue a coherent, unified 'civilising mission'.

The American settlement house attempted to resolve these internal contradictions by creating a neutral zone in which the inherited cultural assumptions of the Victorian middle class settlement worker and the ethnic cultural traditions of her working class neighbours were magically suspended. The attempt to dissolve political and cultural attachments was partly a pragmatic attempt to serve the best interests of the ethnic urban poor by 'Americanising' them, but perhaps more importantly reflected the 'subjective' needs of the alienated settlement resident, casting off the burden of her cultural inheritance. Consequently the settlement house appealed primarily to those who, like the settlement worker herself, felt themselves alienated from their class, family and culture, especially to the children of immigrant families. The 'neutrality' of the settlement house attracted an alienated minority, who like the settlement workers themselves, sought refuge in the warm glow of a community without commitments or attachments.

On the other hand, despite its claimed neutrality, the settlement house still retained its aura of middle class respectability and cultural distinction. In common with other 'democratising' cultural institutions of the nineteenth century, the settlement house tended to attract an upwardly mobile lower middle class constituency, instead of the archetypal working class autodidact for whom they were intended; in 1905, there were considerably more "artisans and teachers" than local 'neighbours' registered in Toynbee Hall's various clubs and societies, reflecting what Meacham calls "the self-directed spirit of lower-middle-class endeavour" (Meacham 1987, 122 - 123). For this upwardly mobile constituency the settlement house's residual trappings of middle class culture were part of the attraction. The tendency to attract a combination of white collar clerical workers and teachers, along with a sprinkling of working class 'aliens', was exacerbated by the settlement's conscious appeal to the 'upper tenth', the so-called "worthy poor" among its neighbours (Barnett 1888, 48 - 49). Robert Woods saw the settlement as an experiment in social engineering, a means of "shielding the better grades of labor from the disastrous competition" of the underclass, while writing off the "residuum" of the extremely poor who were "characterised by some chronic form of dependence or degeneracy" (Woods 1902, 370 - 372). The idea of rescuing the fortunate individual through culture betrayed the settlement's origins in traditional university extension and the 'liberal education' tradition, with its emphasis on the moral effect of culture upon character and individual perfectibility.

The latent contradictions in settlement policy, between faith in the saving power of culture and the practical task of 'getting things done for the neighbourhood', were never fully dissolved. In the next phase of the settlement house's development, spurred by a series of external pressures, these latent contradictions erupted and the movement split between a neo-utilitarian function as an instrument of official immigration policy and a culturalist emphasis on individual artistic training. These

new policy developments were a grim parody of the old articles of faith; the search for a 'common culture' became loyalty to the American nation and the moral uplift of individual friendship became the career opportunity of a specialised artistic training. Equally they reflected back upon the settlement's contradictory origins in nineteenth century education, on the one hand the 1830s utilitarian propagation of 'useful knowledge' as a vehicle for social engineering, on the other the eighteenth century tradition of cultural education for a political elite.

Other educational and cultural institutions went through a similar period of crisis around the turn of the century. In the public library the educational mission gave way to a laissez-faire policy of 'self-help' which catered to the new market for culture; the internal debate over the 'great fiction question' polarised the different internal factions within the library, the moral improvers, the practical educators, the cultural idealists. In 1909 the British workers' education movement split between the 'collaborationist' Workers Educational Association, who sought to retain the old links with Oxford University, and the secessionist Central Labour College who demanded a separate 'workers' curriculum, including a course on Marxist economics; behind the dispute was the clash between R H Tawney's continued faith in a common culture, and the anti-culturalist opposition, including Ramsay MacDonald, who warned that the link with Oxford would simply "facilitate the passage of co-opted proletarians up the ladder and into the bourgeoisie" (Simon 1990; Meacham 1987, 186).

Behind these crises was a recurrence of the 'incurable structural contradiction' from which the movement for cultural democratisation had started, the merging of idealist and utilitarian assumptions. Under pressure from professional workers and responding to the new market for culture, this fragile coalition began to break down. One set of institutions (the majority of settlement houses) reverted to the old

philosophy of social utility, replacing artistic activities with an instrumental commitment to service provision, fulfilling officially sanctioned 'useful' functions such as the Americanisation of immigrants or the diffusion of marketable skills. Another set of institutions (the WEA, the library, the chautauqua, specialised 'artistic' settlements) reverted to a philosophy of 'the best for the most', replacing the ideal of a common culture with a repackaged version of upper middle class art, literature and music which was sold to a susceptible lower middle class constituency with the implicit promise of raising their social status to a vaguely conceived aristocratic ideal.

This repolarisation, between an instrumental cultural policy based on service delivery and a cultural marketing policy based on a hard sell of middle class culture, would recur both with the American federal arts projects in the 1930s and with the British community arts movement of the 1970s and 1980s. While pressure came from the outside (wartime mobilisation, the new market for culture), the dynamic of cultural democratisation was internal rather than external, a slow working out of inherent contradictions within the nineteenth century middle class. These contradictory forces remained in place even when the democratisation of culture had apparently broken down in the early twentieth century. This pattern would recur in later 'moments' revealing new facets and factors behind the 'unstable equilibrium' of cultural democratisation, a cycle of contradiction, equilibrium and recurrent crisis.

3. THE FEDERAL ARTS PROJECTS: REPOSITIONING THE ARTIST

3.1 The Historical Pattern: Towards a Materialist Cultural Policy?

In the previous chapter I explored the contradictions behind the nineteenth century attempt to 'democratise' culture. This attempt was informed by an idealist theory of culture as a transcendent, transforming 'general perfection'; at the same time this cultural idealism was shot through with contradictory traces of utilitarianism and pragmatism.

In the U.S. federal arts projects of the 1930s this pattern was inverted; a search for a 'useable' culture, grounded in a materialist theory of culture as the product of material forces in social and economic life, was contradicted by traces of cultural idealism. As both artists and government officials sought to 'reposition' art and the artist in relation to a 'sound general movement', they were consciously reacting against 'romantic' and 'idealist' theories of culture as a transcendent, transforming ideal. At the same time, like the idealism of the nineteenth century settlement house, the materialism of the federal arts projects was compromised by internal contradictions.

The redefinition of culture in materialist terms, the search for a 'useful' role for artists and the attempt to link cultural policy to the broader New Deal objectives of social and economic reconstruction, were eloquently described at the theoretical level but seldom achieved in practice. In theoretical terms the federal arts projects sought to reposition themselves in relation to the perceived failures of modernism and romanticism. The idealist perception of art as a transcendent common good was replaced by the search for a 'useable' culture, rooted in traditions of folk art and

engaged with practical tasks and problems, including the economic difficulties facing the nation; specifically the directors of the arts projects sought to replace an 'artist-led' policy with a 'community-led' cultural policy. In order to address the actual economic crisis of the American artist and the perceived aesthetic crisis of American art, the arts projects sought to broaden the base of artistic production and consumption. The 'repositioning' of art and artists took place at two levels. First, the projects sought to redefine the relationship between artists and communities; instead of pursuing the romantic myth of the artist outside society, artists were encouraged to relate their work to community concerns, to participate in educational and community programmes, to seek individual inspiration in collective experience. Secondly, the projects sought to reform the structural distribution of cultural production and consumption; the primary aim was to make culture more socially inclusive or 'democratic', but this general aim was often confused with more particular attempts at geographical and political decentralisation (cf. Kawashima 1997).

The 'repositioning' of cultural production and consumption was fraught with difficulties. Some of the complicating factors were historical and circumstantial. Local and national government officials, politicians, artists and local communities saw the federal arts projects in terms of their own self-interests. Artists were keen to exploit their new role of artist-as-worker, while reluctant to abandon the modernist-romantic role of artist-as-prophet. Within the bureaucracy there were tensions between regional and federal centres of authority which dated back to the Civil War and beyond that to conflicts between federal and state rights in the Constitution. At the political level, the official status of the arts projects was contested by those who saw the arts projects as a permanent cultural project aiming to create a new 'democratic' indigenous culture (the federal arts project directorate,

most artists) and those who saw them as a temporary and expedient solution to the problem of white collar unemployment (Congress, local WPA administrators).

It is my contention that, important as these obstacles were, the problems of the federal arts projects began at the level of policy with an 'incurable structural contradiction' between the 'new' materialist cultural policy of rooting cultural production in everyday life and residual traces of cultural idealism. Historically, the federal arts projects followed the Gramscian pattern of recurring 'eruptions' of contradictions which are reconciled in an 'unstable equilibrium', only to reemerge in new forms of 'crisis'. For all its self-conscious newness, New Deal cultural policy grew out of the nineteenth century traditions it sought to escape; the contradictions of cultural democracy in the 1930s can thus be seen as the flipside to the contradictions of cultural democratisation in the 1890s.

The attempt to redefine the artist's relationship with community was flawed by a 'romantic' view of the artist as a kind of community shaman; while artists claimed to subjugate individual ego to community need, they nevertheless sought a privileged role as community spokespersons. Ironically this was especially true of those 'committed', so-called 'communist' artists who claimed to be using their art as a 'weapon' in the revolutionary struggle⁴⁶. The artist's role was further complicated by economic need. In order to qualify for work on the projects, artists had to demonstrate their 'professional' credentials; the idea that art was a collective,

⁴⁶ I am referring here firstly to the conception of community as "a mystical union of the self with the whole" (Blake 1990, 254 - 255; cf. Pells 1973, 165), secondly to the idea of political commitment as a form of "secular religion" (Aaron 1961, 32). Radical intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s here echoed the settlement worker's quasi-religious faith in community (Addams 1910, 24), her "great desire to share the race life" (Addams 1910, 69; cf. O'Connor 1973, 25) and her tendency to translate objective political commitments into subjective moral judgements (Mowry 1949; Hofstadter 1952, 258 - 261; Pells 1973; Blake 1990). As with the 'subjective revolution' of Breton and the surrealists (Nadeau 1965, 205 - 207), politics acquired a quasi-religious mystique and bestowed a heroic, romantic aura (Aaron 1961, 39). More pragmatically, the collective programmes of Federal One and of the American Communist Party boosted the individual self-esteem of the 'committed' artist (Monroe 1975, 64; Pells 1973, 169; McKinzie 1973, 176).

community experience was resisted by artists' unions as a threat to their professional integrity and professional relief requirements reinforced the artist's unique social status⁴⁷. Finally the idea of 'the community' as a basis for artistic production was based on a nostalgic, sentimentalised view of 'lost' primitive societies and idealised community consensus; in practice, local elites and bureaucratic power struggles would obstruct any genuine 'dialogue' between artist and community⁴⁸.

The attempt to 'decentralise' from the traditional centres of artistic production and consumption was similarly flawed. Initially the projects pursued a policy of geographical deconcentration, what Kawashima calls 'cultural decentralisation without political decentralisation' (Kawashima 1997); because they did not trust local state administrators, the federal directors of the arts projects retained artistic control and set up an administrative hierarchy independent of the New Deal administrative machinery. Behind this retention of power was an argument about the need for 'flexibility' and 'standards'; retaining federal control over local projects betrayed an attempt to retain traditional 'idealist' conceptions of culture, rooted not in the relativism of local experience and local communities, but in the absolute values of 'great art', administered by a committee of federal experts. Again the relief requirements reinforced this culturalist bias; the concentration of artists in the metropolitan centres of cultural production subverted attempts at geographical decentralisation, just as the 'professional' relief requirements subverted attempts to redefine the artist's role. In the second phase of the federal arts projects, following the abolition of the Federal Theatre Project and the transfer of the remaining projects to state control⁴⁹ in 1939, the projects pursued a policy of 'cultural decentralisation with political decentralisation' (Kawashima 1997). Here the problem was that local political administrators and local elites did not necessarily

⁴⁷ For union resistance to the Federal Theatre Project, see Matthews 1967, 244. For the question of 'professional' classification, see McDonald 1969, 87 - 98.

⁴⁸ See sections 3.3 and 3.7 respectively.

⁴⁹ By state control, I mean control by the separate states of the U.S.

share the federal arts projects' 'democratising' mission; decentralisation was taken at face value, as an end in itself, not as a means of broadening the base of American culture by reaching new audiences and reinvolving communities in the artistic process. Instead control of cultural policy was merely relayed from a federal bureaucracy, whose primary concern was in making culture 'democratic', to a local state bureaucracy, whose primary concern was the instrumental provision of 'useful' services.

The relative failures of the federal arts projects to achieve the goals of their directors can be seen as the inevitable consequence of an internal structure riddled by contradictory goals and competing factions. Congress, the President, the federal directors of the arts projects, the federal administrator of the WPA and the local state WPA administrators all had different expectations of the projects. Above all the projects were broken by a 'fundamental dichotomy' between cultural ambitions and relief requirements. This 'structural' critique of the arts projects has been well documented by McDonald (1969), Matthews (1967) and McKinzie (1973). The projects were also complicated by latent contradictions based not in conscious policy goals, but in inherited habits of thought. For example, so-called 'communist' artists and fellow-travellers, despite the rhetoric of 'art as a weapon' and 'art in the service of the revolution', still clung to a 'romantic' view of the artist as a (revolutionary) hero; Roosevelt, while nominally committed to the Congress's view of the arts projects as a localised solution to the problem of unemployment, harboured ambitions for the arts projects as a national monument to the achievements of the New Deal⁵⁰. It is this internal contradiction between overt policy goals and inherited

⁵⁰ As with the British community arts movement of the 1980s, the 'romantic' tendencies of some 'committed' artists would later meet with bitter recriminations in the late 1930s and early 1940s, directed against the 'hollow men' and 'fellow travellers' who had sought "the romance of the revolution without any of its responsibilities" (Aaron 1961, 380 - 382). Roosevelt's 'real' motives in supporting the arts projects are admittedly rather more difficult to read, given his political adaptability and "mastery of vague but inspirational generalities" (Lawson 1988, 156). However, several commentators have noted the ambivalences in Roosevelt's dealings with Federal One (McKinzie 1973; Matthews 1975; McDonald 1969). This ambiguity is reflected in the different roles he played

‘habits of thought’ that I want to explore in this chapter. Specifically I want to analyse the projects’ attempt to move away from the idealist-romantic tradition of culture as the discovery of unchanging truths by great individual artists towards a materialist conception of culture as the product of material social and economic circumstances and practices. This shift was obstructed by the ‘idealist’ habits of thought inherited by institutions and individuals. The confident directives of the arts project directors and the declarations of commitment by individual artists ran up against an inescapable idealist heritage. The arts projects of the 1930s were both a radical break from and a continuation of the cultural idealism of the nineteenth century.

This inheritance can be illustrated by the many connections between the ‘materialist’ arts projects and the ‘idealist’ settlement house. Politically, the arts projects, like the New Deal as a whole, grew out of the pre-1917 Progressive movement, which in turn had absorbed the social and cultural reform movements led by Jane Addams and the settlement movement. Despite its occasional ‘socialist’ rhetoric, the New Deal owed more to the middle class tradition of charitable ‘good works’ and the professional social worker’s experiments in ‘progressive’ social engineering than it did to Marx. Exemplifying this twin inheritance were college-educated women like Eleanor Roosevelt, an influential ally of the arts projects in the White House and a former settlement resident, and professional former social workers like Harry Hopkins, the WPA director, also an ex-settlement resident. Intellectually, John Dewey, whose theories of education had influenced (and been influenced by) Jane Addams’ work at Hull House, was to have a similar influence on New Deal philosophy in general and on Holger Cahill in particular; Dewey’s theoretical

in relation to the arts projects: first the patrician patron of the arts approached by Biddle in 1933, then the compassionate defender of the white collar unemployed in the 1935 address to Congress, then the strict financial controller alternating with indulgent political patron in his letters to Hopkins in 1937 and, finally, the political survivor who successfully detached himself from the projects’ excesses in 1939.

balancing act between Marxist collectivism and liberal individualism (Dewey 1930, 1935), was no less influential on New Deal political philosophy than his aesthetic theory of 'art as experience' (Dewey 1934). Institutionally settlement houses were the setting for many of the pre-1935 federal experiments in art and community; the Federal Art Project's community art centre programme was an extension of this same tradition. Meanwhile Hallie Flanagan's Federal Theatre Project was influenced by the college-based little theatre movement, which in turn was associated both with the pre-1917 settlement house theatre (eg. the Hull House Players and the Neighborhood Playhouse at Henry Street Settlement) and with post-war university extension (eg. Alfred Arvold's Little Country Theatre in Dakota, Koch's Carolina Playmakers and George Pierce Baker's English 47 group at Harvard).

In this chapter I am not so much concerned with the external 'structural' clash between the arts projects and the economic and social policy goals of Congress as with the internal cultural policy of the federal arts projects. In particular I will focus on the policies of the Federal Art Project and the Federal Theatre Project, as expressed by their respective directors, Holger Cahill and Hallie Flanagan, and the inherited 'habits of thought' they confronted. I will begin by introducing the 'structural' context of the arts projects (3.2). In the next two sections I will review some of the inherited contradictions of the arts projects, in particular the attitudes to 'community' (3.3) and to the role of the artist (3.4). In section 3.5 I will discuss how the directors of the federal arts projects succeeded in incorporating these contradictions within a coherent theoretical ideology, and in the remaining sections (3.6 - 3.8) will review the attempt to translate this theoretical 'equilibrium' into achievable policy objectives.

3.2 New Deal Cultural Policy in context 1935 - 1939

The cultural policy of the federal arts projects in 1935 grew out of the Keynesian economic theory of the New Deal. The short term aim was the provision of work for the unemployed. The long term aim was to regenerate the economy by broadening the base of production and consumption. However, under a separate federal directorate, the arts projects grafted onto the materialist logic of New Deal economics an idealist faith in the transforming agency of art, diverging from the more limited mandate which had been approved by Congress. Eventually Congress would reassert its authority, abolishing the Federal Theatre Project in 1939 and transferring the remainder to state control before closing them down in 1943; this phase of development is considered in section 3.7. Between 1935 and 1939, the cultural policy of the federal arts projects was essentially a balancing act between cultural idealism and materialist economics. This ambivalence was made possible by the privileged status of the arts projects, reflected in their federal structure and relatively high unit costs, and grew out of the complexities of 'white collar' relief as conceived by Roosevelt. The federal arts projects of 1935 also inherited from their pre-1935 antecedents an amalgam of culturalist and utilitarian assumptions. In this section I will review these structural anomalies and inherited historical contradictions before examining the cultural policies of the Federal Art Project and Federal Theatre Project in more detail.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA)⁵¹ was established by Roosevelt in May 1935 as the coordinating agency for a new public works programme which would provide jobs for the unemployed. Of the \$4 billion initially appropriated for the

⁵¹ Following the 1939 reorganisation of the programme, the WPA became the Work Projects Administration.

WPA, approximately \$27 million was allocated to four⁵² federal arts projects, to cover an initial period of 6 months. These were the Federal Art Project, the Federal Music Project, the Federal Theatre Project and the Federal Writers Project, known collectively as 'Federal Project Number One' or 'Federal One'. During its lifetime Federal One accounted for between 1 and 2% of the total WPA programme budget.

The WPA was conceived as an economic programme; WPA projects were seen in instrumental terms, as temporary expedient solutions to the problem of unemployment. Funding of the WPA was determined by successive appropriations requested by the President and approved by Congress; as McDonald points out, the WPA did not enjoy the "presumption of permanency" accorded other governmental agencies which had been established by a "substantive law" (McDonald 1969, 203). Most WPA projects were initiated locally by a 'sponsor', often an agency of local or state government, which shared the cost of the project with the federal government. Typically projects involved large-scale public works in construction or road-building.

Yet Roosevelt also recognised that unemployment was not just a material problem; in his January 1935 message to Congress, he stressed the spiritual dimension of unemployment and the need to restore the "self-respect" of labour as well as physical nourishment⁵³. This theme would be echoed on the federal arts projects, with Hallie Flanagan recognising "another form of hunger" in the cultural starvation of small town America, beyond the "physical hunger" of unemployed actors

⁵² The Historical Records Survey was initially a subsection of the Federal Writers Project; from November 1935 it was constituted as a separate fifth project but continued to be included in 'Federal One' for administrative and financial purposes.

⁵³ "The lessons of history, confirmed by the evidence immediately before me, show conclusively that continued dependence upon relief induces a spritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fibre. To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic , a subtle destroyer of the human spirit. [...] We must preserve not only the bodies of the unemployed from destitution, but also their self-respect, their self-reliance and courage and determination." (Annual Message to the Congress, 4th January 1935 in Franklin D Roosevelt (1938), *Papers of Franklin D Roosevelt* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), Vol. 4, pp. 19 - 20.

(Flanagan 1940, 19). At the individual level, Roosevelt attempted to restore self-respect by ensuring work programmes were commensurate with the skills of the unemployed, not just a form of penance for those on 'relief'; he also sought to boost collective morale by fostering national pride. The federal arts projects were related to both these aims. When the federal government took direct responsibility for funding work relief with the passing of the Federal Emergency Relief Act in 1933, a diversification of work relief projects and a corresponding diversification of wages followed. In particular, Washington began to press for more 'white collar' employment projects, including arts projects. By March 1935, just before the creation of the WPA, around 11% of workers on work relief programmes and around 25% of projects were classified as 'white collar' (McDonald 1969, 85); arts projects at this stage accounted for a mere 0.7% of the total employment on the work relief programme (ibid, 86). Harry Hopkins had pioneered the use of white collar employment projects in New York state between 1932 and 1933 (during Roosevelt's tenure as state governor), including the use of artists as teachers and mural painters in settlement houses. In April 1935 Roosevelt appointed Hopkins as administrator of the WPA. In their treatment of white collar unemployment, Roosevelt and Hopkins shared the settlement worker's 'culturalist' belief that unemployment represented a personal crisis not just an economic one.

The use of wage differentials and the provision of specialised 'white collar' employment were distinguishing features of Federal One. It cost the WPA around 70% more to hire an artist than to hire a construction worker in 1937 (McKinzie 1973, 87); the average man-month cost of \$99.80 for Federal One compared with the overall WPA average of \$59 (McDonald 1969, 232). Unlike other WPA workers, Federal One workers were paid according to a "prevailing hourly rate", allowing them to qualify for higher wages by virtue of their 'professional' classification and their concentration in cities where wages were higher (McDonald

1969, 177)⁵⁴. Federal One also employed a higher proportion of ‘non-relief’ personnel in supervisory positions. Critics of white collar relief saw the arts projects in particular as a refuge for ‘boondogglers’ (the 1930s equivalent of ‘scroungers’ or ‘welfare cheats’)⁵⁵.

The unorthodox status of the federal arts projects was symbolised by their federal structure. Whereas the WPA aty had effectively reinforced middle class ‘cultural hegemony’. There were three strands to this attack. Firstly Gans suggested that the nineteenth century settlement house, for all its neutrality, had retained its aura of middle class cultural privilege and appealed especially to a section of the immigrant poor who were prepared to “learn how to become middle class”; settlement workers had been blind to the alternative cultures of the slum-dwellers and had sought to change them, not to understand them (shington over the issue of white-collar relief, introduced by the federal government against the wishes of local administrators between 1933 and 1935 (McDonald 1969, 71 - 82). The federal arts projects were also identified with the Roosevelt administration’s drift towards centralised control and the imposition of federal authority over the states; political tensions between the federal executive and the autonomy of the states dated back to the days of British rule and to the Civil War of the 1860s. These lingering tensions and the pre-1935 administrative hostilities were exacerbated in the first year of operation as large numbers of Federal One workers were appointed by federal or regional arts programme directors and added to the payroll of the state WPA, over the heads of local administrators (McDonald 1969, 146 - 157). Unlike regular WPA projects,

⁵⁴ In April 1938, 67.3% of all Federal One employees were classified as ‘professional and technical’, the highest skill and wage classification available under WPA rules (McDonald 1969, 232). Taking the Federal Art Project as an example, around 70% of FAP workers were based in major cities over the first two years of the programme, with over half in New York City (McDonald 1969, 389); the proportions were similar on the other federal arts projects.

⁵⁵ In a 1939 editorial on “WPA and the Arts” the Washington Post attacked “white-collar projects” as being “ideally suited to serve the purposes of those who are unwilling to perform a day’s work for a day’s pay” (Washington Post 3/5/39). A ‘boondoggle’ was originally a kind of woven belt which, according to critics, typified the useless objects produced by those working on the projects.

arts projects required no local 'sponsor' (typically the state or municipal government, contributing to a project's non-labour costs), on the grounds that their 'sponsor' was the federal government; there was thus no obligation to involve local interests in authorising projects. Federal One directors (national and regional) continued to insist on their right to authorise projects, leaving the state WPA office to pick up the administrative pieces, including classifying workers, requisitioning materials and administering wages (inevitably a source of conflict). The centralisation of Federal One and the latent hostility of the state WPA staff (and local political representatives) would later become a major political liability.

The federal structure symbolised the ambivalence in Federal One between the relief mission, mandated by Congress, and the cultural programme envisaged by the national directors and, perhaps, by Roosevelt himself. The localised structure of the WPA reflected its status as a temporary response to local unemployment conditions. The federal structure of Federal One was justified by Hopkins as a means of upholding "professional integrity" and "technical standards" across the country (McDonald 1969, 224 - 226). Clearly the creation of a new national culture was not to be held accountable to local conditions and administrative rules. In McDonald's description of the exchanges between Roosevelt, Hopkins and the Bureau of the Budget over the funding of Federal One, there emerged a struggle between two opposing concepts of the arts projects (McDonald 1969, 210 - 239). On the one hand Roosevelt initially refused to authorise 'blanket' expenditure on the arts projects, demanding "an application for each type of work in each community only where such projects are justified by existing unemployment conditions" (McDonald 1969, 223 - 224); on the other hand his threats were never carried through and the arts projects continued to seek precisely that "presumption of permanency" that Congress had implicitly denied⁵⁶. Roosevelt's direct control over Federal One's

⁵⁶ These vacillations were partly a reflection of the faltering economy. The initial exchange of letters between Hopkins, Roosevelt and Daniel Bell in July 1937 reflected growing anxieties over the

budget allocations was partly intended to forestall political criticism and publicly reinforce their status as a temporary relief measure; yet he also protected them from local scrutiny and provided some of the 'flexibility' sought by Hopkins, allowing them to function as a semi-independent cultural programme⁵⁷.

The same conflict between relief requirements and cultural 'standards' was acted out in the arts projects' recruitment practices. Most WPA projects were created in response to the availability and skills of unemployed people in a given area. Federal One worked from the opposite direction, conceiving projects and setting recruitment criteria in Washington, then attempting to find the 'right' people from the relief rolls. This led to another anomaly: under WPA rules, 90% of workers on any project had to be registered on relief, but in December 1935 the relief requirement for Federal One was reduced to 75%⁵⁸. The 25% non-relief quota allowed arts projects to recruit expert supervisors from outside the ranks of the unemployed and to transfer 'talent' between projects, typically from a metropolitan centre such as New York to a regional project which lacked enough unemployed artists of a sufficient calibre to operate effectively. This practice of transferring personnel, while essential to a regionally rooted, national cultural programme, was of course wholly at odds with Roosevelt's stated emphasis on 'existing unemployment conditions'.

economic downturn leading to a series of cuts in WPA budgets (cf. William T Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper Row, 1963), pp. 244 - 251).

⁵⁷ Roosevelt's intentions continued to be ambivalent. Hopkins warned the directors of Federal One that "the objective of this whole program as laid down by the President, and he has laid it down over and over again, is the objective of taking 3,500,000 people off relief and putting them to work..." (McDonald 1969, 32). However, Roosevelt may have protested too much; it was after all his political patronage which protected Federal One's budget from Congressional scrutiny and maintained the privileged federal status of the arts projects until he was forced to recognise them as a political liability. Given these mixed intentions, the decision in 1939 to abolish the Federal Theatre Project and to downgrade the remaining arts projects appears to have been a pragmatic political sacrifice, providing Roosevelt's opponents with a minor symbolic victory while allowing the main WPA programme to continue.

⁵⁸ The reduction was reversed the following year in November 1936 amid much controversy.

The ambivalent status of Federal One can be traced back to its immediate pre-1935 origins. The privileged federal status of the arts projects drew on the nationalism and cultural idealism of New Deal public art; encouraged by Roosevelt, early public art programmes attempted to create a new national culture, a monument to the values of New Deal. This nationalistic, occasionally propagandist, tradition of public art would be taken on both by 'the Section' (described below) and by Federal One. At the same time a more utilitarian tradition of culture developed out of the less public and less publicised local educational and cultural programmes which preceded the WPA; some of this work would also continue under Federal One, most notably in the Federal Art Project's community art centre programme.

In 1933 the artist George Biddle had suggested in a letter to Roosevelt that young artists express "in a permanent art form" the social ideals of the New Deal (Biddle 1939, 268). This suggestion led to the creation of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) in December 1933 which was succeeded by the Section of Painting and Sculpture, later the Section of Fine Arts (hereinafter referred to as 'the Section'). The Section was established to provide "interior art" for new federal buildings using "leftovers from building funds" (McKinzie 1973, 38). The main source of funding was the Treasury Department; the Section was not primarily concerned with providing employment or 'relief' and was exempt from WPA relief requirements. In 1935 the Section was supplemented by the Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP), dedicated to the decoration of existing government buildings. TRAP did receive a relatively small contribution from the WPA but because it employed only a few artists it could afford to be selective⁵⁹; selection criteria were controversial, leading to accusations of favouritism. The competitive awarding of 'commissions' was based on artistic quality, not the material need for relief; in New York a local

⁵⁹ By the time it closed in June 1938, the total amount allocated to TRAP over three years was \$771, 521, of which \$17,021 remained unused. TRAP employed a maximum of 356 artists at any one time and completed 85 murals, 39 sculptures and 10,215 easels (McDonald 1969, 371).

PWAP director informed artists that “need is not in my vocabulary” (McKinzie 1973, 14 - 16). Section administrators were also able to bypass open competition for mural commissions by selecting artists “on the basis of their sketches”, further flaunting their disregard for conventional ‘relief’ criteria (Park and Markowitz 1984, 12 - 13).

The Section and TRAP were a throwback to the nineteenth century attempt to solve the ‘problem’ of poverty in cultural terms, countering economic depression with spiritual uplift. Under the leadership of Edward Bruce, artists learned to ‘paint Section’, developing a style described by Bruce as ‘American Scene’. The programmes combined to propagate an optimistic, harmonious view of American society which idealised its subjects using an accessible, heightened form of realism. The best known product of the Section / TRAP was the post-office mural programme. Operating outside the WPA rules (which emphasised the needs of the worker, not the project), the post-office murals followed a culturalist agenda, seeking to create a new national mythology of future progress rooted in the iconography of a heroic past. The vision of history in the post-office murals emphasised consensus and continuity, painting out ethnic and class conflicts. The Section’s pursuit of cultural renewal through a new national mythology reflected the cultural agenda of Roosevelt’s New Deal, described by Alan Lawson as “the fusion of all segments of society into a cooperative commonwealth” by way of “Roosevelt’s mastery of vague but inspirational generalities” (Lawson 1985, 155 - 156). Roosevelt’s support for the Section, together with his own skill as a fireside propagandist, underlined the extent to which he viewed national renewal as a matter of cultural and spiritual restoration, not simply as economic reconstruction.

While the PWAP and the Section were federal programmes initiated by the Treasury, most of the earlier wave of projects providing employment to artists on

the relief rolls between 1933 and 1935 were initiated at local and state level, funded either by private committees or local government, with the federal government confining itself to a coordinating, supportive role. These projects tended to emphasise recreation and education rather than artistic excellence. Artists were employed as a catalyst for community cultural activity, as teachers or animateurs. McDonald describes the pre-1935 arts projects as dominated by “the social philosophy of the neighborhood house” (McDonald 1969, 100). Many of the activities, especially adult education, took place within settlement houses and other neighborhood institutions and extended the settlement house’s use of amateur and recreational cultural activity as a means of promoting group participation. This strand of ‘useful’ culture built on the other half of the settlement house inheritance, the second generation of resolutely practical, professionalised settlement workers who had emerged from the disaffected culturalism of the settlement pioneers. Again this tradition would continue as a strand within Federal One, in the Federal Art Project community art centres and the Federal Theatre Project’s social programmes which in New York included an active children’s theatre project, a community programme taking plays into New York City parks, an education programme in New York schools and experimental drama therapy projects in Bellevue Hospital and in prisons. Later these decentralised, self-consciously ‘useful’, projects would become increasingly important as the federal arts projects passed from federal to state control and state administrators began to seek a more ‘practical’ return on their investment and then again as the arts projects were bent to serve the war effort. However, these cultural activities were no more ‘typical’ of Federal One in its prime than the more ‘public’, controversial and nationally disseminated products such as the Living Newspapers or the Section’s post-office murals.

The structural and historical context of the federal arts projects points to a contradiction between a temporary relief programme responding to local

unemployment conditions and a permanent national cultural programme. While Congress saw the WPA as a temporary solution to the problem of unemployment, many of the artists on Federal One, together with most of the federal and regional directors, aspired to an ongoing cultural programme. Artists, unlike other WPA workers who saw project work as a temporary surrogate for a 'real' job, apparently "cherished government patronage and sought to make it permanent" (Monroe 1972, 18). In 1938 the ill-timed Coffee Pepper Bill attempted to establish a permanent Bureau of Fine Arts on the back of the arts projects, confirming the suspicions of conservative members of Congress; even as late as 1940, after the Federal Theatre Project had been abolished, Hallie Flanagan was projecting a governmental department of art funded out of federal amusement taxes with a budget of \$15 million (Flanagan 1940, 328 - 329). In 1939 Congress retaliated decisively against these 'presumptions of permanence', abolishing the Federal Theatre Project and drastically curtailing the remaining arts projects which were placed under state control until their eventual abolition in 1943.

The administrative and structural conflicts surrounding Federal One between the cultural objectives of those working inside the projects and the narrower economic objectives of the WPA relief programme mandated by Congress have been summarised by Matthews as a "fundamental dichotomy between relief and theatre" (Matthews 1967, 305). This conflict was related to a historical contradiction between two competing conceptions of culture and cultural policy.

The pre-1935 cultural programmes established a precedent both for the kind of ambitious national cultural programme Congress evidently feared, and for a more localised, 'useful' cultural programme rooted in the local community. In fact the cultural policy of the arts projects (as represented by the Federal Art Project and the Federal Theatre Project) was a compromise between these two traditions. The idea

of a 'usable' culture inherited the ambiguities of the old settlement house, caught between culturalist idealism and utilitarian 'usefulness'. On one side lay the ambitious 'culturalist' agenda pursued by the Section and attacked by later critics as a form of New Deal nationalist propaganda or insidious cultural hegemony (Kidd 1988, Harris 1987); on the other lay the instrumental, utilitarian tradition represented by the pre-1935 local cultural programmes and the later period of the arts projects under state control after 1939. In between, the directors of Federal One sought to reconcile these extremes while balancing the local and national political factions which sought to pull them in opposite directions. This balancing act is the subject of the next section.

3.3 The 'Usable Past' of the Federal Art Project and the Federal Theatre Project: progressive nostalgia

Having reviewed the structural and historical context of Federal One, in the remainder of this chapter I will focus on the contrasting policies of two projects, the Federal Art Project and the Federal Theatre Project. In this section I am concerned with the reliance by both projects on idealised and nostalgic models of a coherent, consensual community as the basis for a new cultural policy.

The Federal Art Project and the Federal Theatre Project, under the leadership of Holger Cahill and Hallie Flanagan respectively, sought a renewal of American culture alongside the New Deal's revival of the U.S. economy. They related the actual economic crisis and the perceived creative crisis of American culture to a common cause, the disconnection of American artists from American society; by broadening the creative base of artistic production they would also broaden the base

of artistic consumption, providing a common platform for artistic creativity and economic sustainability. Artistic and economic priorities thus converged in an attempt to reposition the American artist as an integrated, 'useful' member of the community. The aesthetic and economic arguments for restoring the connection between artist and community were reinforced by political pragmatism. Both Cahill and Flanagan recognised that the continuing survival of the projects would depend on local grassroots support and involvement. Through decentralisation and democratisation they could in the short term bring electoral pressure on Congress for the continued funding of the arts projects; in the longer term projects would depend upon local funding and local control once the 'emergency' federal subsidies dried up.

This repositioning was presented in historical terms as a reaction against the perceived failures and indulgences of contemporary American culture and a return to indigenous cultural traditions. For all the self-conscious newness of the federal arts projects, they were implicated in a nostalgic attempt to recreate 'lost' traditions. Both Flanagan and to a lesser extent Cahill belonged to a tradition of community-based culture outside the boom and bust of 'mainstream' American commercial culture. Holger Cahill, the director of the Federal Art Project, had become an expert in folk art through his curatorship of exhibitions at the Newark Museum⁶⁰ and the Museum of Modern Art; he repudiated the corrosive individualism of late nineteenth and early twentieth century art and the "dislocation" of art from its social context, arguing that American art had been overly influenced by European trends in

⁶⁰ At Newark Cahill had served under John Cotton Dana, a former librarian, a vociferous advocate of the "museum of community service" and a critic of the more old-fashioned 'dead' of 'gazing' museum. Under his direction the Newark Museum aimed to fulfil a civic function, emphasising the practical or 'useful' arts and exploring the social history and customs of Newark. Instead of showing European masterpieces, Dana exhibited "practical everyday art for homes, businesses and schools" (Alexander 1983, 394). He also introduced an education department, crafts demonstrations, teacher training and a picture loan scheme. Cahill worked at the museum from 1922 to 1932, mounting two exhibitions of folk arts and publishing a book in 1932. Dana was clearly an influence on Cahill, especially on the community art centre and education programmes of the Federal Art Project.

the commercial art market and that a flourishing culture depended on a “sound general movement”, not “the solitary genius” (Cahill 1936). Hallie Flanagan, director of the Federal Theatre Project, was associated with the ‘little theatre movement’ which had grown up in small communities and colleges as an antidote to commercial theatre; the little theatre movement was a reaction to the escalating costs and audience numbers of Broadway in the first quarter of the twentieth century, which had resulted in creative and economic stagnation (MacGowan 1929, 69 - 70). In place of commercialism and individualism, Cahill and Flanagan shared in a movement to return American culture to its native roots in local communities and shared experience.

The escape from the cultural and economic bankruptcy of the present into an idealised ‘lost’ past of harmony between artist and community and a ‘coherent’ society was related by Cahill to “the search for a useable past” (Cahill 1936, 24 - 28; Jones 1971). This usable past was framed by references to lost traditions. Cahill referred to medieval art and “the era of handicrafts” before the “machine mode of reproduction” broke the bond between artist and community (O’Connor 1973, 36); Flanagan referred to the ‘democratic’ theatre of ancient Greece (Flanagan 1940, 5). Both Cahill and Flanagan drew on a more recent ‘revivalist’ tradition: the revival of American folk arts, the regionalist painter’s ‘return to the significant subject’, the Mexican muralists’ revival of a public art based on public issues, the little theatre movement’s roots in local communities. All of these movements consciously reacted against the perceived economic and aesthetic failures of contemporary American culture. Cahill suggested that the dislocation of art and artists had been driven by the machinations of the commercial art market and patronage (Cahill 1936, 12 - 15; O’Connor 1973, 35); Flanagan traced the stagnation of American theatre to the influence of the “Broadway formula” and the “old struggle for stardom, money and prestige” and sought “an entirely new theatre”

based on a a “common group enterprise” (Flanagan 1940, 160 - 163; 232 - 236). For Cahill and Flanagan the economic collapse of commercial culture was linked to its creative sterility; only a massive increase in artistic production and consumption outside the old metropolitan circles could rescue the American artist from economic and creative crisis.

I believe that the arts projects’ reliance on a ‘usable past’ was problematic for two reasons. First of all, both Cahill and Flanagan were required under the WPA relief criteria to work within the existing structures of the contemporary culture industry; specifically, they had to provide employment for artists who met the standard classifications of ‘professional’ and ‘skilled’ workers and who expected to return to their old professions within the commercial arts sector. Many of these artists resented change and feared that the new communitarian policies would undermine their professional status. There was also resistance at the managerial level, especially from old Broadway hands on the Federal Theatre Project, and from local project managers. All of this internal resistance was in addition to the external conflicts between Federal One and the political and administrative hierarchy of the WPA and Congress. Secondly, the ‘usable past’ which Cahill and Flanagan attempted to recreate was itself the repository of complex and contradictory traditions. Within the ‘usable past’ they sought to revive lay traces of individualism, reactionary conservatism and the old ‘culturalist agenda of the late nineteenth century; nostalgia clouded these tendencies in a progressive, communitarian aura.

According to the Federal Art Project manual, “the aim of the project will be to work toward an integration of the arts with the daily life of the community, and an integration of the fine art and the practical arts” (McDonald 1969, 383). Holger Cahill related this integration between art and community to indigenous ‘American’ traditions including the culture of the Pueblo Indians, the Shaker movement, the

populist American genre painting of the nineteenth century and the Mexican muralists (O'Connor 1973, 36)⁶¹. The Index on American Design was Cahill's attempt to reactivate this cultural heritage. The Index, which was perhaps inevitably never completed, employed around 400 project artists at a time who painstakingly reproduced 20,000 examples of decorative and applied arts from across America in photographs and drawings. Cahill described the Index as "an endeavour to recover a usable past in the decorative, folk and popular arts of our country" (O'Connor 1973, 42).

Cahill's vision of the future remained rooted in the past. For all his progressive thinking, there was a conservative cast to Cahill's recreation of bucolic folk traditions which contrasted with the more contemporary explorations of urban and industrial folklore undertaken by the Federal Writers Project (McDonald 1969, 709 - 716). Frank O'Connor describes Cahill's 'usable past' as a form of nostalgia, "a longing for a bucolic, or just plain peaceful, uncluttered past that is now lost" (O'Connor 1973, 22); this longing may have been influenced by Cahill's former career as a museum curator. Alfred Haworth Jones relates the search for a usable past to the New Deal's reliance on 'affirmative history', a vision of the "classless, inclusive character of the national experience" in the past to legitimise New Deal policies for the future (Jones 1971, 716 - 718). This sanitised, harmonious version of history was especially dominant in the post-office murals⁶². Class and racial conflicts were scrupulously avoided; Native Americans were portrayed signing treaties with settlers, muscular labourers toiled cheerfully and black people were either notably absent or blissfully untouched by racial oppression. The murals reflected "a belief in the ideal rather than the reality of history" (Park and

⁶¹ Cahill's enthusiasm for the Pueblos may have been influenced by Ruth Benedict's anthropological work comparing primitive 'integrated' cultures with the 'disoriented' and 'stratified' cultures of the West (Benedict 1934, 223 - 250; Lawson 195, 160).

⁶² The post-office murals were funded by the Section of Painting and Sculpture, later the Section of Fine Arts. While the Section received some funds from the WPA, it was separate from the Federal Art Project and the rest of Federal One.

Markowitz, 43). While the Federal Art Project itself never achieved the programmatic coherence of the Section's 'American Scene', there were similar tendencies towards symbolic propaganda in some of the project's public art works (Harris 1987; 1991, 259 - 60).

The role of community artist was obviously open to exploitation; Cahill's nostalgic idealisation of the relationship between collective participation and individual inspiration provided a smokescreen for ambitious local politicians who recognised the commercial profitability of "regional one-upmanship" and "roadside tourism" (Kendall 1986, 53 - 57). The revival of 'regionalist' painting in the 1930s encouraged artists including Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry and Thomas Benton to return to their 'native' mid-West. There was an element of opportunism in this migration; "championed by nativist boosters", the artists accepted their roles as returning prodigals (Kendall 1986, 24 - 26), even posing together in workman's overalls for the cover of Time Magazine and the Kansas City Star. Yet at first regional communities were slow to accept the artists as one of their own, suspicious of their big city reputations; the artists in turn remained true to a personal vision in their art, ignoring the demands of local committees for suitable subject matter in civic murals. While civic boosters saw the usable past as a commercial resource, 'regionalist' artists like Benton retreated into nativist chauvinism, lashing out at the 'homosexual' cliques of the art establishment and foreign radicals (Benton 1939, 264 - 266; 1951, 172). Benton shared Cahill's enthusiasm for the Mexican muralists and his attempt to restore American art to its roots in public meanings and popular history, as against the formal innovations of 'French salonism' (Benton 1951), even claiming that he and his fellow regionalists had "sparked" the New Deal art projects (ibid., 192); however, his trajectory into curmudgeonly egotism and 'Americanist' propaganda demonstrated the latent individualism and conservative nationalism in Cahill's usable past.

Hallie Flanagan, like Cahill, drew on past traditions for her vision of the future. She sought to rediscover a 'democratic' theatre rooted in community life, "an illustration and a bulwark of the democratic form of government" (Flanagan 1940, 373). In a 1939 article she expanded on "the contribution of the arts to democracy", describing the arts as "one of the great mediums of understanding"; only through understanding could the people participate in a democracy (Flanagan 1939). She associated this public, deliberative form of theatre with the civic theatre of Ancient Greece and the subsidised 'state' theatres of Europe. Closer to home she related this tradition to her experiences in college-based 'little theatre' with George Pierce Baker at Harvard; she saw the regional network of college and community theatres as a model, "theatres which have possibilities of growing into social institutions in the communities in which they are located" (Flanagan 1940, 23).

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, the little theatre movement reflected a view of the theatre as a social institution and a cornerstone of civic activity; by the 1930s there were over 1,000 'little theatres' in the U.S. (source: Perry 1933, McGowan 1929), ranging from touring rural theatre companies, experimental university-based groups (including Flanagan's own troupe at Vassar) and more ambitious 'civic' theatres like the semi-professional Cleveland Playhouse. Much of the impetus of the little theatre movement came from the universities. George Pierce Baker established his playwriting workshop, 'English 47' at Harvard in 1908 (later transferred to Yale in 1913), Frederick Koch (a former pupil of Baker) became active in the North Dakota in 1907 before establishing the Carolina Playmakers from North Carolina University in 1918, Alfred Arvold established his Little Country Theater in North Dakota in 1914 on the back of the university extension service as a form of "intellectual rural free delivery" (Arvold 1922, 47). Hallie Flanagan herself worked with Baker as his assistant before establishing the Vassar Experimental

Theatre at Vassar College; later she employed E C Mabie from the University of Illinois and Frederick Koch from North Carolina as regional directors on the Federal Theatre Project.

For all its democratic, communitarian aspirations, the 'little theatre' was an unreliable model for Flanagan's 'people's theatre. First of all the little theatres belonged to the same nineteenth century tradition as university extension and the settlement house; men and women of culture would act as a catalyst for local community involvement. There were practical problems with this approach under WPA regulations; the coupling of professional expertise and amateur involvement was highly controversial on a work programme, especially with the theatre unions. More critically, the reliance on charismatic leadership by professional artists carried a risk of exploitation. While one side of the 'little theatre' tradition, represented by Alfred Arvold's Little Country Theater in North Dakota, emphasised amateur involvement and community development, another, represented by Frederick Koch's Carolina Playmakers, emphasised professional excellence and formal innovation. Typically Arvold's makeshift productions emphasised participation and self-expression, treating the completed performance or script as an incidental by-product; the theatre was "a place to train country-life workers" and to enrich the lives of local farmers, not a seedbed for new playwrights (Arvold 1922). In contrast, Koch saw community involvement as a catalyst for the reanimation of the American theatre, rescuing playwrights from the "superficial and innocuous" artifice of theatrical convention (Koch 1940). For Arvold, theatre was a vehicle for community development and involvement; for Koch, community involvement was the vehicle for theatrical innovation.

The contradictions in a 'democratic' civic theatre were exposed in the Progressive era pageant. The pageant form derived from the English fashion for Renaissance-

style pageants in the late nineteenth century; where the English pageant was an exercise in medievalist nostalgia, American pageants presented episodes from local history to propagate a message of 'progressive' civic reform. Like the post-office murals, the pageants presented an idealised 'usable past', submerging real events in an abstract hymn to civic progress. They also deployed community involvement on a grand scale; Percy Mackaye's 'Pageant and Masque of Saint Louis in 1914 mobilised a cast of 7,000 and drew nightly audiences of 100,000 (Glassberg 1991, 1). Elements of the progressive pageant, the use of large casts and archetypal figures, the manipulative staging and traces of wholesome propaganda, were later incorporated into the Federal Newspaper's Living Newspapers in the 1930s.

For all its appearance of community participation, the pageant was criticised for failing to involve audiences in its muddled symbolism (Burleigh 1917, 40 - 53); similarly, while impressive hordes of extras were dragooned by the 'pageant master', community input into the creative process or didactic content of the pageant was non-existent. According to Glassberg, "like many of the decade's social and political movements, which also employed the rhetoric of 'community' and 'tradition', the pageant experience promoted hierarchy, discipline, and rational organization in the effort to achieve a celebration of democracy, spontaneity, and lyrical emotion" (Glassberg 1990, 156). The manipulative, undemocratic qualities of the pageant show through the cracks in Percy Mackaye's advocacy of a 'civic theatre' (1912), effectively a proposal to translate the principles of the civic pageant into a permanent institution. Despite the rhetoric of community, the civic theatre was to be led by "artists of high standards", not by the untutored public, under the slogan "leadership by artists: participation by the people" (Mackaye 1912, 259). Mackaye's advocacy of the pageant and the civic theatre was driven by professional self-interest; he recognised a new civic role for the playwright as the self-appointed

voice of the community, passing off his overblown symbolic spectacle as “the drama of democracy”.

As the little theatre movement matured towards institutional and financial stability it too came to rely on professional leadership; the shift reflected both the audience demand for a more ‘professional’ product, growing financial pressures and the claims of professionals like Mackaye to lead the community to enlightenment. In a survey of 100 theatres, MacGowan noted a trend “departing from the ideal of a broad, all-inclusive amateurism” (MacGowan 1929, 93). Professional input gradually displaced community involvement; the original little theatre’s complicity between amateur actors and audiences was replaced by a more professional relationship in which the performance’s distinctive style and content were no longer dependent on community input⁶³.

Flanagan’s experience of ‘little theatre’ was based not on the professionalised ‘civic’ theatre but on the amateur student theatre at Vassar College. Yet here too the model was problematic. College theatres provided opportunities for technical experiment (cf. Flanagan 1928); within the closed community of college life such experiments could even be popular rather than alienating. According to one alumna, the charmed circle of college life created “a miniature community which has fostered the germ of civic unity, and produced a theatre expressing the will of the community itself” (Burleigh 1917, 85 - 86). However, this heightened sense of community depended on the self-contained homogeneity of the student body. As with the settlement houses and women’s colleges of the nineteenth century, the ideal of a self-contained

⁶³ The definition of ‘community theatre’ changed during this period. The Cleveland Playhouse, with a budget of \$100,000 was described in 1929 as “still a community theatre, though professional” (MacGowan 1929, 105). In contrast, for a previous generation, professionalisation was identified with a loss of democratic control and ‘community theatre’, by definition, involved direct input from amateurs (Beegle and Crawford 1916, 7 - 8).

consensual community did not necessarily translate to the culturally diverse urban 'neighborhood' or to the committees and hierarchies of small-town, rural America.

The 'usable past' of the Federal Art Project and the Federal Theatre Project was an attempt to build a new democratic culture from the base of an indigenous American tradition. However, this tradition contained a number of nineteenth century 'culturalist' assumptions which contradicted the democratic communitarian agenda of the arts projects.

First, the rhetoric of 'community' in some instances disguised the old cult of the individual Romantic artist or the Progressive cult of professional expertise. In the 'civic theatre' and the pageant, the best interests of the community were mysteries known only to a priesthood of professional artists and civic reformers; artistic control and social engineering cut against local autonomy and collective self-expression. In the rural touring theatres, Arvold's emphasis on community development through culture was turned upside down in Koch's emphasis on 'community' involvement as the lifeblood of the playwright; 'community' fed the artist, instead of artists nurturing communities. In the visual arts, 'regionalism' became the label for a handful of well-known painters who used a vernacular, accessible style without ever fully engaging with the rural mid-Western communities to which they claimed to have returned. The artist was a shaman, not the overall-clad 'worker' portrayed on the cover of Time magazine. These latent contradictions between collective creativity and the cult of the individual talent would be tested by the administrative classification of 'professional' and 'skilled' artists on the projects.

Secondly the rhetoric of 'community' provided an ideological smokescreen for propagandists and civic boosters. Pageants and murals claiming to represent past events or present issues served as tourist attractions and celebrations of national and

civic progress. Instead of empowering communities or initiating a dialogue between collective aspirations and the individual talent, Progressive era culture bombarded them with instructions and directions disguised as unquestionable consensus. This propagandist tendency would reemerge in 1930s in the post-office murals and some of the later, more obviously didactic 'Living Newspapers'.

Finally, the 'usable past' propagated an idealised harmonious 'community' which may not have existed outside the imaginations of an alienated middle class. In the college-based little theatre, the artificial harmony of college life substituted for the complex relationships of real communities with multiple identities and needs, echoing the 'common culture' of the university settlement. Cahill compiled his own usable past of idealised 'cohesive' communities from the folk traditions of the past. Artists and administrators taught to expect communities to operate through rational consensus were ill prepared for the controversies and conflicts of interest which assailed real community arts projects in the 1930s.

3.4 A Marxist Past: 'art as a weapon' and commitment

In the previous section I described traces of a nineteenth century cultural idealism at odds with the arts projects' communitarian rhetoric. In this section I will review the other side of the arts projects' inheritance, a 'materialist' conception of culture derived from the artists' collectives and workers' theatre groups of the 1920s. This radical tradition, allied to the American Communist Party (CPUSA), introduced elements of cultural utilitarianism, collectivism and propaganda to the arts projects. While communist rhetoric and ideas were influential on the arts projects, I will argue that this influence remained contradictory and never resulted in a coherent 'materialist' or 'Marxist' conception of culture or cultural policy.

Communist theory sought to 'reposition' art and artists in relation to society, making the 'superstructure' of artistic production secondary to the 'base' of the class struggle. Theoretically this repositioning was analogous to the anti-individualist 'repositioning' of the artist sought by Flanagan and Cahill. However, according to the Marxist-Leninist party line, art was a weapon in the revolutionary struggle, a means and not an end in itself. This instrumental cultural policy had more in common with the Progressive pageant than with the aims of Flanagan and Cahill; communist art was answerable not to the 'community' but to an abstract of the people's will, as interpreted by party officials and 'committed' artists. In some instances, 'committed' artists appeared more concerned with the party's promise of prestige and influence rather than with a desire to make their work 'accountable'.

While the communist party's influence on artists increased quantitatively in the 1930s, it diminished in strength. This ideological dilution was part of the communist strategy of the 'popular front' introduced in 1935. Seeking to build a broad coalition of progressive and socialist forces opposed to fascism, the communist ideologues welcomed 'fellow travellers', especially artists, who were broadly sympathetic to communist party ideals and language even if they were not as committed as the first wave of radical artists. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, 'commitment' was paid for in material and ideological sacrifices made by the artist for the cause; by the mid-1930s this personal tariff was reduced and the rigorous policing of ideological content was relaxed, allowing a looser and more generalised 'commitment' to the communist cause. The result was a quantitative increase in supposedly 'committed' artists, combined with a qualitative reduction in the required level of ideological commitment.

Seen in this context, the ideological traces of communism in the arts projects are less substantial than their rhetoric, while the correspondence between Marxist cultural

theory and the communitarian pragmatism of Cahill and Flanagan is at most only a loose analogy. What emerged in the arts projects in the 1930s was a 'culturalist' variant of Marxist cultural theory in which artists reinvented the romantic tradition of artist as (revolutionary) hero and 'commitment' was a matter of subjective psychological need rather than objective political alignment.

In the 1920s 'commitment' entailed a degree of self-sacrifice, both materially and artistically. Early workers' theatre groups demanded a gruelling repertory and a rigorous lifestyle (McDermott 1965, 1966). According to Cosgrove, the Workers Laboratory Theatre's Shock Troupe performed over 80 plays to 100,000 workers in 1934 (Cosgrove 1985, 272); rehearsals were supplemented by a heavy schedule of ideological classes. Wages were minimal and hours were long. Artistically most of the actors were untrained and ideological commitment mattered more than aptitude or experience; writing and directing were also controlled by committee. Communist painters and writers in the 1920s formed the John Reed Clubs, named after the American intellectual turned revolutionary man of action. The early John Reed clubs of the 1920s and early 1930s were 'sectional', following the Marxist collectivist line advocated by the communist party at the time, and aimed to use art primarily as an instrument of ideological propaganda; artists were discouraged from individualist tendencies and workers were invited to assess artists' work and correct ideological "errors" (Monroe 1975, 65). In this context of rigorous self-searching, 'fellow-travellers' were urged to abandon art for art's sake and to "forge a new art that will be a weapon in the battle for a new and superior world" (ibid.).

Commitment had its compensations. According to Richard Pells, the communist party "rivalled the New Deal in giving intellectuals a sense of importance, as well a numerous things to do" (Pells 1973, 168). Party membership offered both "comradeship and an end to loneliness", encouraging artists "to feel as though they

had become significant actors on the stage of history” (ibid., 179). The communist artist’s sense of collective participation in a historical movement would later be transferred into the federal arts projects. Thus according to Monroe, Federal One “through the collective nature of its art programs, literally created a community of artists” and allowed the artist to feel “he was moving within the mainstream of American life” (Monroe 1975, 64).

After 1935, popular front communism’s demands on the ‘committed’ artist were reduced. ‘Fellow travellers’, once the object of scorn, were now welcomed; rigid party control over artistic form and content gave way to a more sophisticated formal approach. The Group Theatre, founded in 1931, signalled the newly expansive approach to membership and technique; sympathisers from the legitimate theatre were invited to produce ‘workers’ plays’ and agitprop workers’ theatre groups were schooled by the Group in Stanislavskian method. The individual director replaced the old school of collective self-criticism; agitprop sketches performed by mobile ‘shock troupes’ were replaced by full length plays in conventional venues⁶⁴. Relationships with audiences also began to change; greater professionalism meant abandoning the old identification between untrained workers on the stage and their comrades in the audience. Instead, in a throwback to the nineteenth century tradition of middle class cultural ‘improvement’ of the supposedly uncultured working class, “gradually, the masses were seen not as active participants but as a passive audience attending plays designed for their betterment” (Pells 1973, 254). In another echo of nineteenth century cultural reform, the audiences for ‘workers’ theatre’ gradually ceased to consist of ‘workers’ themselves and came to consist principally of the urban middle class. This shift was reflected within the League of

⁶⁴ For the Group’s influence on workers’ theatre, see Cosgrove (1985, 263 - 264). Several commentators suggest that the Group represented a ‘culturalist’ shift away from the radical politics of the old workers’ theatre (Kidd 1988, 412 - 414; Williams 1974, 25; Pells 1973, 259); for a dissenting view, see Cobb 1989. For stylistic changes in the workers’ theatre, see McDermott 1966, 119 - 120; Pells 1973, 260.

Workers Theatre Companies by a growing concentration on New York as the League's centre of operations and an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to compete with the commercial theatre for a conventional middle-class theatre-going public (McDermott 1965). Despite a belated attempt to decentralise in 1939, the League (now trading under the less 'committed' title of the New Theatre League) crumbled into debt as subscriptions dried up.

By the mid-1930s commercial producers had begun to ape the conventions of 'workers' theatre' on Broadway and in Hollywood in order to attract a fashionable middle class audience (Pells 1973, 263). According to John Houseman, "workers' plays" were now "the smart commercial angle" (Federal Theatre Project 1936); confirming his judgement, in 1938 commercial management took over management of *The Cradle Will Rock*, a 'political' play first produced by Houseman and Orson Welles for the Federal Theatre Project. Of the successful 'left wing' plays produced that year none was produced by a dedicated 'workers' theatre' group (McDermott 1965). Even groups with authentic left wing credentials like the Group Theatre began to seek cultural or moral solutions to the problems of life under capitalism, in place of the crude certainties of economic analysis, and presented individual heroic action as an alternative to collective transformation (Cosgrove 1985, 271; Pells 1973, 259 - 261).

Visual artists were also released from the rigorous commitments of the 1920s. The John Reed Clubs and the Artist's Union (a 1934 offshoot of the John Reed Clubs catering for unemployed artists) adopted a 'fraction' structure which allowed a caucus of artists who were party members to remain in contact with the party leadership, while the majority of artists were only loosely affiliated to the party through the club. At a 1935 meeting between the Artist's Union fraction and a communist party official, artists walked out of a meeting when they were requested

to “devote more time to party work”; one artist declared that “the distinguished comrades from the district committee” were “full of shit” (Monroe 1975, 66). The John Reed Clubs provided the artist with a sense of social ‘membership’ without the high ideological price of ‘commitment’. The Artists’s Union was succeeded by the American Artists Congress, in which the political commitments of membership were virtually non-existent. As ideological control slackened, party membership increased. Among New York artists, communist party membership rose from around 60 before 1934 to several hundred in the period 1935 to 1939; significantly, the numbers attending weekly meetings of the Artist’s Union was even higher, especially if artists’ interests were at stake (Monroe 1975, 66).

By the mid-1930s, ‘commitment’ no longer carried the same political charge as it had in the 1920s. Like the settlement worker, the radical artist sought to be socially ‘useful’. ‘Commitment’, like regionalism, was partly an aesthetic reaction against the self-involved formalism of pre-war art. At a psychological level, the artist collectives and theatre ensembles of the 1930s were a product of the same ‘subjective necessity’ which inspired college women in the 1890s; the alienated middle class intellectual sought refuge in the warm glow of “beloved community” (Blake 1990). “Revolution” was, according to Richard Pells, “seen as a form of therapy in which the intellectual took on an entirely new personality” (Pells 1973, 162). Echoing the self-disgust which inspired the settlement resident to turn her back on her culture and her class, there was an element of self-destructiveness in the the ritual immersion of the self in the collective oneness of community. In the rigorous self-discipline of the 1920s and the more rhetorical commitments of the 1930s, the artist ritually abnegated self and culture, succumbing to the paradoxical anti-intellectualism of the radical intellectual described by Christopher Lasch (1965). Such self-denial was not even particularly useful to the party; artists accordingly laboured under “an unnecessary psychological burden which frequently obstructed

the other aims they were seeking to achieve” (Pells 1973, 186). Thus, according to Lasch, American radicalism became a “ritual celebration of radicalism itself” (Lasch 1965, 288), while “commitment and action became ends in themselves” (Pells 1973, 147). Alongside the committed artist’s residue of ‘subjective’ self-disgust and self-denial was a heavy dose of self-deception; the promise of ‘oneness’ with a different social class was based on a false identification of the artist’s spiritual sense of alienation with the economic disenfranchisement of the worker. The subjective quality of ‘commitment’, based in self-disgust, self-denial and self-deception, lent an air of unreality to the artist’s objective political attachments.

The pervasive influence of communism on the federal arts projects was thus a matter of aesthetics and psychology as much as politics. On the Federal Theatre Project, Hallie Flanagan had written enthusiastically of the possibilities of workers’ theatre in 1931 and had staged a production bearing the stylistic signature of workers’ theatre at Vassar⁶⁵. The great artistic innovation of the Federal Theatre Project, the Living Newspaper, was probably directly inspired by the 12-minute *Newsboy*, a piece of agitprop first presented by the Workers Laboratory Theatre in 1931. The Living Newspaper, described by one contemporary as “vaudeville with a basic idea” (Flanagan 1940, 309), explored contemporary social and economic issues through a collage of documentary information, using short scenes, a large cast, simple staging and vivid lighting; stylistically it recycled many of the conventions of workers’ theatre (O’Connor 1990). The Living Newspaper also clearly aspired to ‘commitment’ in the political sense, dedicated, like its agitprop predecessors, to ‘educating’ the public to discuss important social issues instead of distracting them with spectacle and sentiment. Yet the living newspapers were more successful

⁶⁵ In an article on the first conference of the League of Workers’ theatre entitled *A Theatre is Born*, Flanagan commented that “there are only two theatres in the country today that are clear as to their aim: one is the commercial theatre which wants to make money, the other is the workers’ theatre which wants to make a new social order” (Flanagan 1931, quoted in Rubinstein 1986, 306). Flanagan co-wrote and directed *Can You Hear Their Voices*, an agitprop collage presenting the views of disaffected dirt-farmers, for the Vassar Experimental Theatre at Vassar College in 1931.

theatrically than politically. Praised by critics who disapproved of their message (Vacha 1986, 76), surely the worst fate for the politically committed artist, the living newspaper failed to develop a working class constituency, marooned instead within the fashionable left-leaning intelligentsia of the New York theatre audience. Here the Living Newspaper had more in common with the smart commercial angles of the new 'workers' theatre' than the shock troupes of the 1920s, reproducing a style without a political substance for a mostly middle class audience (Vacha 1986, 87; Matthews 1975, 330). More worryingly, the Living Newspaper Unit's high profile in New York and its sporadic presence in the regions (Chicago's production of *Spirochete* being a notable exception), reproduced the League of Workers Theatre Companies mistake of centralising operations in New York at the expense of regional development.

Of course there were notable exceptions to the culturalist trend. Communists and radicals infiltrated the federal arts projects, partly as a result of financial need and partly following an "unwritten policy of entryism" (Cosgrove 1985, 227). A handful of Federal Theatre Project productions in New York strayed into outright political propaganda, such as *Revolt of the Beavers*, a controversial Marxist parable produced by the New York Children's Unit. According to John O'Connor (1990), the later living newspapers also became increasingly manipulative and propagandist; where earlier productions had presented audiences with complex social problems, later productions embodied government solutions (O'Connor 1990, 344). This political closure of content was accompanied by a more didactic form of presentation; the older discursive, multifaceted format was replaced by bludgeoning spectacle and the confident authority of a propaganda film (Vacha 1986, 82 - 85). If the early living newspapers recreated the collective complicity of the workers theatre (O'Connor 1990, 332 - 337; Cosgrove 1985, 275), the later productions reproduced the pageant's manipulative use of spectacular effects to enforce a single point of

view.⁶⁶ However these productions were not typical of the Federal Theatre Project in New York, still less of the work in the country as a whole, as Flanagan emphasised in her testimony to the Dies Committee. The argument that the Federal Theatre Project would eventually fall victim to political censorship strains credibility, especially as the contemporary accusations of political bias were never officially proved⁶⁷.

The intense political ferment of the New York units of Federal One may be seen as a symptom of the committed artist's cultural introversion. Instead of a new union between artist and society there was unionisation of artists. For all their rhetorical solidarity with the ordinary blue collar WPA workers, the artists on Federal One enjoyed a privileged, professional status far removed from the 'plumber's wage' originally demanded by the artist George Biddle in 1933. The 'commitment' of most of these artists was primarily cultural, not political; rather than a political struggle, they pursued an ideal of community, in the 'ferment' of 'association' with other artists later described by Willem de Kooning, through project meetings and collective studios (Cahill 1954, 22). Where they did engage with social issues, there was a tendency to do so in moral or cultural terms, following what Pells describes as "the decade's tendency to glide over the content of socialist theory, while stressing its moral and emotional implications for human behavior" (Pells 1973, 143).

⁶⁶ For the manipulative effects of the Progressive era pageant, see Glassberg (1990). Where the workers' theatre used minimal props, costumes and rudimentary technique, the pageant deployed a more overblown theatrical vocabulary which was not always effective (Burleigh 1917, 42 - 43, 50 - 52). The Living Newspaper's alternation of bare stage and 'cinematic' spectacle, of single figure and mass cast, can perhaps be seen as a hybrid of these two genres. One possible precedent for this cross-fertilisation was the 'Pageant of the Paterson Strike', staged by John Reed's International Workers of the World in Madison Square Gardens in 1913 (Glassberg 1990, 127 - 128).

⁶⁷ The Congressional committees 'investigating' the project in 1938 and 1939 were ill-prepared and ill-informed; the communist witch-hunt led by Martin Dies, relying mostly on half-baked testimony of disaffected former employees, was especially unconvincing, with Flanagan at one point being asked if Christopher Marlowe was a communist. Other committee members raked through the project's lists for "suggestive and salacious titles". The political mud-slinging was merely a pretext for a symbolic attack on Roosevelt's political authority; the Federal Theatre Project was singled out for abolition primarily because it was the most centralised of all the projects and most clearly in breach of Congress's relief requirements.

Politically, 'commitment' on the arts projects was of a muted, culturalist variety, rooted in the intellectual's subjective search for an elusive sense of social membership, echoing the cultural communitarianism of the settlement house.

Philosophically, the ethos of the arts projects reflected not the Marxist utilitarianism of 'art as a weapon' but the culturalist commitment to a common culture. In terms of the 'incurable structural contradiction' between idealist and materialist conceptions of culture, Federal One never committed itself to the base-superstructure logic of Marxist cultural theory; while it inherited some of the collectivist trappings of Marxist 'commitment', individual artists on the projects took their art too seriously to sacrifice creative control to a party line. As in the nineteenth century, the crisis of culture grew out of a crisis of faith within the middle class; alienated artists, intellectuals and left-leaning audiences saw the communion of collective action as a compensation for the personal, artistic and economic depression after the false dawn of peace and prosperity. Where social problems were addressed, artists dealt primarily in the soft rhetoric of culture, not the hard currency of economic and political analysis. A 'culturalist' version of Marxism, which privileged art and artists as agents of social change, was allied with the residual idealism of the nineteenth century; this 'unstable equilibrium' forms the subject of the next section.

3.5 John Dewey and the Politics of Equilibrium

In this section I will discuss how the historical and theoretical traditions discussed in the previous two sections were incorporated within a coherent philosophical framework. This framework drew upon the philosophy of John Dewey and the 'cultural regionalism' being advocated by Lewis Mumford and other social theorists. What this theoretical framework failed to take into consideration was the specific historical and administrative context of the federal arts projects.

Holger Cahill cited “the philosophy of John Dewey” as one of the essential elements which had made the federal arts projects possible (O’Connor 1973, 38). Dewey’s philosophy was also woven into the cultural radicalism of the 1930s (Pells 1973, 118 - 125). His achievement was to reconcile the individualist tradition of American liberalism with the collectivist tradition of socialism. Dewey described a dynamic interaction between individual and collective cultural development and between individual freedom and state intervention. The idea that individual creativity and collective organisation were complementary, not antagonistic, lay at the heart of New Deal cultural policy. Along with other theorists of the period, including Lewis Mumford, Dewey described a harmonious equilibrium between individual and collective well-being. Yet the synergy described by Dewey and Mumford proved difficult to realise in practice.

In *Liberalism and Social Action* (1935), Dewey criticised old-fashioned “doctrinaire” liberalism and the belief that there was a “natural opposition between the individual and organised society”. Instead he proposed a “renascent liberalism” based on the realisation that individual freedom did not just mean freedom from constraint but active support for individual development, through “institutions that provide the material basis for the cultural liberation and growth of individuals” (Dewey 1935, 5; 55)⁶⁸. In *Individualism Old and New* (1930), Dewey embarked on a similar critique at the psychological level, arguing that “an earlier pioneer

⁶⁸ *Liberalism and Social Action* presents a robust defence of state interventionism and social engineering against the doctrinaire economic liberalism of Locke and Adam Smith. Essential to Dewey’s argument is the assumption that institutions and governments need not be brutal and coercive, but may be benign and constructive. Here he explicitly argues against Marx’s doctrine of class struggle, entering a liberal plea for cooperation and ‘organised intelligence’ in place of the violence of political confrontation: “the measure of civilisation is the degree in which the method of cooperative intelligence replaces the method of brute conflict” (Dewey 1935, 81). Of course Dewey’s pragmatism is open to the same charges of ineffective and essentially conservative bourgeois squeamishness that Alinsky levelled against the settlement house (see 2.5, above). Above all Dewey’s pragmatism was based on optimism, a belief, shared with the settlement workers, that social problems could be scientifically and methodically ‘solved’. Revealingly Dewey dedicated *Liberalism and Social Action* to the memory of Jane Addams.

individualism” had been absorbed within “a condition of dominant corporateness”. He suggested that “the balked demand for genuine coöperativeness and reciprocal solidarity in daily life” had resulted in neurotic forms of aggression, greed, nationalism and irritation. The solution would be a new individualism based on social relationships, an “integrated individuality”, defined as “the product of definite social relationships and publicly acknowledged functions” (Dewey 1930, 36; 56 - 61; 53)⁶⁹.

These political and psychological arguments about the relationship between individual and collective development fed into Dewey’s aesthetic theory. In *Art and Experience* (1934), Dewey described the process of artistic creation in terms of a new relationship between artistic production and consumption. The process of patterning and reorganising experience was active and continuous, so that the final product, the work of art, was the culmination of a continuous movement. The act of viewing the work of art required a similar process of “taking in”, described by Dewey as “a gathering together of details and particulars physically scattered into an experienced whole” (Dewey 1934, 54). These two phases, the ‘artistic’ act of production and the ‘aesthetic’ act of perception and enjoyment were related (Dewey 1934, 46 - 7). The artist was also a viewer, continually experiencing and redirecting his work; similarly the viewer had actively to “create” his experience (Dewey 1934, 34). This active interchange between art and experience was what made the artist’s work “artistic” and the viewer’s experience “aesthetic”. Dewey thus

⁶⁹Again, in *Individualism Old and New* Dewey echoes the settlement worker’s faith in cooperative living as a solution to deep-rooted social problems, turning social conflicts into symptoms of a sick society and, by extension, of sick individuals. Like Freud (whose *Civilisation and its Discontents* was published in 1929), Dewey thus converted social and economic problems into moral and psychological ones; here he belongs to the same idealist tradition of ‘reform through culture’ which encompasses Samuel Barnett (1888) and J A Simpson (1976) - see Simpson’s description of socio-cultural animation as “a sort of social vitamin” which can cure “stunted” individuals and a sick society (Simpson 1975, 8). The metaphor of sickness reveals a culturalist-idealist assumption that social problems can be ‘cured’ through individual access to the cultural panacea - precisely the assumption so mistrusted by the young Beveridge at Toynbee Hall (cf. Briggs and Macartney 1984, 61).

described a complicity between the individual artist and audiences or viewers as the necessary condition for artistic creativity and public enjoyment and understanding. These arguments gave an intellectual focus to Cahill's argument that great art grew out of a 'sound general movement' not individual acts of genius, and that American artists needed to rediscover their creative roots in community life.

Mumford's contribution to the politics of equilibrium was to present the interactions between individual and collective development in terms of regional development (Mumford 1925, 1928). Mumford's regionalism was based on a series of 'organic' relationships between humans and their physical environment, between city and region, between "modes of life" and "fundamental conditions"; these relationships had been broken down by industrial specialisation and urban concentration, resulting in "urban hypertrophy and rural debilitation" and the erosion of "vivid creative life". The solution to this economic imbalance was the reconstruction of regional cultural identity as the basis for regional economic renewal; only by identifying "the people, industry, and the land as a single unit" would it be possible to "promote and stimulate a vivid creative life throughout a whole region". Mumford's analysis anticipated the regional emphasis of the federal arts projects; Cahill sought to restore the connections between artists and their native communities, especially through the community arts centre programme, while Flanagan sought to ground the Federal Theatre Project in regional units as the basis for a democratic, participatory culture. For reasons which will be considered in the next section, these regional aspirations were never realised and the crucial imbalance between regional and national cultural development remained.

The interlocking relationships described by Dewey and Mumford, between individual and community and between cultural and social life, provided an elegant theoretical framework for the federal arts projects' attempt to 'reposition' the artist.

However this framework depended on idealising each component in the relationship, the artist, the audience and the state.

Both Dewey and Mumford argued that individual artistic creativity was grounded in collective experience. Instead of being a constraint, the relationship between artist and community was thus a source of freedom; freed from the constraints of the marketplace and the distorting influence of the connoisseur, American artists, according to Cahill, “should not be held in any conventional channel”, confident of at least some following in their ‘home’ community within a nation of cultural consumers. Popular taste was likewise not to be stereotyped as a unified stylistic pattern; echoing Dewey, Cahill argued against “literalism”, “false localism” and “romanticising the past”, claiming that true “imaginative realism” meant “a genuine recovery of emotion” (Cahill 1936, 30 - 35). Contrary to the stereotypical view of the Federal Art Project as a bastion of regionalism or social realism (a reading based primarily on the murals division, not on the more numerous and diverse output of the fine arts and graphics divisions), abstract artists like Stuart Davis also found the arts projects congenial to their work (McKinzie 1973, 108 - 109). The diversity of artistic styles was premised upon a diversity of public responses to art; abstract art was thrown into relief by its social context, as in the recently restored Williamsburg murals created for Brooklyn’s Williamsburg Housing Project in 1936⁷⁰.

The formula required a massive change in the pattern of cultural consumption, a freedom from bureaucratic interference at the local level and a leap of faith among artists themselves. First the traditional concentration of cultural consumption in the metropolitan elites would need to be replaced by a new diversity of regional publics;

⁷⁰ Described as the first “nonobjective public murals in the United States”, the murals feature the work of four abstract artists. Their location in a public housing project forced the artists to consider the context of their work, both in terms of the physical space and the ways in which the space was used by residents. The murals, newly restored in 1990 after long neglect, are on long-term loan to the Brooklyn Museum from the New York City Housing Authority.

at the federal level, this would entail 'decentralising' the arts projects, allowing regional communities to jettison metropolitan 'standards' if necessary. Secondly, local administrators would have to resist the temptation to interpose their own version of 'community' taste, thereby preempting the outcome of the dialogue between artist and audience or succumbing to a narrower, utilitarian administrative or political agenda. Finally artists would have to abandon the safety net of conventional metropolitan 'standards' and appeal to the new 'regional' audiences; they would also have to expose the private, 'visionary' processes of artistic creation to public scrutiny.

At each level these leaps of faith were not made. The ancient antagonism between federal and state government complicated attempts to decentralise artistic production and consumption. Federal directors were not prepared to surrender political control of the projects to local administrators whom they suspected of elitism and self-interest. Local sponsors in turn impressed upon project artists their preferences for "realistically portrayed landscapes and flowers" which finished their days languishing in Washington warehouses (McKinzie 1973, 114); local theatre projects mimicked Broadway conventions and production values. Federal and local administrators sniped at each other; Karal Ann Marling (1982) describes the "procedural chaos" of conflicting bureaucratic instructions for artists working on the Section's post office murals. Abstract artists such as Isamu Noguchi struggled not so much with the real interests and tastes of the public as with bureaucratic codes based on narrow definitions of accessibility and usefulness. Finally artists subjected themselves to their own internalised perceptions of public taste; O'Connor notes a degree of personal guilt among artists pursuing a personal aesthetic which they felt to be "out of step with the dominant utilitarian notion that only what is useful can be considered beautiful" (O'Connor 1973, 23). This guilt was reinforced by bullying from local administrators and political interests, and by the artist's own desire to

‘belong’ in a broad artistic movement (the ‘conventional channel’ described by Cahill) instead of exploring the backwaters of local and regional taste.

Artists clung to their role as privileged outsiders, reinforced by their ‘professional’ economic status within the WPA. Administrators remained trapped in sectional disputes between the states and federal government and used the arts projects to support local political objectives and national cultural ambitions. Above all the arts projects were tied to a government relief mission which reinforced the specialised professional status of artists and the metropolitan bias of cultural consumption against the ideals of democratisation and decentralisation. These constraints form the subject of the next section.

3.6 Democratisation and Decentralisation

Cultural democratisation and decentralisation represented the strategic key to the new relationships between art and society outlined by Dewey and Mumford. However, as Nobuko Kawashima points out, ‘decentralisation’ does not necessarily refer simply to the provision of ‘culture for all’; this is what Kawashima calls ‘cultural decentralisation’ (Kawashima 1997). Decentralisation can also refer to rearrangements of geographical distribution and political structure. These different versions of decentralisation are in turn associated by Kawashima with a variety of policy positions, not just the policy of ‘cultural democratisation’ or ‘culture for all’. In this section I will consider how the arts projects pursued different ‘cultural’, ‘geographical’ and ‘political’ versions of ‘decentralisation’ simultaneously. In the end these policies worked against each other, undermining the more important and overriding policy goal of ‘cultural democratisation’.

Both Holger Cahill and Hallie Flanagan saw cultural decentralisation as the route to a new indigenous American culture, rooted in local communities. Here 'cultural decentralisation' was virtually synonymous with 'cultural democratisation', directed at the 'repositioning' of art and artists away from the traditional centres of artistic production and consumption, the discovery of new 'non-traditional' audiences and the broadening of community participation in cultural activities, rather than at any geographical shift in resources or decision-making. This objective overlapped with a more straightforward goal of geographical deconcentration, aimed at building up regional constituencies of support outside the metropolitan north east; this objective was a pragmatic response to political criticism from the Congress and a recognition that the long-term viability of the projects would depend on local and state funding taking up the slack once the federal 'emergency' funding was terminated.

To some extent these two versions of 'decentralisation' worked against each other; geographical deconcentration and political devolution of decision-making to the states did not necessarily guarantee a change in the balance of cultural participation. Deconcentration was not democratisation. When the remnants of the federal arts projects were eventually transferred to state control in 1939, the effect was to recentralise control of the projects in local bureaucracy, not to open up new channels of communication between artists and communities. Holger Cahill and Hallie Flanagan adopted different approaches to cultural decentralisation. Flanagan used central control to challenge local bureaucracy, local elites and local concentrations of cultural resources and political power. Cahill allowed much greater autonomy to local administrators. Politically Cahill's approach was the more durable; without necessarily achieving a more 'democratic' distribution of cultural opportunities and resources, the Federal Art Project succeeded where the Federal Theatre Project failed, in building up a local profile in the south and west of the country. The perceived 'centralisation' of the Federal Theatre Project was a primary reason for its

early abolition; the geographical deconcentration of the Federal Art Project allowed it to make the transition to local state control from 1939 to 1943 discussed in the next section.

The problems of democratisation and decentralisation were complicated by the political antagonism between federal and state administrators and by the relief requirements. WPA relief regulations dictated that local projects had to be set up in response to the number of qualified unemployed people in the area. For the same reason, they also prevented the transfer of personnel outside the state where they had originally been registered for relief. The federal arts projects were thus bound to be concentrated in areas of previously high artistic employment; New York City, suffering the fall-out from Broadway's commercial failures and long a magnet for artists of all disciplines, many of whom were now 'unemployed', was one such centre of concentration. For the Federal Art Project, New York City accounted for approximately 45% of the total workforce in 1937; 75% were concentrated in just 25 cities which contained only 20% of the total population (McKinzie 1973, 93; McDonald 1969, 388). For the Federal Theatre Project, the equivalent figures were somewhat higher, confirming its reputation as the most centralised of all the federal arts projects (McDonald 1969, 282).

As already noted, the relief requirements also worked against attempts to reposition the artist in relation to the community. Professional classification, which focused on creative ability as the primary selection criterion, perpetuated traditional roles and encouraged a perception that the community and educational activities which had featured strongly before 1935 were 'second-class' activities. Professional actors resented being delegated to educational projects (McDonald 1969, 565), while administrators (including Cahill) saw the 'non-creative' projects as a convenient means of absorbing "less gifted" artists (McKinzie 1973, 141; Matthews 1967,

184). The labour unions were suspicious of amateur activity at a time of widespread professional unemployment (Matthews 1967, 192); Equity warned of an influx into the profession of “stage-struck high school seniors or frustrated housewives” (Matthews 1967, 244). WPA administrators objected to community and educational activities on the same grounds. Not surprisingly artists remained concentrated in the traditional areas of activity, in the ‘creative’ arts, not in the new roles of animateurs and educators. It is worth remembering that the Federal Art Project’s heralded community art centre employed only 10% of FAP staff in 1936 (rising to 25% under state control in 1939), as compared with the approximately 50% who continued to be employed in “the production of works of art” by the mural, easel, sculpture and graphics divisions (McKinzie 1973, 105; McDonald 1969, 422).

Hallie Flanagan regarded decentralisation of resources as a prerequisite for democratisation; only a regionally based, local theatre could build a relationship with audiences and become integrated into community life as a ‘social institution’. The argument that cultural democracy depended on local cultural institutions was directly inspired by the little theatre movement (Flanagan 1940, 23). According to Kenneth MacGowan, the little theatre movement “savors of the democracy of Thomas Jefferson as surely as Broadway is a dramatization of federalism and centralization. The local theatre is the aesthetic expression of states’ rights.” (MacGowan 1929, 20). Frederick Koch had projected a “people’s theatre” (a phrase often invoked by Flanagan) as “an imaginative, a spiritual expression of our tradition of democracy” (Koch 1940, 64). At the same time Flanagan sought to retain central control over policy; local cultural resources did not mean local political control. Thus she proposed a national structure with regional roots, a “federation of theatres” in which “the general policy and programme would be outlined in Washington, but the carrying out with modifications dictated by local conditions would rest with the states” (Flanagan 1940, 23).

As a result of the WPA relief requirements referred to above, Flanagan's original regional plan could not be implemented and activities were overwhelmingly concentrated in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, with a plethora of smaller, weaker units scattered in smaller towns and cities across the countries. As Jane De Hart Matthews notes, "the foundation stones for a regionally centered national theatre had, in short, been dumped in three large piles with a few pebbles scattered about elsewhere" (Matthews 1967, 60). Meanwhile the political and financial pressure for geographical deconcentration increased. As a result of its controversial productions and militant staff, the New York City Unit rapidly established a prominent reputation within the project, provoking counter-measures from the WPA in Washington. First, in November 1936, the WPA reduced the numbers of non-relief personnel allowed to the arts projects, bringing Federal One into line with other WPA programmes; the measure was apparently aimed at the top-heavy New York City units, criticised by the WPA for their high supervisory costs. Then in July 1937 the WPA announced across the board cuts to Federal One for the next financial year. The arts projects were now increasingly dependent on local contributions, especially to cover non-labour costs; a higher proportion of decentralised, community-based activities in order to appeal to local 'sponsors' thus became "a present necessity" (Matthews 1967, 141).

In response to these pressures, Flanagan embarked on a belated and somewhat desperate decentralisation drive through 1937 and 1938, while still attempting to retain central control over policy direction. Firstly Flanagan attempted to introduce touring companies to take work outside the major cities into smaller communities. Secondly she attempted to assign "a nucleus of qualified professionals" to form "competent producing units" for a community programme; this followed the successful model in North Carolina where professional directors had been working

with eighteen amateur 'community' groups. The touring plan was foiled mainly by the WPA regulations on transferring personnel and local resistance from WPA administrators at the state and city level, following a now familiar pattern (Matthews 1967, 181 - 5). In early 1938 a Chicago plan to distribute productions from the metropolitan 'hub' to outlying districts (Matthews 1967, 188 - 91) was foiled by a WPA ruling banning any touring activity without prior approval from Washington, based on a desire to maintain financial controls over the project (McDonald 1969, 576). Following these administrative blockages, the 'Big Three' of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles continued to dominate in what was to be the final year of the Federal Theatre Project's life.

While Flanagan recognised the need to counter New York's dominance on the project, geographical deconcentration was not her primary concern. Significantly her various decentralisation plans worked through a 'top-down' model, with expertise and influence being deployed from the centre (usually New York) outwards. Her insistence on decentralising resources and centralising political control stemmed from her desire to circumvent localised centres of cultural dominance, where the old habits of theatre professionals and the legacy of Broadway stood in the way of the 'democratic', participatory theatre to which Flanagan aspired. These centres of resistance were to be found in the regions as well as in New York City.

Senior Federal Theatre Project staff in New York, mostly old Broadway hands, were reluctant to abandon the old habits of commercial management. At a production conference in 1936, they tabled plans for 79 productions, using 177 sets and 2672 costumes over 6 months (Federal Theatre Project 1936). Later Flanagan would lament New York's "provincialism" and the "lack of any sense of the theatre we were trying to build" (Flanagan 1940, 119). Broadway's influence extended into the

regions. In Chicago Flanagan commented that the Chicago unit was “at its best when it was itself and at its worst when it imitated anything including its own stock-company past” (Flanagan 1940, 137). In Connecticut the local Federal Theatre unit recycled the Broadway formula, and “fashionable first night crowds led the public to believe the plays were social, not theatre events” (Flanagan 1940, 232 - 6). In Seattle, where the local WPA had vetoed a black production of *Lysistrata*, the Washington State Director informed Flanagan of his preference for “the usual type of theatre-goers because an audience that looks poor is apt to give an impression of being radical” (Flanagan 1940, 308).

Flanagan and the regional project staff had radically different objectives in seeking to ‘decentralise’ the Federal Theatre Project. For Flanagan the objective was to challenge the conventions of Broadway-bound commercial theatre management and reach new audiences; ‘decentralisation’ meant shifting the project’s centre of gravity from conventional plays and fashionable first night crowds to a broader ‘popular’ audience. Thus she disparaged “the wealthy theatre patrons who might attend the occasional high-priced road show” and “the university audience, which was geographically remote and busy with social and academic affairs” as “useless” (Flanagan 1940, 307 - 308); such tactics were merely repeating “the sort of thing that landed several thousand people in the lap of the United States government” (Flanagan 1940, 240). The regional units saw decentralisation in terms of building up local constituencies of support. Thus according to Elizabeth Cavendish, directors of the Connecticut unit “vainly courted social influentials” instead of cultivating their “natural allies in labour and ethnic organizations” (Cavendish 1986, 155). These two versions of decentralisation cancelled each other out, caught between the regional attempt to ‘recentralise’ the project around local centres of political and economic power, and Flanagan’s attempt to circumvent localised centres of excellence in order to reach ‘the people’. In Connecticut the result was “a failure to

win the unquestioned support of any significant group or class in the communities in which it operated” (Cavendish 1986, 155).

For Flanagan, decentralisation was an attempt to challenge American theatre’s fixation on the symbolic centre of ‘Broadway’. In 1936 she launched a central Audience Research Department, aiming to challenge the commercial theatre’s received wisdom of mass-marketing of Broadway ‘product’. In 1937, as part of a reorganisation of the New York units of Federal One, Flanagan herself took over direct responsibility for the running of the New York City unit alongside her duties as national director and moved her office from Washington to New York. While her move was partly intended to restore administrative and financial controls, it also allowed her to tackle the influence of commercial theatre managers on the project at source. In 1937 she combined the Play Policy Board and the National Play Board into a new National Service Bureau, the primary function of which was to screen out plays the director’s office deemed inappropriate. Disingenuously, Flanagan justified the move as a form of administrative streamlining and claimed she did not intend to “dictate individual plays”, only to provide a “suggestion of emphasis” (Flanagan 1940, 45). The Bureau also provided a resource for equipment, ideas and expertise; in 1938 a Federal Summer Theatre was introduced to provide an injection of new ideas, particularly for the smaller, more isolated units of the Project.

Flanagan’s ‘decentralisation’ strategy had from the start depended on a centralisation of political authority first in Washington, then in New York. McDonald suggests that Flanagan was a centrist who did not understand “local conditions” and attempted to impose avant-garde theatre on regional audiences. On the contrary, Flanagan was all too aware of local conditions. Central direction was a necessary evil, aimed firstly at challenging metropolitan conventions at source, and secondly at persuading local theatres to develop their own independent programming and

marketing strategies instead of mimicking Broadway standards and chasing fictional metropolitan audiences in small-town America. The other side of Flanagan's decentralisation plan, a deployment of resources and expertise from the centre to the regions, was effectively curtailed by WPA regulations forbidding the transfer of personnel (including touring companies) across regional lines, and by a series of punitive funding cuts instituted by the WPA in 1937, 1938 and 1939. Intended to rein in central administrative overheads, these sanctions also succeeded in stopping Flanagan's belated decentralisation drive in its tracks (Matthews 1967, 245).

The Federal Theatre Project remained the most centralised of all the federal arts projects, with activities overwhelmingly concentrated in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. Even at its peak in 1936, activity was notably thin in the south and west of the country, while in seven of the southern states there was no presence of any kind (McDonald 1969, 523). Thus the Federal Theatre Project was vulnerable in the political heartland of Roosevelt's opponents, especially following Republican gains in the November 1938 elections. The failure to decentralise geographically and to build local constituencies of support was the decisive factor in the Federal Theatre Project's premature death in 1939.

The Federal Art Project was considerably more successful than the Federal Theatre Project in building support in the regions. The key to the Federal Art Project's decentralisation strategy was the 'community art centre' which gave the project a strong symbolic presence in the south and west of the country, where the Federal Theatre Project was especially weak; Florida, for example, contained ten community art centres (White 1987, 170 - 175). The Federal Art Project was nevertheless subject to the same restrictions as the rest of Federal One; artists were still prevented from transferring across state lines by differing state relief requirements, residency qualifications for relief and the reluctance by state WPA

officials to take on the public charges of another state (McKinzie 1973, 93 - 94). Overall, project activities remained overwhelmingly concentrated in the metropolitan north-east. Seen in this context, the community art centres were an ingenious solution to Federal One's in-built metropolitan bias and provided a bridge-head for the period of state control beginning in 1939.

The first of the Federal Art Project's community art centres was established in Raleigh, North Carolina in December 1935. According to John F White, a total of 53 centres and 37 'extension galleries' operated between 1935 and 1941 (White 1987, 170 - 175); McKinzie's figures are rather higher, reaching a peak of 103 centres in 1941, but the pattern of steady expansion is the same (McKinzie 1973, 142 - 3; cf. Harris 1991). The typical community art centre divided its programme between participation (classes for children and adults) and appreciation (exhibitions, lectures and discussions). Classes avoided a prescriptive, classical approach to instruction and were extremely diverse; alongside painting, drawing and pottery, approximately 30 - 40% of classes were in handicrafts and some centres even offered musical instruction (McKinzie 1973, 144). Exhibitions included national and regional touring programmes of work by project artists but also included work produced within the centre; for example in Jacksonville's Negro Art Gallery, student exhibitions outnumbered official WPA touring exhibitions by approximately four to one (O'Connor 1973, 217). Centres attempted to fulfil a 'useful' civic function, in the tradition of Dana's Newark museum⁷¹, involving themselves in local concerns such as town planning, home decoration and public art (O'Connor 1973, 43); the Walker Art Center in Minnesota included an 'Everyday Gallery', featuring 'useful gifts', principles of industrial design and new home appliances (White 1987, 24 - 25). Other innovations included a touring 'art caravan', a precursor of the 'art bus' of the 1970s (O'Connor 1973, 252 - 253).

⁷¹ For Dana's influence on Cahill and the FAP, see footnote at the beginning of section 3.3.

Statistics for the new centres were impressive, sometimes improbably so⁷². Jonathan Harris estimates that in 1940 the 84 community art centres together attracted between 12 and 15 million people over the year, and involved approximately 350,000 people per month in some form of artistic activity (Harris 1991, 253). The Jacksonville Negro Art Gallery claimed to have been attended by 40,000 people over three years, including over 35,000 'Negroes'; this amounted to half of the town's Negro population and one third of the city's total population (O'Connor 1973, 216). The Harlem Arts Center, one of the most successful centres under the direction of Gwendolyn Bennett, claimed 4,000 attendances per month (O'Connor 1973, 214). The community art centres were supplemented by other free standing educational programmes. According to McKinzie (1973, 130), the FAP employed 465 art teachers in New York City in summer 1936; teachers worked through various social agencies, including settlement houses and a travelling workshop, reaching a total of 50,000 adults and children each week. Cuts in New York reduced the programme's reach to around 30,000 in 1938 and around 10,000 in 1940; at the same time the curriculum expanded to cover 23 subjects and the proportion of adults to children rose from 20% in 1936 to 35% in 1940. According to WPA statistics, FAP education programmes reached a total of 2 million people in 160 different locations, including half a million in New York City (McKinzie 1973, 130).

Behind the statistics, the community art centres attempted to combine two forms of decentralisation. At one level, they were an attempt to 'reposition' the artist from the 'conventional channel' of the north eastern metropolis into mainstream community life, in line with Cahill's nostalgic attempt to reconnect artists with "a fresh poetry of the soil" (Cahill 1936, 36). At the same time they represented a

⁷² The FAP tended to use official reports and statistics as a promotional tool (McKinzie 1973, 182). In some cases 'official' attendance figures for community art centres exceeded the entire town population (O'Connor 1973, 209).

shrewd political concession to the project's opponents in the south, granting 'extension galleries' to 'social influentials' who might return the favour when WPA appropriations came to the vote in Congress. As with the Federal Theatre Project, there was a tendency for these objectives to cancel each other out; concessions of political power to local elites undermined the 'democratising' intentions of the community art centre.

Unlike the Federal Theatre Project, the community art centre represented a policy of 'cultural decentralisation *with* political decentralisation' (Kawashima 1997); Cahill was less inclined to invoke the central authority of Washington against local concentrations of power. He actively encouraged local political 'ownership' of the community art centres by inviting 'cooperating sponsors' to contribute money and support in kind to local projects. This was a break with Federal One policy which, as already noted, made the federal government the sole 'sponsor' of local projects, replacing the local sponsor required by other WPA projects. While the official statistics showed that local contributions to the community art centre programme had reached a modest total of \$850,000 by 1941 (McKinzie 1973, 143) and the centres remained overwhelmingly dependent on federal funds, the local input (usually amounting to between \$1500 and \$2000 per centre towards building and maintenance costs) was impressive in the middle of a depression and reinforced the sense of local involvement and ownership. The fundraising strategy was based on multiple small contributions, encouraging a broad spread of symbolic ownership; in Spokane, for example, the largest single donation in a total of \$3840.54 raised over 3 months was \$200, with many families contributing less than a dollar and schools running 'penny drives' (White 1987, 100 - 101).

However, once the initial "small-town barn-raising atmosphere" dissipated, political and financial authority tended to gravitate back to local elites; only 8% of

Spokane's 1938 contributors resubscribed in 1941. The illusion of 'community' ownership proved difficult to sustain. Elite patronage reclaimed the community arts centre through the local chamber of commerce and 'society' fundraising events.

The reconcentration of political power and financial control at the local level undermined the 'democratising' mission of the federal directorate in Washington. Local administrators, local chambers of commerce and local art societies tended to see the community art centre as a means of making local people more 'art conscious', the first step towards a permanent municipal art gallery or museum. Meanwhile Washington resolutely emphasised that 'participation' was the only route to a real, broad-based appreciation of art. The conflict between 'appreciation' and 'participation in the community art centre betrayed a conflict in the decentralising mission, recalling the rows between Flanagan and local theatre project administrators in Connecticut and Washington state. While classes emphasised community creativity and participation, touring exhibitions imported the cultural 'standards' of New York to Main Street. 'Art appreciation' was increasingly used to bolster the cultural leadership of the local elite, with curators preferring 'traditional' work over the more 'modern' artists supplied by Washington. In Oklahoma Washington officials rebuked the centre director for using the word 'museum' instead of 'centre' in official memos and for using the 'Society' pages of the local paper to publicise gallery events. In Phoenix conservative board members objected to the provision of free classes for 'underprivileged children' because of their unseemly appearance. In Chicago local high society closed ranks to exclude artists from dedication ceremonies in 1941. In Spokane city officials complained that "present exhibitions appeal only to those interested in the fine arts and have a limited appeal"⁷³.

⁷³ See Nicholas A Calcagno and Barbara K Scott, "The Federal Gallery System in Oklahoma: a successful experiment" (White 1987, 37 - 78); Daniel A Hall, "A WPA Art Center in Phoenix 1937 - 40" (White 1987, 114 - 130); Margaret Goss Burroughs, "Chicago's South Side Community Art Center: a personal recollection" (White 1987, 131 - 144); Sue Ann Kendall, "The Spokane Art Center" (White 1987, 98 - 113).

Instead of contributing to democratisation, 'decentralisation' became a battle for political control between Washington and the states. Flanagan and Cahill sought to 'reposition' the artist in relation to an idealised community, free from the tyrannies of middle class taste and conventional 'standards'; however, as Thomas Benton discovered in Missouri, provincial elites were just as prone to artistic snobbery and imported aristocratic 'taste' as their New York counterparts⁷⁴. Cahill conceded political authority to the states in pursuit of an idealised, inclusive version of community which turned a blind eye to localised concentrations of political and economic power. Flanagan retained central political authority in order to confront these local concentrations of power. Neither strategy was successful in relation to the overall aim of democratisation. However, Cahill did succeed where Flanagan failed in achieving a degree of geographical deconcentration and in making symbolic concessions to local state autonomy. The longer term consequences of these policies will be considered in the next section.

3.7 State Rights and Utilitarianism 1939 - 1943

Under state control, the federal arts projects experienced a radical and comprehensive 'decentralisation', which included the complete destruction of the Federal Theatre Project (perceived as the most centralised of the projects) and the surrender of federal authority over the remaining projects. This geographical and political decentralisation, as I have already implied, did not amount to the cultural decentralisation and democratisation sought by Cahill and Flanagan. In this section I will consider the period of state control as a new form of hegemony in which the 'unstable equilibrium' between competing policy objectives on the arts projects tilted decisively in favour of instrumentalism and local service provision.

⁷⁴ "Those who affect art with a big 'A' do so with their eyes on Europe just as they do in New York" (Benton 1939, 274).

In June 1939 Congress retaliated decisively against the presumptions of the arts projects in a drastic reorganisation of the WPA and Federal One. The Federal Theatre Project was abolished and the remaining arts projects were placed under the control of the states; all arts projects were further required to receive a minimum of 25% of their overall costs from the states, bringing them into line with other WPA projects. The federal directorates were reduced to a consultative role and only Holger Cahill remained of the original four federal project directors. Employment on projects was limited to a maximum of eighteen months, further reinforcing the temporary status of the projects and weeding out the more experienced staff. Administrative costs and non-relief funding were cut, removing the possibility of strategic planning. With their ambitions now effectively curtailed, the arts projects continued to exist primarily as service providers to the states until their eventual abolition in 1943.

The enforced decentralisation of the 1939 reorganisation took the earlier emphasis on community accountability and 'social usefulness' to its logical conclusion. From January 1940 the WPA designated the remaining arts projects as 'community service projects'. 'Applied arts' enjoyed a resurgence; according to Richard McKinzie, whereas the emphasis before 1939 had been on 'creative arts', by 1940 over 4,100 of the 5,818 remaining WPA workers were employed in the 'practical arts' (McKinzie 1973, 129). Following Pearl Harbour in 1941 the arts projects were absorbed within the WPA War Services Sub-Division and committed to the war effort; 'useful' activities were stepped up, including the production of propaganda and information posters, contour maps, furnishing and decorating military facilities, providing training aids and classes on subjects such as camouflage. The new regulations played to the community art centres' strengths; their number continued to grow, from 66 centres in June 1939 to "over a hundred art centers and

extensions” by 1943 (McDonald 1969, 416). As other visual arts programmes were cut back, the proportion of WPA artists employed by the community arts centre and education programmes combined rose from less than 10% in 1935 to 25% in 1939 (McDonald 1969, 422).

Instead of the ‘repositioning’ of art and artists sought by Cahill and Flanagan, political decentralisation resulted in a shift in the balance of political power from national to state control. In turn the reduction of the federal directorate to a merely consultative role and the replacement of a central source of ‘discretionary’ funding by the new dependence on sponsorship by the states produced a new utilitarianism. According to Richard McKinzie, “federal emphasis on creative production, skill maintenance and rehabilitation gave way, under state direction, to ‘service’ to sponsors” (McKinzie 1973, 164).

This new utilitarianism was a product not of ‘community’ control or accountability but of political expediency. Instead of forging a new relationship between artist and community, the post-1939 arts projects vested power in the local state bureaucracies, which bent the projects to their own ‘useful’ purposes. Local administrators imposed a stereotypical idea of ‘usefulness’ on the artist and implemented a crude instrumental cultural policy which bypassed the kind of ‘community’ input sought by Cahill and Flanagan. Crucially the output of the projects, for example a morale-boosting exhibition of military equipment and uniforms in a community art centre or the design of a government information leaflet, did not grow out of any dynamic interaction between artist and community. The objectives were dictated by administrators and politicians according to their view of the public’s best interests; the products were predictable and stereotypical, designed to meet the sponsor’s brief. Nor did such work have any long term value; it was a disposable product designed to meet a specific need of the moment, not to further dialogue and debate.

The new utilitarianism also capitalised on certain internal tendencies within the projects. First of all the surrender of artistic autonomy to bureaucratic controls followed the 'committed' artist's instinct for self-sacrifice. The "highly utilitarian and formalist bias" of socialist realism propagated by the John Reed Clubs in the late 1920s and early 1930s had taught artists the joys of artistic self-denial. The War Services Sub-Division also capitalised on earlier tendencies towards mass manipulation and propaganda; these tendencies have been noted in the Federal Theatre Project's later Living Newspapers such as *Power*⁷⁵ together with their earlier roots in the Progressive era pageant. Finally, the self-serving agenda of local politicians had emerged as a consistent obstacle for the federal arts projects in their efforts to decentralise artistic production and distribution to 'community' control. Where Flanagan had attempted to bypass local interest groups by combining decentralisation of production with centralisation of policy, Cahill's uncensorious, non-interventionist approach had allowed local sponsors to exert a disproportionate influence on local projects (McKinzie 1973, 110 - 112).

The 'regionalism' of the federal arts projects depended on a system of checks and balances between national and local tiers of government. Both Cahill and Flanagan saw cultural regionalism as the key to a new national culture; thus according to Alan Lawson, "the concept of a culturally unified nation of distinctive local groups was a close analogue to the cooperative commonwealth that the New Deal sought" (Lawson 1985, 160). The balance between individual development and regional and

⁷⁵ *Power* was a resounding vindication of government energy policy at a time when the government was pushing through a controversial policy to take the utilities into public ownership; this was precisely the method used by the Progressive era pageant in relation to civic reform twenty years earlier. Whereas earlier Living Newspapers had examined issues from all sides without endorsing any specific policy (cf. O'Connor 1990, 343 - 344), *Power* used manipulative stagecraft including verbatim quotations from senators opposed to public ownership to endorse the New Deal party line (Vacha 1986, 79 - 80; McDonald 1969, 533 - 535). According to Matthews, both Hallie Flanagan and Harry Hopkins apparently failed to recognise a pro-New Deal viewpoint as party political (Matthews 1967, 78)

national institutions was the essence of Mumford's 'organic' regionalism and the 'new individualism' of John Dewey, which provided the theoretical framework for the cultural policies of Flanagan and Cahill. However, this idealised 'politics of equilibrium' was threatened by the long-standing political tensions between federal authority and 'states' rights', which were aggravated by the structural anomalies of the federal arts projects.

While Mumford and other sociologists (eg. Odum and Moore 1938) argued for a 'cultural', 'organic' regionalism based on a balance between regional and national institutions, the southern agrarians argued for a 'sectionalist' regionalism, rooted in a rural reaction against metropolitan dominance and in political divisions which dated back to the American Civil War (Davidson 1938; Davidson et al., 1930). For Davidson, the political challenge for regionalism (or 'sectionalism') was to liberate the regions (especially in the South and the West) from the overbearing power of federal government, 'the leviathan state'. This power was concentrated in the North Eastern cities. He regarded the 'national' culture of the United States as a myth disguising the interests of the old Yankee metropolis. Roosevelt's gestures towards regional culture and regional autonomy (for example the Tennessee Valley Authority) were accordingly viewed as "sectional imperialism... operating under the Federal mask" (Davidson 1938, 27). The sectionalists occasionally seemed to be refighting the battles of the Civil War, as when Davidson demanded "the power for the South to preserve its bi-racial social system" without being "sniped at with weapons of Federal legality" (ibid., 126); in the 1930 manifesto for the southern agrarian movement, *I'll Take My Stand*, 'sectionalist' arguments shaded into demands for segregation and secession.

Seen in this context, the decentralisation strategies of Cahill and Flanagan carried a strong political charge. The Federal Theatre Project's perceived bias towards New

York culture and Washington political control fuelled 'sectionalist' criticism of the arts projects, especially in the south. On the other hand, Cahill's programme of political decentralisation, in particular the community art centres, occasionally meant conceding political ground to 'sectionalist' interests; for example, the Federal Art Project was forced to comply with segregationist policies in the southern states, resulting in a separate system of 'Negro Art Centers' in the south (Harris 1991, 256).

For the 'cultural regionalists' the ultimate goal was not 'states' rights' but individual rights, liberated from national and local concentrations of power. 'Cultural regionalism' thus attempted to counterbalance federal and state authority in order to realise the 'universal' aspirations of the people (Odum and Moore 1938, 3 - 34); according to Felix Frankfurter and J M Landis, the region was a means of overcoming "the false antithesis embodied in the shibboleths 'States' Rights' and 'National Supremacy'" (Odum and Moore 1938, 27). 'Cultural regionalism' was thus integral to the 'democratising' objectives of Cahill and Flanagan, a means of releasing popular cultural aspirations from national and local 'centres of excellence' and of basing cultural pluralism on regional diversity, 'a nation of regions'. Where cultural regionalism was based on reconciliation, political regionalism or 'sectionalism' was based on strident confrontation in the defence of 'states' rights'. In 1939, the 'equilibrium' sought by the federal arts projects, even if it had only rarely been achieved, was finally surrendered to the 'sectionalist' claims of the states.

Much of the stereotypical criticism of the federal arts projects refers primarily to the period beginning in 1939 when they had ceased to be federally controlled. The 'hegemonic' critique of the arts projects (Harris 1987; Kidd 1988) belongs strictly to this period of their existence. A notable feature of the Federal Art Project before

1939 (in contrast with the Section) was its inclusiveness in style and content and its failure to impose or construct a coherent collective ideology from the work of individual artists and separate regional cultures. When Harris (1987) claims that the Federal Art Project represented a hegemonic discourse, he is referring primarily to murals in prisons and hospitals created after 1939. Harris suggests that the Federal Art Project opposed modernist individualism and sought to use art as the instrumental embodiment of the will of the State; the murals were “as much concerned with ‘civilising’ the artist... as with the return of the anti-social offender to the National Community” (Harris 1987, 39). Thus “art becomes both a therapy and a police tactic” (ibid., 42). However, this instrumentalism took place at the local level after 1939, when state administrators could enjoy free rein over artists without the counterbalancing influence of an effective federal directorate.

The repolarisation of the arts projects after 1939 into instruments of local government policy, and the resurgence of anti-individualism, utilitarianism and ‘states’ rights’ in New Deal cultural policy, followed a familiar hegemonic pattern. The fundamental contradiction between culturalist / idealist and Marxist / utilitarian conceptions of culture which had produced the federal arts projects in the first place eventually re-erupted to destroy them. Where Flanagan and Cahill had sought an ‘unstable equilibrium’ between national and regional cultural identities and between individual and collective expression, they had initially struggled against the structural centralisation of Federal One and the ingrained individualism of their colleagues. In time the balance of political power swung back from Washington to the states, and the arts projects were swamped by the collective demands of state governments and the utilitarian requirements of the war effort. In the end, hegemony was based not on ‘the Will of the State’ but the wills of the states.

3.8 Crisis and equilibrium

Reviewing the material discussed in this chapter, it is possible to trace the underlying pattern of contradiction, crisis and equilibrium noted in the introduction. In concluding this chapter, I will review this historical pattern in relation to Gramsci's theory of hegemony. I will also link the policies of the arts projects to their contradictory origins in nineteenth century idealism and utilitarianism and to the underlying contradiction between idealist and materialist conceptions of culture which forms the theme of this study.

Holger Cahill and Hallie Flanagan recognised a moment of crisis in U.S. culture and cultural policy which reflected the national economic crisis. The old system of cultural production, in which an elite of individual artistic talents was brokered by commercial entrepreneurs to a minority of middle class patrons, had failed both economically and aesthetically. Accordingly Cahill and Flanagan sought a new system of cultural production in which artists and communities worked together to construct a grass-roots, indigenous American culture where both creativity and consumption were rooted in collective experience.

In support of this vision, they invoked a 'usable past' of 'coherent' democratic societies and harmonious, 'healthy' relationships between artist and community. While Flanagan compared the intimacy and immediacy of the little theatre movement and the workers' theatre with Broadway's boom and bust, Cahill contrasted the Mexican muralist's 'art of native social meaning' and the 'unity' of Pueblo culture, American folk art and Shaker craftsmanship with the American artist's meretricious individualism and the American patron's 'hero-worship' of imported masterpieces. Relating this tradition to the present 'crisis', Cahill described "a turn towards a more democratic point of view". Over the past three

hundred years art had “depended far more upon individual talent than upon tradition or group activity”, resulting in “an inclination towards extreme subjectivism and over-personalised expression” in “the modern period”. However this had changed “in the last few years” (i.e. since the creation of the federal arts projects in 1935). The solitary genius’ monopoly on artistic production and the connoisseur’s monopoly on artistic consumption were now being challenged by a “broad democratic participation in the creative experience” (O’Connor 1973, 35 - 36).

Fuelled by their vision of a ‘usable past’, Cahill and Flanagan anticipated and idealised a new equilibrium between artist and community. They had inherited some of the settlement worker’s faith in the cohesiveness and rationality of ‘community’, overlooking the vested interests and short term goals advanced by self-appointed ‘representatives’ and competing factions. They also trusted in the artist’s willingness to cooperate in the new experiment by surrendering a measure of control over their work. Their optimism on both counts was challenged by the broader political and ideological context of the arts projects, which ensured that the equilibrium sought by Cahill and Flanagan would remain the stuff of nostalgia.

Politically, the arts projects were part of a federal work programme mandated to employ accredited professionals from the relief rolls. This mandate reinforced the professional status of the artist and undermined attempts to involve amateurs and community groups; it also exacerbated the problem of metropolitan dominance and rural under-provision, since projects were required to respond to local unemployment conditions and the majority of unemployed artists were concentrated in the major eastern cities, especially in New York. Administratively, the arts projects had inherited the historic antagonism between Washington federalism and militant state ‘sectionalism’. While this antagonism dated back to the days of colonial rule and the civil war, it had been exacerbated by Roosevelt’s use of

Presidential powers to push through New Deal reforms. Within the WPA, Washington had encroached upon the authority of state administrators during the introduction of white collar relief in the early 1930s and again with the appointment of a separate federal directorate to the arts projects.

Ideologically, the arts projects had inherited two distinct cultural traditions from the cultural and educational reformers of the nineteenth century. The first was the artist-led 'culturalist' tradition, in which artists were the unacknowledged and unaccountable legislators of the community and great art was capable of transcending social divisions and social problems, either by dissolving them in a moment of 'uplift' or, more cynically, by excluding them from the canvas. This was the tradition with which the majority of project artists and local project managers were most familiar, schooled in the starry irrelevancies of Broadway theatre and the 'art for art's sake' of the Old Masters. Ironically even some of the avowedly 'committed' artists and 'Marxist' fellow-travellers belonged in this camp; while they were attracted by the arts projects' warm glow of community and a collective sense of political purpose, their primary concern was with their own artistic vision and they resented the demands on their work made by party spokespersons on behalf of 'the people'.

The other tradition inherited by the arts projects was the utilitarian tradition in which art was no longer valued for its own sake but as the means to a 'practical' end. Among state administrators and local politicians the urgency of immediate social and economic problems outweighed the artist's claim to a free hand. Thus instead of encouraging artists to engage with communities, many administrators saw the arts projects' 'usefulness' more pragmatically, as an opportunity to plug gaps in local service provision. Anyone familiar with contemporary local government arts policy will surely recognise this tendency. Local 'sponsors' and state politicians were

abetted by the committed artist's instinct for self-sacrifice; the alienated intellectual's self-destructive search for social usefulness in the 1930s replicated the 'subjective necessity' and the self-disgusted anti-culturism of the nineteenth century settlement worker.

Ideologically, the arts projects were forced to work through a contradiction between cultural idealism and cultural utilitarianism inherited from nineteenth century cultural institutions such as the settlement house. Politically they were constrained by their status as a relief programme, the conflicting agendas of artists, administrators, politicians and the public, and continuing tensions between Washington and the states. Inevitably, the harmonious 'equilibrium' sought by Cahill and Flanagan broke down in the face of these fundamental contradictions and confrontations. The projects eventually reverted to the incurable contradiction with which they had begun, between the complacent culturalism of unaccountable artists and middle class patrons who continued to pursue their solitary visions even as the surrounding edifice collapsed about them, and the crude utilitarianism of the state-run 'community projects'. This repolarisation was played out in the respective 'decentralisation' policies of the Federal Theatre Project and the Federal Art Project.

'Cultural decentralisation' for both Flanagan and Cahill was concerned with circumventing elite 'centres' of artistic production and consumption, in order to release community creativity; like the 'cultural regionalists' of the 1930s, they sought a balance between regional and national cultural authority, not just a redistribution of resources or of political decision-making. 'Cultural decentralisation' or 'regionalism' were only the means to the end of 'democratisation'. However, the federal arts projects were also forced to implement political and geographical forms of decentralisation in order to defuse criticisms of the cultural and political powers concentrated in New York and Washington. The

Federal Theatre Project attempted (unsuccessfully) to decentralise resources while retaining central political authority. The Federal Art Project attempted to decentralise both resources and political authority to the states.

In both cases, the outcome undermined the broader policy objective of democratisation, resulting in a reconcentration of cultural and political authority. For the Federal Theatre Project, political centralisation reinforced the cultural hegemony of the New York City Unit where a handful of producers ignored Flanagan's search for new audiences in favour of their own ambitious production plans (cf. Federal Theatre 1936). Instead they resolutely pursued a 'culturalist' agenda in which faith in the theatre outweighed Flanagan's insistence that "we are part of the economic life of America, that we are one with the worker on the stage and in the audience" and that "we are not a group of commercial managers but the representatives of a People's Theatre" (Federal Theatre Project 1936). The attitudes of the commercial theatre spread out from Broadway into the regions, reinforced by the glamorous controversy of the New York City Unit.

For the Federal Art Project, political decentralisation through the 'cooperating sponsor' strategy devolved authority to local politicians and administrators. After 1939 these political satellites spun out of federal control. Local sponsorship provided leverage for board members and local politicians to impose their own ideas and tastes on the projects, cutting out any possibility for interaction between artists and communities. Under state control from 1939 to 1943, the federal leviathan was replaced by the local machinery of self-serving politicians, businessmen and middle class board members; unaccountable artists were replaced by accountability to utilitarian bureaucrats and civic boosters.

The polarisation between a New York based cultural leadership, refusing Flanagan's demands for accountability, and a localised political leadership which replaced Cahill's vague communitarianism with local service delivery, is reflected in two stereotypical views of the arts projects' legacy. On one side, the period of state control from 1939 has come to symbolise the suppression of individual talents beneath crude utilitarianism and political expediency (eg. Harris 1995, Kidd 1988); fears of political censorship and State control, rooted in the 1930s, would repeatedly impede subsequent attempts to introduce federal arts funding in the U.S. (Larson 1983). On the other side the controversial productions of the New York City Unit of the Federal Theatre Project represent the glamorous irresponsibility of great art, flying in the face of incompetent political censors and crass administrators who fret over equity, access, and production budgets; this was the stereotype of 'artistic freedom' brokered by post-war U.S cultural diplomacy (Cockroft 1974). However influential these stereotypes may have been on subsequent cultural policy, this polarisation does not represent the real achievement of the arts projects.

What the arts projects achieved, if only fleetingly, was a recognition that individual artistic freedom and collective accountability might not be for ever incompatible. Between utilitarianism and culturalism, they opened the possibility of a third way, a conception of culture neither wholly the product of individual inspiration, nor wholly at the mercy of 'material forces', but the result of a continuing negotiation between artists and communities. The conception depended on a delicate balance of power between artists, administrators and audiences based on mutual trust and mutual risk. In the face of by escalating political, ideological and administrative confrontations, this balance would prove untenable and the projects would revert to 'culturalist' and 'utilitarian' stereotypes.

In Gramsci's terms, the arts projects represented a moment of 'unstable equilibrium', a temporary recasting of an incurable contradiction before old factions and prejudices solidified into a new dialectic. As such they followed the same process of contradiction, equilibrium and repolarisation as later experiments in cultural democracy, from Britain in the 1970s to France in the early 1980s. Inevitably the equilibrium sought by Cahill and Flanagan was not a permanent structure but a continuing process, providing a fleeting glimpse of future possibilities, a moment of crisis linking the contradictions of nineteenth century cultural policy with the twentieth century search for cultural democracy.

4. MEDIA ACCESS AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THE MOMENT OF MEDIA REFORM 1965 - 1990

In the last two chapters I considered two historical ‘moments’ of contradiction crisis in cultural policy. In this chapter I am returning to more recent dilemmas in cultural policy and to the theoretical debates outlined in the introduction, now transferred to the battleground of contemporary media studies. Having viewed the contradictions between idealist and materialist conceptions of culture from both sides in the previous two chapters, I will now attempt to move towards some form of synthesis. In the nineteenth century settlement house, an initially ‘culturalist’ attempt to reform individual ‘character’ through exposure to Arnoldian culture was contradicted by residual utilitarian tendencies and internalised ‘subjective’ conflicts. In the federal arts projects, a ‘materialist’ attempt to base cultural policy on the collective experience of ‘community’ was contradicted by residual culturalist ‘habits of thought’ and administrative structures. In recent media policy and media theory, elements of these patterns are repeated. What is new is an attempt to reconcile competing conceptions of ‘culture’ and ‘community’ within a new framework, drawing on Habermas’s concept of the ‘public sphere’ and on ‘public interest’ models of media access. I will suggest that the ‘public sphere’ offers a more precise and more flexible means of accommodating competing idealist and materialist conceptions than the vocabulary of ‘culture’ and ‘community’. Perhaps inevitably this reconciliation is initially more convincing on a theoretical than on a practical level, but I will close with some tentative suggestions of possible implications of this new theoretical framework for media policy and practice.

* * * *

4.1 Hegemony and Contradiction

The media access movement, like the British community arts movement, was closely linked to the theoretical critique of 'cultural hegemony' undertaken by the left in the late 1960s. To summarise the arguments discussed in chapter 1, the method of the 'hegemonic critique' deployed by the activists was to apply a 'materialist' view of culture (culture as determined by material economic interests and social forces) to an 'idealist' cultural policy or institution (culture as a collective aspiration to a general perfection or 'common good'). This 'hegemonic critique' was based on a simplistic distortion of Gramscian theory, reducing Gramsci's 'unstable equilibrium' of competing and contradictory social forces to a monolithic 'bloc' representing the class interests of the dominant or ruling class.

Out of this 'hegemonic critique' emerged a strategy which confused ends with means, concentrating on the reform of media structures (dismantling the 'power bloc' of monopoly / duopoly broadcasting) without considering the longer term problem of its replacement. The strategy was based on the revolutionary optimism of Marxist determinism; once structures of domination were somehow 'abolished', the liberalisation of the media and the liberation of the people would automatically follow. Of course neither Gramsci nor the majority of Marxists (including Marx?) would subscribe to such a straightforward analysis. The problem of hegemony, according to Gramsci, was more complex. The failure of media reform to deliver the promised liberalisation and liberation was proof of that resilient complexity Gramsci had expounded in relation to previous revolutionary 'failures'.

Hegemony, according to Gramsci, is rooted in contradiction. The apparently monolithic structure of British and U.S. broadcasting in the late 1950s and early 1960s was the product of an internal contradiction between conflicting ideas about

the purpose of broadcasting and of broadcasting policy. It was this internal contradiction which the opponents of the BBC and the networks set out to exploit, in a classic counter-hegemonic strategy. However, their own agenda was fraught with precisely the same contradictions; accordingly they did not resolve these contradictions, they simply rearranged them in a different form. Behind the mutual name-calling, the established broadcasters and their reformist adversaries shared a similar problem of reconciling contradictory 'idealist' and 'Marxist' conceptions of culture and cultural policy.

In Europe the tendency of broadcasting reform in the 1970s and early 1980s was towards liberalisation, decentralisation and deregulation. The tendency in the 1980s and 1990s has been towards reregulation, transnational protectionism and a rearguard defence of previously discredited state interventionism, now translated from the national level to trans-frontier directives and conventions or local government initiatives. The terms of the media access debate have shifted once again from private rights to the public interest. However, the 'fundamental contradiction' between two versions of access, two versions of broadcasting policy and two conceptions of culture remains.

In this chapter I will begin by considering the underlying contradictions of media access. These contradictions can be traced back to some of the dilemmas noted in previous 'moments' of cultural reform, including the 'democratising' cultural institutions of the nineteenth century and the New Deal. First I will briefly chart the 'determinist' and 'culturalist' strands of media studies which provide the theoretical background to the media access debate. I will argue that these two intellectual traditions can be related to two opposing traditions of broadcasting policy, and that these two traditions can be traced as an underlying contradiction in British and U.S. broadcasting policy. The same contradiction has also informed the media access

movement; I will argue that the argument for media access takes two principal forms, one based on 'private rights' and derived from an eighteenth century Enlightenment / liberal tradition, the other based on 'public good', drawing on a tradition of nineteenth century institutional paternalism. Finally I will consider how these competing arguments might be applied to contemporary problems of democracy and media policy, especially to the 1990s model for media access, the creation of a 'public sphere'.

4.2 Theoretical Background: Bringing the Audience Back In

This section, in reviewing the recent history of media studies, traces conflicts between 'culturalist' and 'determinist' schools of thought similar to those noted in the introduction. I will argue that 'culturalist' assumptions have emerged as the dominant paradigm in recent media studies, resulting in a dangerously complacent attitude to the ideological effects and political economy of the media industry.

Theories of media effects can be divided into two broad categories (Morley 1989, Katz 1987, Fejes 1984). One tradition has been concerned with the ideological effects of the mass media on society, and in turn with the effects of social and economic forces on the media. Researchers working within this tradition have emphasised to varying degrees the causal relationships between conditions of production, distribution and reception of media messages; this tradition, variously labelled as the '(ideological) effects', 'critical' or 'mass media' school, has been likened to a 'hypodermic' model of media influence (Morley 1989, 16). The terms of analysis are generic, with media producers and consumers treated as generalised categories within a structural pattern, not as isolated phenomena. This level of abstraction and the emphasis on 'determination' are the product of more or less sophisticated variants on the Marxist theory of 'base' and 'superstructure'; in most

cases, the researcher is more interested in the economic, social and ideological dimensions of media effects than in the detail of particular case studies.

The other school of media researchers has taken the particular effects of programmes on individual viewers or listeners as its starting point, beginning with the behaviourist research into the effects of media campaigns on voting behaviour conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld in the U.S. in the 1940s; researchers in this tradition have tended to focus on the reception of media messages rather than the means of production. In discovering the multitudinous ways in which the media are 'used' or 'negotiated' by consumers, researchers have suggested that the media have only 'limited effects' on audience behaviour. Researchers associated with this view have been variously categorised as belonging to 'the uses and gratifications school', the 'model of limited effects' or the 'behaviourist' tradition.

In the 1920s Walter Lippmann (1922) led the polemical attack on the new electronic 'mass media' and their damaging effect on public opinion. Historically, the first wave of media research in the 1940s and 1950s set out to challenge these predictions using techniques of market research. According to Lazarsfeld's 'two-step flow' model of media effects, the influence of local networks and opinion leaders was more significant than media campaigns in the formation of public opinion (Katz 1987, 25 - 27; Peters 1989, 214 - 215). From the 1960s onwards 'critical' researchers, drawing on a European tradition of 'critical thinking' influenced by Adorno, Marx and Gramsci, challenged what had come to be known in the U.S. as the 'dominant paradigm'; in particular they charged that Lazarsfeld's research had resulted in a dangerously complacent view of powerful media institutions, stemming from a methodology which focussed on the micro-effects of consumer choice, which

in turn reflected a convergence between corporate-funded 'administrative research' and the marketing needs of the industry (Gitlin 1978)⁷⁶.

By the late 1970s the new 'critical' tradition had replaced the 'model of limited effects' as the dominant theoretical paradigm (Fejes 1984); the pattern was consistent with the previously noted theoretical emphasis on 'hegemony' in cultural studies during the same period. Here media institutions were placed in the broader context of social power structures. Instead of studying the micro-effects of programmes and campaigns on individual viewers, 'critical' researchers pointed to the containing framework of the media, especially in the reporting of news on television (Gitlin 1980; Kellner 1990); the macro-effect of the media was towards ideological containment and control within a framework flexible enough to accommodate smaller cross-currents of dissent and diversity. Some internalised resistance was in fact a welcome component of media hegemony since it gave the impression of high-minded neutrality (Kellner 1990, 96); however, other forms of dissent, those which genuinely threatened radical social change, remained beyond the pale and could only be accommodated once they had been neutralised and reassembled according to the professional and political codes of the media institutions (Gitlin 1980, 249 - 282). The focus on the 'framing' devices of television news in the new media criticism highlighted the media's agenda-setting function. In Elihu Katz's neat summary, the critical school described media effects in terms of their inertia rather than their dynamic (and therefore measurable) impacts; instead of telling us what to think, the media tell us "what not to think or what not to think about" (Katz 1987, 31).

⁷⁶ Some of these limitations were acknowledged by Lazarsfeld and Katz in their original research; however, these concessions were mostly consigned to their footnotes (Gitlin 1978, 211 - 212).

In fact the new 'critical' tradition was capable of a more subtle, nuanced reading of media effects than was acknowledged by some of its opponents; this was not simply a return to the old simplicities of 'mass society' and the Orwellian nightmare of the mass media. Nor did the new tradition simply paste in the word 'society' and 'media' into Marx's theory of 'base' and 'superstructure'. In perhaps the most definitive statement of the new direction in media studies, Stuart Hall (1980a) described the processes of 'encoding' and 'decoding' which connected the social structure (Hall's "social and economic relations") to the production of media messages, their circulation by media institutions, their use by audiences ('distribution and consumption') and their 'reproduction' in the experience of the viewer / listener. Hall described these four stages as 'relatively autonomous'; in other words, there was no direct correlation between each component, but nor were they entirely disconnected. The ideas of the audience were not 'determined' by the media, nor were the media 'determined' by structures of dominance in society; however, there was a 'preferred reading' contained in the text which reflected a 'dominant social order' and which in turn would be reflected in "significant clusterings" in the ways audiences decoded media messages, across the individual variants. This 'preferred reading', Hall implied, was related to social class.

What Hall achieved here, as he had done in cultural studies (Hall 1980b), was a skilful balancing act between Marxist and non-Marxist forms of analysis. Into the pattern of 'determinate moments', Hall introduced the idea of 'polysemy', a concept drawn from linguistics; language contained literal meanings ('denotations') and associative aspects ('connotations'), such that language became a site of struggle over contested meanings. However, Hall insisted that 'polysemy' in this case did not mean 'pluralism'; some meanings were more equal than others, and in this way certain 'privileged' messages could be channelled through the media. By loosening the limits of Marxist 'determination' without breaking them, Hall was able to

rehabilitate the discredited Marxist categories of class in the lexicon of media studies, but at a price. Just as he had in cultural studies, by emphasising the 'relative autonomy' of language, ideas and culture, Hall opened a Pandora's box of new theoretical terms; the new critical theory would polarise between those who felt Hall had not gone far enough towards a 'semiological' model and those who still clung to the certainties of determinate effects and the stable categories of class. Within the 'critical' tradition of media studies a new split would emerge between the groups I have previously referred to as 'new determinists' and 'new culturalists'.

According to his critics there were two problems with the 'encoding' side of Hall's model (Wren-Lewis 1983). Firstly, 'encoding' implies a faceless elite exploiting the media and the media audience to serve its own interests; yet the nature of these interests remains abstract and indistinct and the intentions of 'dominant elites' are not adequately explained. Secondly the model is based on a "prestructured meaning" which exists outside the text and is channelled through television as a 'preferred reading'; the reduction of television to a secondary, instrumental agency ignores the range of meanings made available to the audience by television itself and by the unpredictable relationship between programmes, viewers and their individual experience. The 'preferred reading' might not exist outside the mind of the critic.

Instead of basing media studies on the 'real' world of class relations existing outside the text, 'audience theory' pursued meanings embedded in the text or 'discourse' of television. For the audience, these meanings were no less real because they did not conform to the structure of Hall's 'preferred reading'. Accordingly attention moved from 'encoding' to 'decoding'. Here the new media studies divided between the camps of the new determinists and the new culturalists. Both referred to television programming as a self-sufficient text or discourse, to be analysed using terms derived from literary theory; both were unashamedly 'post-Marxist'.

The new determinists drew on structuralist and psychoanalytic theory to describe the “positioning of the subject by the text” (Morley 1989, 19 - 22). The viewer’s experience was indeed determined, not in the Marxist sense of base determining superstructure, but in the Althusserian sense of an ideological state apparatus inscribed in language which ‘interpellates the subject’, assigning roles and meanings (Althusser 1970). This method of analysis was closely related to the development of film theory associated with *Screen* in the late 1970s and 1980s. As Morley points out, the new determinists did not take into account the socially specific situations of audiences; for television audiences, the circumstances of viewing were even more various and unpredictable than in the relatively controlled environment of the cinema. Moreover the analysis was pitched at a level of abstraction which disguised its roots in crude determinism. Determinism had now cut loose from Hall’s residual Marxism and the ‘intentionalist fallacy’; audiences were being ‘determined’ or ‘interpellated’ but it was not clear by whom or for what purpose. The new determinists revived the ‘hypodermic’ model of media effects but nobody was holding the syringe.

The new culturalists moved in the opposite direction. Again the television text was cut loose from the authorial intentions of its ‘encoders’. This time the emphasis was on the multifarious ‘uses’ of television by audiences and the infinite variety of readings negotiated between audience and text. Whereas the *Screen* critics had used a closed form of textual analysis, the new culturalist criticism stressed the openness of television texts. This openness was partly a property of the text itself and partly in the experience of television viewing. Finding against entrenched fears of American cultural imperialism in their study of the American soap opera *Dallas*, Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1990) stressed the open-ended quality of U.S. popular culture; the success of *Dallas*, they argued, lay not in its recreation of a mythical

American dreamworld but in its ability to strike a chord of recognition with very different audiences using familiar, archetypal narrative structures and devices. Accordingly the different focus groups they interviewed had very different interpretations of the programme, based on their own ethnic and familial traditions; the use of focus groups was itself a signal of the new research's emphasis on the details and differences of audience perception. David Morley would concur with the 'open' version of U.S. popular culture described by Liebes and Katz, suggesting that it provides "a space in which oppositional meanings (in relation to dominant traditions of British culture) could be negotiated and expressed" (Morley 1989, 33); for British audiences, part of the liberating 'openness' of U.S. popular culture may have derived not so much from its archetypal 'universality' as from its exotic foreignness and the absence of familiar norms.

Other culturalist critics pointed to the 'messy' experience of television viewing as a means whereby audiences could 'subvert' the dominant messages of the media. Television viewing, according to Ien Ang (1991), cannot be separated from the "social world of actual audiences" which includes not only different social contexts but also the different activities which accompany or distract from television viewing, different levels of involvement and interest and different social roles played by the viewer. The very idea of a 'television audience' may be a misnomer, so entangled is the experience of television viewing with other activities and experiences. Media research must accordingly move towards an "ethnographic" perspective which uses a far more sophisticated and complex set of categories, beyond the relative certainties of class and culture (Ang 1991, 164).

The culturalist slant on media studies was partly a result of 'critical' researchers of the early 1980s beginning to channel their abstract structural analysis of media effects into specific audience studies. Again the emphasis on open-ended texts and

audience contexts was influenced by literary theory; Stanley Fish's description of 'interpretive communities' (Fish 1980) revived Lazarsfeld's 'two-step flow' model, emphasising horizontal connections between readers / viewers and individual elements within a literary or media 'text'. These horizontal connections subverted the top-down vertical flow of messages from mass broadcaster to mass audience. For some critics, associated with Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies, the interpretive community was a post-Marxist reflection of the traditional Marxist categories of class; thus working class television viewers and other oppressed groups could create 'oppositional' readings which subverted the dominant codes inscribed in the text by dominant institutions and elite groups (Willis 1990, Hebdige 1979, Morley 1989). By the late 1980s and 1990s, the residual Marxist language had been laid to rest and replaced by the more fluid categories of 'ethnography' (Ang 1991, 155 - 165; Silverstone 1990, 178 - 186); it is significant that Liebes and Katz (1990) based their study of audience readings of 'Dallas' on ethnic, gender and family roles rather than setting up 'class' based focus groups as Morley had done with British television viewers ten years earlier. The new studies also tended to be more concerned with the range of audience responses to television fiction rather than the more overtly political effects of television news.

A further strand in the new 'culturalist' media studies was the emphasis on the new technological possibilities for audience autonomy. Use of such devices as the VCR for time-delayed viewing and fast-forwarding and the remote control for 'zapping' and 'surfing', together with the expansion of available television channels, appeared to give viewers greater control over how they watched, even though what they watched was still framed by the choices made available to them by broadcasters. As Ang indicates, for broadcasters, programmers and advertisers, these new technological tactics of television viewing resulted in a crisis of control, played out in increasingly desperate attempts to monitor and measure audience behaviour in the

early 1980s (Ang 1991, 68 - 77). Viewing figures had been reduced to comforting statistics which bore little relation to the reality of audience attention; since U.S. broadcasting depended on the sale of audiences to advertisers, the inability to measure this commodity accurately was profoundly worrying. Ang's suggestion that 'television audience' is an essentially 'fictive' construction (i.e. not fictional in the sense of 'made up' but disconnected from any known or knowable reality) also threatens the whole basis of media policy (Ang 1991, 167 - 169).

By the 1990s the audience, left out of the 'critical' school of media studies in the early 1980s according to Fred Fejes, has emphatically taken centre stage. For the new determinists, while television 'texts' impose structural limitations on audience response, the boundaries are in the mind of the viewer, not in the 'codes' of broadcasters or the social structure. For the new culturalists, audiences have effectively been liberated from 'media effects'; according to a few like Paul Willis and John Fiske, they have also cut loose from the residual categories and structural determinations of social class, free to play multiple roles and to manufacture meanings out of thin air. Taken to its postmodernist extreme, the new culturalism sees television consumption as a liberating experience, a kind of psychodrama in which viewers can switch roles as easily as they switch channels, creating their own subversive subcultures out of the messy convergence between television and everyday life.

While an older generation of commentators continues to emphasise the 'political economy' of the television industry (Bagdikian, Schiller, Hermann & Chomsky), the 'new determinists' have tended to cast doubt on any direct correlation between the political interests of media owners and the 'encoding' of media messages⁷⁷. In what

⁷⁷ Of course the 'hypodermic' model of media effects is not dead; aside from Marxist academic commentators, the model continues to be popular with politicians and religious groups, as illustrated in the recent debate over the 1996 Communications Decency Act in the U.S.. However, if it is possible to describe changes in fashion in academic circles, then I would argue that the 'hypodermic'

is left of the older 'critical' tradition of media studies, the maintenance of hegemony has been reduced to a vague agenda-setting function which operates through self-censorship and hidden boundaries; 'encoding' is virtually undetectable and the boundaries of the media 'frame' are so broad and accommodating it seems churlish to complain of 'dominant social structures' and the interests of 'dominant elites'. Most academic and industry commentators in any case appear more interested in audience decoding than in the encoding of class interests, focussing on conditions of consumption rather than conditions of production. In discussions of media consumption references to the unfashionable topic of social class are relatively unusual, a fading residue of the old critical tradition (Murdock & Golding 1989; Garnham 1983, 17 - 20). Broadcasting policy-makers likewise tend to avoid discussions of class; the industry myth of 'consumer sovereignty' echoes the technological optimism of Paul Willis and the 'audience liberation' theory of John Fiske, portraying consumers as classless individuals making choices in an ever-expanding global supermarket.

Clearly there is a danger here of complacency. If television viewers have really been liberated from media effects it does not matter greatly what they watch; questions of quality and diversity in broadcasting policy no longer apply because these categories can be created by audiences themselves out of the most unpromising materials through a variety of 'playful' practices and 'subversive' readings. At this point we can now turn to consider the broader implications of these theoretical ideas about media effects and audience liberation for broadcasting policy.

model is decidedly unfashionable while the discourse of structuralist, postmodernist and post-Marxist analysis is academically 'hip'. Such changes in fashion are of course related to other trends outside academia - the rise of consumerism, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and, not least, the pervasive influence of market-based, deregulated media.

4.3 Broadcasting policy in Britain and the U.S. 1925 - 1965: two paradigms

In the previous section two theoretical traditions were traced in media studies. The 'determinist' tradition has followed a line from the 'mass society' critics such as Walter Lippmann in the 1920s through the 'critical' tradition of the 1960s and 1970s to the new determinists of *Screen* and the critics of the 'political economy' of media ownership and class inequalities among audiences in the 1980s and 1990s. In varying degrees this tradition insists that the media have determinate effects on audiences and that these effects are inscribed in the dominant social structure of economic relations between classes. The 'culturalist' tradition began with the model of 'limited effects' and the behaviourist emphasis in U.S. media research in the 1940s and 1950s, then was temporarily displaced by the critical tradition in the 1960s and 1970s before regaining the ascendancy in the late 1980s with the growing emphasis on audience theory and the 'postmodernist' celebration of cultural consumption. This tradition minimises the cause and effect of media institutions, concentrating on the radical possibilities for audience 'resistance', 'symbolic creativity' and 'consumer sovereignty'. In this section, these two critical traditions will be related to two opposing paradigms in broadcasting policy.

The 'determinist' tradition implies that the public is extremely vulnerable to the power of the media, and that the media are extremely vulnerable to the economic imperatives of capitalism. Accordingly, the best way to defend the public from pervasive 'media effects' is to establish a protected system of public broadcasting in which non-economic, cultural objectives can be promoted, safe from the imperatives of economic materialism which form the 'base' of Marxist analysis. This is the position persuasively argued by Nicholas Garnham (1983), justifying the need for a public service broadcasting system on the basis of a Marxist analysis of the cultural industries; unfortunately, as Garnham readily admits, the existing British system of

public broadcasting has failed to meet this need, becoming itself part of the 'dominant structure' from which it was intended to be a protection. This failure begs the question of the possibility of removing broadcasting from the determinate conditions of capitalist economics; I will return to this question below.

The 'culturalist' tradition meanwhile implies that the public is perfectly able to look after itself in the media marketplace. The only condition here is that there should be a sufficient variety of material which is sufficiently 'open' to allow all the possibilities of consumer choice, 'oppositional' readings and playful negotiation of meanings to come into play. This is the model of the 'marketplace for ideas' in which culture is treated as a commodity like any other; the system is driven by consumer choice, provided of course that the consumers (not the advertisers, the media owners or a powerful minority of consumers) are in a position to make those choices. Unfortunately, as pointed out by the American economist Ronald Coase, such a perfect market has yet to be created, and the current system routinely fails to meet consumer demand (Coase 1974).

Superficially these two 'ideal types' of broadcasting system appear to correspond with the broadcasting systems of the British BBC and the U.S. 'free market' respectively. However, the critiques of the 'public service' and 'market of ideas' model advanced by Garnham and Coase respectively indicate that theoretical possibilities have not been translated into institutional reality; for all practical purposes, neither the 'public service' model nor the 'free market of ideas' actually exists. Both models rest upon a particular ideal of the audience which does not correspond with what Ien Ang calls 'the social world of actual audiences'. According to Ang, where commercial broadcasters have constructed 'the audience-as-market', public service broadcasters have constructed 'the audience-as-public'; Ang suggests that both these categories are simplistic aggregates designed to foster

an 'institutional point of view' of the television audience as an objectified category to be controlled and 'conquered', smoothing out ('streamlining') the unpredictable patterns of actual audience behaviour into a "fictional abstraction" (Ang 1991, 26 - 41).

If we apply this theory to the historical development of broadcasting policy in Britain and the United States, we can see the respective 'ideal types' of broadcasting and audience in each country being counterposed and compromised. Within each country there has been a continuing tension between different views of the audience, pulling broadcasting policy in opposite directions; the tension between the broadcaster's idealised 'construction' of the audience described by Ang and the realpolitik of broadcasting policy in response to conflicting demands is the source of a fundamental contradiction, between the theory or rhetoric of broadcasters and their practice. When stretched too far, this contradiction opened out into overt conflict, allowing a point of entry for the radical media reformers of the 1970s and 1980s.

British broadcasting policy was initially premised on a 'collective' model of a unitary, national audience. The primary justification for the BBC's broadcasting monopoly, aside from initial concerns with economic protectionism and technical efficiency, was the maintenance of a unified, 'comprehensive' service across the whole country. The collectivisation of the audience corresponded with a cultural idealism in programming. The BBC continued the nineteenth century traditions of cultural idealism and liberal education described in chapter 2, running through Oxford and Cambridge university extension, the public libraries, the settlement house and the adult and worker education movements. This tradition was best represented by John Reith, whose concern with 'improving' popular taste and striving towards a general perfection based on best selves ('needs', rather than 'wants') marked him as the intellectual descendent of Matthew Arnold. However,

like earlier cultural institutions, the BBC was also pulled in the opposite direction both by external competition and by other more utilitarian factions within the institutional hierarchy (especially politicians and their appointees), who saw the objectives of the BBC in more instrumental terms, as for example the maintenance of social stability, the defence of national economic interests or the upholding of national morale in wartime.

From the outset, the BBC was forced to contend with external competition; foreign commercial broadcasters, supported by British sponsors, began beaming English language programming from France in the late 1920s, and the relay exchange operators of the 1930s in turn wired these non-BBC programmes to local audiences, challenging the BBC programming monopoly (Coase 1950, 69 - 123). This combination of foreign and domestic competition intensified with the licensing of independent television in 1955 and independent commercial radio in 1973, followed by the inexorable rise of satellite and cable broadcasting in the late 1970s and 1980s and, more recently, the enhanced communications made possible through telephony and computing. However, competition in some form has been a factor in BBC policy from the start.

Internally, Reith's high-minded vision of a common national interest was challenged by political conflict and consumer demand. During the General Strike of 1926, despite Reith's refusal to turn the BBC into an instrument of government propaganda, the BBC's 'neutrality' was nevertheless perceived by the trade union movement as a form of pro-government bias (Briggs 1985, 96 - 106). In the 1930s, the BBC's version of a common national culture was criticised for imposing middle-class, metropolitan 'standards' on an audience who, according to the audience surveys, wanted that 'culture' extended to include more popular programming including jazz, dance music and comedy.

The BBC responded to conflicting internal demands and external competition by diversifying its services. At first diversification was seen as a purely geographical issue, with the creation of secondary 'regional' services in the 1930s. The BBC's 'Regional Scheme', offered listeners a choice between national and regional programmes; however, regional broadcasters remained the poor relations of the national service and were in turn a poor substitute for genuine local broadcasting, eliding local interests and aspirations into crude regional aggregates ('the North', 'Scotland'). Unlike Peter Eckersley, the architect of the regional scheme, Reith saw regional broadcasting as an inferior supplement to the national programme (Briggs 1985, 131 - 138). Successive broadcasting committee reports (Beveridge 1949 157 - 161; Pilkington 1962, 224 - 231; Annan 1977, 205 - 210) convey the impression that the BBC was dragged reluctantly towards a limited devolution and decentralisation of services while doing its best to maintain the central control on which the principles of universal, comprehensive service depended.

The next stage in diversification away from Reith's 'universal' standard was the development of separate programming strands with the introduction of the Light and Third programmes in 1945 and 1946 respectively. The move from a single 'national' service to a three tier service (Home, Third, Light) was famously justified by Reith's successor, William Haley, as a "cultural pyramid slowly aspiring upwards" (Ang 1991, 113), with audiences graduating from easy listening to highbrow culture; of course this residual idealism disguised an important concession, acknowledging the class-based stratifications and differences of taste within what had previously been constructed as a unitary national audience. For this reason, according to Paddy Scannell, the new structure represented a "fundamental betrayal" of Reith (Scannell 1989, 138). Other concessions confirmed the shift away from cultural idealism to a more instrumental form of 'public service'. In the

early 1960s, Hugh Greene (BBC Director-General from 1960 to 1969) redefined 'public service' to mean a reflection of social diversity, not the aspiration to lead different publics towards a single 'common culture' (Ang 1991, 115 - 118); Greene's 'mirror' held up to the audience had replaced Reith's concept of the BBC as a national 'church'. With the establishment of BBC2 and Radio 1 in the 1960s, the BBC's old tradition of cultural idealism was tempered by a new pragmatism. Like the movement towards decentralisation, diversification appeared to be a gradual sequence of concessions driven by external competition, rather than a direct recognition of the diversity and complexity of audience demand; to the BBC's critics, some of the concessions appeared merely tactical or cosmetic. Moreover, despite the collapse of 'universal' programming and the unitary audience, some of the aspirational, educational ethos of cultural idealism has survived⁷⁸.

The changing definition of 'public service' from Reith to Greene reflects the move from a 'normative', idealist view of the the audience towards a pragmatic acceptance of pluralism. Even before Reith's departure in 1938, missionary cultural idealism was tempered by forays into populist programming, politically expedient subservience to government and a (strictly limited) devolution of power to the regions. As in the cultural institutions of the nineteenth century, the idealist mission was challenged by external competition and internal dissent; institutional policy was based on a coalition of interests, despite Reith's personal charisma and will. Thus Reith's Arnoldian concept of broadcasting as a common good which would satisfy the aspirations of all but the tastes of only an educated few (Reith's 'minorities' or Arnold's 'aliens') was challenged by a materialist concept of culture as growing out of everyday life. During the war this materialist, populist approach gained the ascendancy as the BBC, along with other cultural institutions (ENSA, Workers'

⁷⁸ The Reithian attempt to lead and test the limits of popular taste survives not just in Radio 3's uncompromising classical music schedule or BBC programming for schools, but in Radio 1's mix of mainstream pop culture with more 'serious' talk-based programming and 'challenging' alternative music offerings.

Playtime), sacrificed high moral seriousness to the immediate need to entertain the troops and boost civilian morale; the Forces Programme of 1940 (as popular with the civilian population as it was with the Forces) was the direct antecedent of the Light Programme of 1945. While this materialist, 'representative' definition of the 'public interest' as the product of consumer demand gained ground through the 1950s and 1960s, it worth reiterating that Reith's cultural idealism was from the beginning necessarily compromised. Within the BBC, the meaning of 'public interest' broadcasting was always a contested issue; idealist and materialist conceptions of culture overlapped and interlocked.

In the U.S., broadcasting policy moved in the opposite direction, sacrificing its founding principles of pluralism for a collective view of the 'mass' audience and mass broadcasting, based on the commercial imperatives of mass marketing on the one hand and the moral protectionism of government regulation on the other. If BBC paternalism can be traced back to nineteenth century theories of moral education, based on controlling and manipulating the 'improving' and 'antisocial' influences on individual 'character', U.S. broadcasting policy had its origins in eighteenth century ideals of citizenship and press freedom, rooted in the mythology of the American Revolution. Central to this mythology was the idea that American democracy was born out of a free-thinking citizenry sustained by a libertarian 'free press' (Buel 1980). U.S. broadcasting policy in the 1920s was essentially a nostalgic and romantic attempt to recreate the 'marketplace for ideas' which had supposedly grown out of the expansion of the 'free' printing press in the eighteenth century. The historical and theoretical inconsistencies of this 'free press' mythology will be considered in the next section. At this stage I want to examine how the U.S. system of broadcasting, like the BBC, began with a particular, idealised construction of its audience, only to compromise that model in the opposite direction in response to external and internal pressures.

While the 1927 Radio Act and the subsequent jurisprudence emphasised the primacy of 'the public interest, convenience and necessity' in U.S. broadcasting policy⁷⁹, the system was premised on a belief that the public interest was best served through private competition. Accordingly, the primary objective in U.S. broadcasting policy has been to ensure that the 'marketplace for ideas' operates in a way that is free and fair. Producers and consumers have individual rights and responsibilities which can be tested in the courts; a large part of U.S. broadcasting policy has thus been handed down in rulings by the Supreme and Federal Courts, rather than in the often vague legislation passed by Congress or the often ineffective regulations issued by the Federal Communications Commission. The model of the 'marketplace of ideas' makes a number of questionable assumptions about the interchangeability of material and cultural goods, the inevitable triumph of 'truth' in a 'free and fair encounter' and the correspondence between competing private interests and the greater public good. Above all it is premised on a highly individualised contract between producers (broadcasters) and consumers (audiences) and on the 'rationality' of consumer choice.

The 'marketplace of ideas' assumes firstly that the broadcasting contract is made between individual 'sovereign' consumers and producers. Secondly it assumes that consumers are able and permitted to make rational choices from a variety of competing services. Both these assumptions were called into question by the economics of commercial broadcasting in the U.S. and the politics of federal

⁷⁹ In sections 301 and 309 of the 1934 Communications Act the Federal Communications Commission (in the 1927 Act, the Federal Radio Commission) is mandated to regulate and license broadcasting according to "the public interest, convenience and necessity" (Kahn 1973, pp. 64, 73). In the absence of any clear guidance from Congress, the FRC / FCC opted for an expansive interpretation of this phrase which encompassed not merely technical considerations, but also the 'common good' of the listening public. This expanded brief was upheld in a series of landmark court cases in 1928 and 1929 (Kahn 1973, 127 - 129), confirming that 'public interest' referred to the public information rights of the listener, not the public speech rights of the broadcaster. This 'affirmative' interpretation formed the legal framework for future broadcast regulation and for legal challenges against broadcast licensees in the 1960s.

regulation. Because commercial broadcasting is financially dependent on selling audiences to advertisers, U.S. broadcasters were forced to accept the advertiser's aggregation of individual consumers as collective markets. According to this perspective, individual consumer choice is less important than collective market demand and certain demographic groups are more valuable than others; as Bagdikian notes, there remains a large 'unwanted American population' which falls outside the advertisers' prime demographic, including in 1984 70% of all black families and 64% of all Hispanic families in the U.S. (Bagdikian 1990, 199 - 200). It can be assumed that the 'consumer sovereignty' of these particular consumers is strictly limited.

In the formative years of U.S. broadcasting during the 1930s and 1940s, growth of the industry was linked with the expansion of 'mass' advertising and the boom in mass produced 'generic' products such as soap, bleach and medicines (Bagdikian 1990, 141 - 148). These products were not designed to fill a niche market or to meet specific consumer needs, and profitability depended on aggressive mass marketing and nationwide distribution. Accordingly broadcasting, with its larger audience reach and simultaneous reception, offered substantial advantages for advertisers over more localised press advertising. Interrupted by the depression of the 1930s and the second world war, the symbiotic relationship between commercial broadcasting chains and the expanding national market for generic consumer goods continued into broadcasting's 'golden age' in the 1950s. Early U.S. broadcasters were thus encouraged to abandon specialised, distinctive programmes for generic programming and to replace local communities of interest with regional advertising markets.

The trend towards 'massification' was also driven by the high capital costs for new entrants to the broadcasting industry. In what would later become standard industry

practice in the deregulated European broadcasting market of the 1980s, local stations joined forces in order to share costs, technical and programming resources, and combined to maximise advertiser income from the more lucrative regional and national markets. Thus began the aggressive corporate empire-building known as network 'affiliation', making a mockery of the nominally 'local', 'pluralistic' structure of U.S. broadcasting. Between 1927 and 1931 the percentage of NBC and CBS affiliated stations rose from 6% to 30%; taking into account hours and level of power, the actual percentage of broadcasting controlled by the networks was somewhere between 50 and 70% (Engelman 1996, 25; Leduc 1982, 166). Television would later develop along the same trajectory, with 95% of 'local' television stations affiliated to the networks by 1957. What had begun in the 1920s as an individualised model of producers and consumers, the mythical 'marketplace of ideas', had instead combined individual radio stations as network affiliates and aggregated individual listeners, local communities and special interests groups as mass advertising markets.

There is a danger in describing these economic pressures towards centralisation and 'massification' that we neglect the influence of official policy; such an interpretation succumbs to a crude (Marxist) economic determinism. A number of recent commentaries have noted the complicity of federal regulators in the expansion of the commercial broadcasting networks in the late 1920s and 1930s (Rowland 1986; Engelman 1996; Leduc 1982; Kellner 1990); far from protecting the independence and autonomy of local and 'special interest' broadcasters, the introduction of federal regulation appears to have been welcomed by the networks as a means of reinforcing their dominance.

U.S broadcast regulation since 1912 had followed an officially neutral 'traffic cop' model, designed to clear up frequency congestion and address the problem of

spectrum 'scarcity'. However, the 1927 Radio Act extended beyond merely technical regulation of the 'free' market. In effect the Act discriminated in favour of a 'chosen instrument', the network affiliate, and against the localised 'special interest' broadcaster in three related ways. First of all the 1927 Radio Act established a competitive, commercial framework while at the same time protecting each frequency from local competition; this protectionist market established a series of local monopolies and favoured the established broadcaster over new entrants. Secondly, the Act's combination of economic deregulation and political regulation minimised the possibilities for local government or other non-commercial funding, leaving advertising as the only viable means of finance available. The spiralling commercialism noted above and the 'inevitable' rise of network affiliation grew out of the regulators' initial suspicion of non-commercial (religious, political, educational) broadcasters. Thirdly, the 1927 Act created a three-tier hierarchy of 'weak' and 'strong' radio stations (Engelman 1996, 19 - 22). The high-powered 'clear channel' frequencies were assigned to commercial broadcasters. Meanwhile, ignoring the success of the already established educational broadcasters (Blakely 1979, 53 - 54), the Federal Radio Commission designated non-commercial broadcasters, including educational, labour and religious organisations, as 'special interest groups', assigning them to weaker frequencies, often split on a time-share basis with other broadcasters. The rise of the networks mirrored educational broadcasting's fall. Between 1927 and 1931 the number of educational broadcasters declined by approximately 50% (Engelman 1996, 24; Blakely 1979, 55 - 60). Subsequent frequency allocations, on the FM radio band in 1938 and on the UHF television band in 1952, have continued to marginalise educational broadcasters, assigning them 'experimental' channels which most conventional equipment could not pick up (Rowland 1986, 254 - 6).

Why did U.S. broadcasting policy in the 1930s apparently discriminate against 'special interest' broadcasters in favour of the more homogeneous network oligopoly? I believe the explanation lay in the FCC's attempt to define the 'public interest' in terms of a unitary, collective radio audience. Behind this logic lay a string of assumptions: that the audience can be characterised by a collective, common interest, not a series of separate 'special interests'; that a single broadcaster, or in this case the CBS - NBC duopoly, is the best means of framing that common interest; that specialised information is best contained within a flow of 'mainstream' programming and special interest groups ought to be integrated within a collective 'community'; that the public good is an aggregate of private consumer demands.

In the context of commercial broadcasting, this political attempt to define a collective, unitary audience converges nicely with the commercial imperative of maximising audience share and advertising revenue. This convergence between commercial logic and official policy formed the basis of the U.S. broadcasting policy of 'trusteeship', whereby the 'public interest' was entrusted to the private interests of the commercial broadcaster. A good example of the merging of political arguments and economic interests was the so-called 'cooperation doctrine' which emerged out of the debate over educational broadcasting in the 1930s (Engelman 1996, 26 - 40; Blakely 1979, 64 - 69; Rowland 1986, 253 - 4).

In the lead up to the 1934 Communications Act, a nascent broadcast reform movement, led by the National Committee on Education by Radio (NCER), protested against the U.S. networks' virtual monopoly control of broadcasting and their failure to meet the public service obligations somewhat vaguely referred to in the 1927 legislation. They were supported by two senators in a proposed amendment to the 1934 Communications Act (the Wagner-Hatfield Bill), which

would have reserved 25% of broadcast frequencies for educational use. Given the 'trust-busting' rhetoric of the New Deal administration, the bill's chances of success must have appeared favourable.

The reformers were opposed by those who argued that broadcasters and educators should 'cooperate' in order to realise the educational potential of radio as a public service. This position, the 'cooperation doctrine', was advanced not just by the commercial networks (CBS and NBC) but by the 'collaborationist' National Advisory Council on Radio in Education (NACRE). A 'hegemonic' coalition of commercial broadcasters, educators and politicians was thus mobilised to defend the status quo. The Wagner-Hatfield amendment was defeated and the 1934 Communications Act simply endorsed the existing regulatory framework from the 1927 Radio Act. NACRE subsequently collapsed in 1938, followed by NCER in 1941. By the 1940s the educational output of the networks had failed to win a substantial audience and was gradually phased out.

The success of the cooperation doctrine was undoubtedly influenced by the lobbying muscle of broadcasters and advertisers defending their commercial interests against encroachment. It also depended on the support of educators and politicians who saw cooperation as a means of defending a unitary, comprehensive system of broadcasting as the best means of reaching a unitary 'mass' audience; 'special interests' should not be separated out but embedded in the flow of accessible, commercially sponsored programming. The alliance between commercial self-interest and the unitary idea of a common 'public interest' resulted in a centralising, 'mainstreaming' tendency in U.S. broadcasting. This tendency was at odds with the nominal commitment to pluralism and local community control. It also subverted the individual contract between consumer and producer which forms the basis for the 'marketplace of ideas'.

The 'marketplace of ideas' assumes that individual citizens go shopping in the marketplace for political and cultural ideas. What it does not allow for is that the sellers in the marketplace (politicians touting ideology, advertisers and broadcasters trading in audience shares), are motivated by different intentions and dealing in different currencies. A number of commentators have noted this inconsistency. Robert Entman (1989) suggests that we need to recognise an imperfect match between three distinct markets, an economic market, a political market and an 'idea market', which correspond with the respective needs of media owners, politicians, and audiences / citizens. Monroe Price distinguishes between the 'market for ideas' and the 'market for loyalties' (approximating to Entman's 'political market'), within which competing factions attempt to win support for their own version of the national identity and interest (Price 1995, 60 - 80). Ronald Coase (1974) notes that the lack of any clear correlation between the different actors (elites, broadcasters, advertisers, consumers, audiences) in the marketplace negates any unified dynamic of supply and demand. Perhaps most damning of all for the 'market' metaphor was Reith's famous distinction between 'needs' and 'wants'⁸⁰; a market based on wants will operate differently from a market based on needs. If we attempt to fudge together these different markets, with their different currencies, actors and motivations, into a single metaphorical 'marketplace of ideas', we ignore these essential differences; the central weakness of the 'marketplace of ideas' stems from the attempt to construct a system of supply and demand out of conflicting, often contradictory needs.

If we consider the 'market' of U.S. broadcasting in the 1930s, it becomes possible to differentiate between the actors in the 'marketplace of ideas' and their different

⁸⁰ "It is occasionally indicated to us that we are apparently setting out to give the public what we think they need - and not what they want... but few know what they want and very few what they need... In any case it is better to overestimate the mentality of the public than to underestimate it" (from Reith's 1924 manifesto / autobiography, "Broadcast Over Britain", quoted in Briggs 1985, 55).

currencies of 'needs' and 'wants'. On the supply side, broadcasters, advertisers and regulators in the 'marketplace of ideas' were not dealing in individual transactions between consumer and producer, but trading in abstract commodities which packaged listeners as collective aggregates. The commercial broadcasters bundled audiences into demographic packages which could then be sold on to the advertiser; in the early days of broadcasting these packages consisted of relatively crude aggregations designed for the marketing of mass-advertised, generic retail products, rather than the more specialised clusterings necessary for 'niche' marketing. The federal regulators were meanwhile seeking to define a common 'public interest', regarding separate 'special interests' with suspicion. These crude categorisations could not accommodate the individual needs and wants of listeners, nor were they designed to do so. On the side of consumer demand, consumers were replaced by their shadowy simulacra, a series of 'fictive' abstractions in the minds of broadcasters, advertisers and regulators (cf. Ang 1991). U.S. broadcasting policy, having begun with the ideals of pluralism, diversity and rational consumer choice (the prerequisites for an efficient 'marketplace' according to classic free market liberalism), was thus driven by commercial interests and federal regulation towards what Ang describes as a 'streamlined' media system and a 'mainstream', collective audience, based on classic 'public interest' assumptions.

Returning to the opposition between two 'ideal types' of broadcasting which was introduced at the start of this section, we can draw two preliminary conclusions. First, both the British and the U.S. systems of broadcasting were forced to compromise from their initial starting positions, in response to competing external and internal factions pursuing different economic, political and moral agendas. Within the 'public interest' model espoused by the BBC, there has been a continuing tension between a centripetal version of the public interest as a collective common good represented by a single coherent organisation (the BBC of Reith) and a

centrifugal version of the public interest as an aggregation of separate special interests represented by a pluralistic, decentralised 'accountable' broadcasting system (the BBC of Greene, or the 'public service' of Channel Four). In the U.S. there has been a similar tension within the 'marketplace of ideas' between a libertarian view of a disinterested, pluralistic market delivering a diversity of goods and services to a diversity of consumers, and the 'mainstreaming' of audiences as collective aggregations of needs, driven by the FCC's notion of a collective 'public interest' and the advertisers' need for viable demographic categories.

Secondly we can trace a remarkable convergence between British and U.S. broadcasting towards a common system of 'monopoly broadcasting', the British ITV-BBC duopoly and the U.S. 'one network in triplicate' (Bagdikian 1990, 132). Trailing remnants of contradictory tendencies and theories as noted above, the two systems converged from apparently opposite ends of the spectrum towards a consensus based on a collective idea of their audience and audience needs, to be served through a unitary system of broadcasting. Monopoly broadcasting was tilted towards the theoretical traditions of 'cultural pessimism' and 'ideological effects' which dominated media research in the 1960s and 1970s; broadcasting was a dangerously powerful medium to which the public were dangerously susceptible, requiring a comprehensive, controlled system of broadcasting rooted in a collective common 'public interest'.

Summarising these two conclusions, the British and U.S. systems of broadcasting were simultaneously both 'monopolistic' and 'hegemonic'. They were 'monopolistic' in so far as they represented a unified system of control based on an institutional view of the audience as a unitary 'mass'. They were 'hegemonic' because they incorporated their own critique; while they represented the audience as a collective, unitary category they also claimed to provide a pluralistic 'market of

ideas'. This 'hegemony' incorporated the two rationales noted at the beginning of this section. According to a materialist conception of culture, a system of broadcasting will grow out of the needs and wants of its audiences, which in turn mirror the determining patterns of class, community and 'structures of feeling'. According to an idealist conception of culture, broadcasting is seen as a powerful medium to be controlled, feared and exploited while audiences are unpredictable, autonomous, diverse and individualistic. In a 'hegemonic' system of broadcasting, these contradictory rationales converged in a single unified system of control.

This hegemonic structure allowed broadcasters to preempt and deflect criticisms, as with the networks' 'cooperation doctrine' in the 1930s, or the BBC's partial and tokenistic concessions to regional autonomy and popular taste in the 1930s and 1940s. The same structure of internal contradictions also made the established broadcasters increasingly vulnerable to the renewed attack on their hegemony which was launched by the media access movement in the late 1960s.

4.4 Two versions of media access

In the previous section I offered a summary of the development of broadcasting in Britain and the U.S., based on a 'fundamental contradiction' between two models of broadcasting policy, 'public interest' broadcasting and 'the marketplace of ideas', based on a view of the audience as 'determined' or 'self-determining' respectively. I suggested that by the 1960s both countries had tilted towards a monopolistic system of control based on a 'public interest' rationale which viewed audiences as a collective entity to be served by a unitary system of broadcasting. The evolution of this system was influenced by a number of economic and political factors (in Gramsci's terms, 'conjunctures') but the ideological paradigm, in particular the positioning of the audience as a unitary 'mass' whose collective interest needed to be

protected, was paramount. The broadcasting system in both countries was 'hegemonic' in that it incorporated contradictory rationales and theories; in this sense it also contained the seeds of its own potential destruction. In this section I will introduce the 'counter-hegemonic' strategies of the media access movement.

Like the system of 'monopoly broadcasting' they opposed, arguments for 'media access' in the 1960s grew out of a similarly contradictory set of motives and ideological positions. Where the broadcasting systems at the time were tilted towards the 'public interest' model, the first wave of media access was tilted towards a 'marketplace of ideas' ideology. However, as with the broadcasters they attacked, the position of access advocates was not clear-cut; the marketplace rationale contained unacknowledged assumptions of a collective 'public interest'. Two consequences arose from this contradictory intellectual position. First, the media access movement, like the movement towards 'cultural access' in the late nineteenth century, drew together a diverse coalition of opportunists and idealists with different political and economic interests. In time this coalition was placed under strain and the subsequent direction of media reform satisfied some factions (the economic opportunists) while disappointing others (the cultural idealists). Secondly, the unacknowledged contradictions within the media access movement resulted in a partial approach to media reform; only when the inadequacies of a 'marketplace of ideas' approach to media access had been cruelly exposed did the underlying 'public interest' dimensions of media access receive belated recognition.

As with the direction of official media policy, the movement for media access was also driven by 'conjunctural' factors, including the availability of new technology, the political sensibility of the 1960s 'counter-culture' and the economic shift towards an information-based economy. However, these contingent factors were the catalyst

for an ideological shift which drew on the deep-rooted contradictions and broken promises of the 'public interest' and 'marketplace of ideas' models of broadcasting.

In this section I will begin by outlining two models of media access. I have chosen to draw primarily on the U.S. experience because here the arguments for media access gained clarity by being articulated within a definite legal framework. This framework consisted of the U.S. Constitution, in particular the First Amendment, and broadcasting law, in particular the contested notion of 'fairness' which was developed through the FCC and the courts. Despite the absence of a comparable legalistic machinery, British models of media access (often directly imported from the U.S. and Canada) followed a similar pattern. In the next section I will trace the drift towards one of these two models, and explain why I believe this version of media access, based on a 'marketplace of ideas' rationale, was ultimately ineffective.

Arguments for media access in the U.S. in the late 1960s took two principal forms. The first argument centred on the private rights of individuals and communities to broadcast their views through the mass media. This position was linked with an 'absolutist' or 'libertarian' reading of the First Amendment. Taken to its absolutist extreme, the rights-based model meant that everyone (including existing broadcasters) had an equal right to airtime; problems of media scarcity, defined not merely by the old limits on spectrum availability, but also by the limited attention of what remained a finite audience, were conveniently overlooked. One access advocate even attempted to introduce a law requiring newspapers to publish all 'letters to the editor' which touched on "a vital community public issue" (Barron 1973, 44 - 52). Aside from the problem of overloading the available outlets and available audiences, the absolutist position also ignored the danger of reproducing social inequalities if media access became literally a free-for-all; the fact that Spiro Agnew was already demanding a right of access for the President of the United

States in 1969 suggested that simply opening up the marketplace of ideas to all comers would tend to favour the politically and economically powerful. Subsequent experience of broadcast deregulation, considered below, would later confirm this assumption.

The second argument for access to the media centred not on the private speech rights of the 'broadcasters', but on the public information rights of audiences. If the desired outcome of the 'marketplace of ideas' was an informed electorate as the cornerstone of a democratic society, media access needed to be channelled in a particular direction. As in the 'public interest' model of broadcasting policy, broadcasting was here conceived as a public activity which carried certain public obligations, in particular supplying audiences with a diversity of information and ideas on matters of 'public interest'. According to this model, access should be regulated according to a normative view of the public's best interests; the model shared the assumptions of 'public interest' broadcasting that a common, collective interest does indeed exist, and raised the problem of how and by whom this 'public interest' could or should be defined.

Advocates of media access have tended to treat these two arguments as if they were one; an increase in the number of voices allowed onto the airwaves will increase the diversity of information available to the public. The contradictions behind this comforting assumption began to unravel in the dilemmas over programme content and selection and audience 'choice', as media access passed from theory into practice in the 1970s.

The two versions of media access described here can be traced back to the First Amendment, which states that "Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press...". In the sphere of broadcasting policy, this

phrase has come to mean one of two things. At a literal level, the amendment is understood in a libertarian sense to enshrine the right of 'free speech', meaning that every citizen (and every broadcaster) has an absolute right not only to speak but to 'publish' their views over the airwaves without interference from the federal government. The second interpretation claims to read the spirit behind the letter of the First Amendment and locates free speech in the context of self-government; 'freedom of speech' means the free circulation of information among the people in a democracy so that they control the government, not vice versa. In this instance there is an 'affirmative' obligation upon the broadcaster not only to protect but to promote free speech. Here 'free speech' is understood in a communitarian sense to refer to the U.S. public's right of access to diverse sources of information, unabridged by direct or indirect censorship from public bodies like the Federal Communications Commission, or from monopolistic and self-interested broadcasters. Free speech is further qualified by reference to 'issues of public importance', the implication being that certain other forms of 'private' speech may fall into a separate 'unprotected' category outside the scope of the First Amendment. The precedent for this qualification was the distinction between 'private' and 'public' forms of writing in the eighteenth century (Warner 1990, 38 - 43).

The latter 'affirmative' interpretation of the First Amendment accorded with the Federal Communication Commission's 'expansive' definition of the 'public interest' as referring primarily to the rights of the listening public, not the broadcaster⁸¹. The former, more literal (and according to critics like Jerome Barron, more 'romantic') interpretation, was oriented towards the private rights of broadcasters; thus broadcasters argued that the imposition of 'public interest' obligations by the FCC infringed their private rights as 'citizens' (Barron 1967, 1641).

⁸¹ "The emphasis must be first and foremost on the interest, the convenience, and the necessity of the listening public, and not on the interest, convenience, or necessity of the individual broadcaster or the advertiser" (Federal Radio Commission Programming Policy 23rd August 1928, quoted in Kahn 1973, 133).

Historically, unconditional freedom of speech under the First Amendment appears to have been a comparatively recent invention; David Yassky traces First Amendment absolutism to the 1930s, when the Supreme Court sought to give individual citizens political leverage against the unprecedented executive powers of central government under Roosevelt (Yassky 1991, 1734 - 1777). In the Revolutionary period, 'liberty of the press' had an affirmative meaning, referring to alignment with the cause of liberty against British tyranny. A free press was expected to make common cause with the U.S. government and people; use of the press to attack the patriot cause amounted to a seditious abuse of privilege (Buel 1980, 59 - 62). For printers in the revolutionary period, 'neutrality' was a political liability and the 'liberty of the press' became a codified shorthand, signalling support for the patriotic cause (Botein 1980). The political context of the Revolutionary period thus tends to support an affirmative, communitarian interpretation of First Amendment rights in terms of a common 'public interest', aligned with a patriotic sense of obligation, at odds with the libertarian interpretation applied to private speech rights in a marketplace of ideas.

The Federal Communications Commission provided an entry point for both the libertarian and communitarian readings of the First Amendment in its 'Fairness Doctrine'. The Fairness Doctrine evolved in the 1950s as a clarification of existing principles rather than a new set of regulations, and was endorsed by Congress in 1959. Its application became more widespread with the publication of the 'Fairness Primer' in 1964 and the issuing of specific rules in 1967, coinciding with growing pressure for greater access and accountability in broadcasting in the mid-1960s.

The Fairness Doctrine had two parts. The first part, reflecting the 'public interest' principle of the public's right to be informed, required the broadcaster to devote "a

reasonable percentage of... broadcast time to the coverage of public issues” (Simmons 1978, 9). This part of the fairness doctrine was expounded at length in the 1949 Report on Editorialising, which reiterated the principle that “it is this right of the public to be informed, rather than any right on the part of the Government, any broadcast licensee or any individual member of the public to broadcast his own particular views on any matter, which is the foundation stone of the American system of broadcasting” (Kahn 1973, 384). The second part referred to the private rights of individuals and groups other than the broadcaster to a share of the broadcaster’s airtime; the broadcaster’s coverage of ‘public’ issues should be ‘fair’ in so far as it provided “an opportunity for the presentation of contrasting points of view” (Simmons 1978, 9). The Fairness Doctrine thus contained both ‘affirmative’ demands that broadcasters provide a diversity of information on ‘public’ or ‘controversial’ issues (the formula was vague), and a ‘negative’ function of cancelling out bias where it was detected. It was this latter half of the formula, ‘part 2’ of the original Fairness Doctrine, which was given emphasis in the 1964 Fairness Primer and 1974 Fairness Report issued to broadcasters, governing the ‘right of reply’ in personal attacks and ‘equal time rules’ in political advertising. Consequently the overwhelming majority of citizen complaints and official FCC station inquiries involving ‘fairness’ referred exclusively to Part 2 of the Fairness Doctrine (Simmons 1978, 146).

Taken on its own, without reference to the ‘affirmative’ obligations of the broadcaster to provide diverse sources of information, the ‘negative’ FCC rules governing right of reply and equal time were highly problematic. Firstly the rules depended on the activism of the aggrieved parties in demanding a right of reply; given the lengthy court delays and the minuscule chances of success (about one in one thousand between 1973 and 1976), the rules were more attractive to political parties and lobbyists than to individual citizens. Secondly the rules had a “bipolar

orientation” (Simmons 1978, 190 - 192) which encouraged a tit-for-tat spiral of mutual name-calling rather than ‘contrasting points of view’; unless the listener or viewer had chanced to hear the original broadcast, the fairness doctrine merely offered two chances to be misinformed for the price of one. Thirdly, the rules gave no entry point for third party views or for new opinions outside the original discussion; the right of reply did not include the right to put new questions. Finally the fairness obligations under part 2 of the Fairness Doctrine were a major financial disincentive to broadcast controversial issues of public importance, as required under part 1; the real costs of legal and editorial checking and the potential costs of providing free airtime to a complainant, together with the unlikely threat of an official FCC inquiry and the still more unlikely sanction of revoking the broadcaster’s licence, all combined to have a ‘chilling effect’ on the broadcasting of controversial, political material.

The fairness doctrine, with its judicial emphasis on part 2 ‘rights to reply’ over part 1 ‘affirmative obligations’, exposed the weaknesses of a theory of free speech which set individual rights of speakers above collective rights of audiences; perhaps if this emphasis had been reversed and part 1 obligations to cover ‘controversial issues of public importance’ had been enforced more vigorously, the fairness doctrine might have served a useful purpose. As it was, the broadcasters’ argument that legal and financial accountability had a ‘chilling effect’ eventually resulted in the repeal of the fairness doctrine in 1987.

In this section I have argued that theoretical rationales for media access in the United States have drawn on two competing traditions of free speech, rooted in the First Amendment and U.S. broadcasting law. The media access movement of the 1960s was thus heir to a historical contradiction. On one side there was a libertarian argument, drawing on an absolutist (and ahistorical) reading of the First Amendment

and based on the speech rights of the broadcaster, individual citizen or collective 'community' to 'publish' their views; seeking a model of broadcasting based on the free and uninhibited 'marketplace of ideas', this argument ignored the economic and political interests which superimposed upon this 'free' market their own block transactions of collective consumer 'needs'. On the other side there was a communitarian argument which drew on a historical interpretation of the intentions behind the First Amendment as an attempt to promote the information rights of voters and citizens in a fledgling democracy; this view, which placed the emphasis on the rights of the listener rather than the broadcaster, received significant support both from the FCC in its 'fairness' rules and in Supreme Court rulings on First Amendment cases involving the FCC in the 1960s. The communitarian argument, based in turn on a 'public interest' model of broadcasting, emphasised the obligations of broadcasters within the existing system to provide a diversity of information and culture, while the libertarian argument demanded new rights for broadcasters and the replacement of the existing broadcasting oligarchy by a newly deregulated 'marketplace of ideas'. The models of media access which evolved in the next twenty years would reflect the contradictions and confusions between these two sets of arguments.

4.5 The moment of media reform: culturalism, access and the market

Given the contradictory inheritance described above, it is striking that the media access movement of the 1960s and 1970s was tilted towards a 'marketplace of ideas' model of broadcasting, based on Part 2 of the Fairness Doctrine and a 'libertarian' reading of the First Amendment. Early arguments for media access referred primarily to private speech rights, not public information rights. The logic in the early manifestos for media access (Barron 1967, Shamberg 1971) was resolutely grounded in 'culturalist optimism' and the arguments contained the same cluster of

assumptions already noted in the theoretical literature and in 'official' broadcasting policy. Audiences were seen as dynamic participants, not passive recipients. The technological means of broadcasting (part of the Marxist 'superstructure'), especially the relatively new possibilities of portable video and cable distribution, were seen as inherently empowering, while the determining effects of structural social inequalities (the Marxist 'base') were to be 'solved' by cultural and technological means, not by political organisation. Thus media activists sought "post-political solutions to cultural problems" (Shamberg 1971). In this section I will review some of the factors behind this resolutely culturalist emphasis and some of the implications for broadcasting policy.

The culturalist emphasis within the media access movement was driven by external 'conjunctural' factors in the 1960s, firstly by the availability of new media technologies, secondly by the political consciousness of the counter-culture and the civil rights movement, thirdly by the free market mythology of 'consumer sovereignty'. The consequence of this culturalist tendency was an emphasis on the means rather than the ends of media access, based on an optimistic faith in audiences as 'citizens' in the Enlightenment tradition of free press theory. Based on this positioning of the audience, early media access initiatives reverted to the 'neutral resource model' of cultural provision first developed in the settlement house and other late nineteenth century cultural institutions. As in the earlier institutions, 'neutrality' was problematic to sustain and ultimately ineffective. The logic of culturalist optimism meshed with classic free market liberalism, and the primary beneficiaries of the movement for media reform would eventually be the new media entrepreneurs; in turn many of the 'new media' were tied back in to the 'old media', with industrial ownership and capital becoming more concentrated even as technologies and forms of distribution became more diverse. The political economy of the broadcasting industry thus reverted to a familiar pattern of oligopolistic

control and 'streamlined' programming for a 'mass' audience. I will now consider these developments in more detail.

The first community television experiments in the late 1960s and early 1970s benefited from the availability of new portable video equipment and the new potential of cable television distribution. Sony's 'portapak' system became available in 1968, making possible a new form of home-made television at relatively little cost. The possibilities for a new, decentralised, locally owned media system encouraged a rush of technological fetishism; Shamberg claimed that portable video was "subversive" because it allowed young people to "be their own authorities" (Shamberg 1971, 21 - 22).

Community television also benefited from new technologies of distribution, especially the growth of cable networks. Again, technology encouraged culturalist optimism, based on the promise of a new 'abundance' of media leading to greater cultural diversity, participation and access (Sloan 1971, Shamberg 1971, Pool 1983). In Canada, which pioneered community television in the late 1960s and early 1970s with support from the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, cable penetration had reached 25% by 1968. In Britain and the U.S., cable systems had begun as a technological means of improving the reach of conventional 'over air' broadcasting; with improvements in transmission equipment, this supplementary distributive technology was largely unnecessary and the first experiments in 'community' television in the 1970s took advantage of newly redundant cable capacity. In the U.S. several cities including Boston and New York introduced 'public access' channels in the early 1970s, often attached to local public broadcasting stations; in 1972 the Federal Communications Commission required all cable operators to make available at least three channels, one for educational use, one for use by government, one for open public access.

These requirements were eventually lifted⁸² ; by 1990 only 17% of cable operators provided public access, mostly in the major metropolitan areas, 13% provided educational access, and 11% government access (Engelman 1996, 257; Aufderheide 1992, 58). In Britain, also in 1972, five 'experimental' cable television experiments were licensed for an initial four year period (later extended to 1979); of these only two (Swindon and Greenwich) survived into the next franchise period. Two further rounds of franchises were awarded in 1981 and 1983. Several of the U.S. public access centres and British community television stations (including Swindon Viewpoint and the Alternate Media Center in New York) imported community television expertise from Canada.

Taken together these new technological developments inspired a new optimism about the possibility of 'democratising' television through a combination of local community control and media 'abundance'. The faith in 'democratic' media was premised on the technological utopianism of Marshall McLuhan (1964); Shamberg's 'meta-manual' (1971) combined McLuhanite rhetoric ("electronic media have become looped-in to our neural networks") with the apolitical anti-establishment stance of the drug culture. Later the same cocktail of techno-fetishism and psychedelic mysticism would fuel the 'revolutionary' claims made for the internet, with Timothy Leary and Jean Baudrillard filling in for McLuhan (Woolley 1994; Rheingold 1994; Helsel and Roth 1991). The problem with these claims lay in their 'culturalist' focus on the narrowly technical processes of media production and distribution, which excluded the broader framework of 'materialist' or Marxist analysis.

⁸² In 1979 the constitutionality of the FCC's rules requiring 'PEG' channels (for public, educational and government use) was successfully challenged in the Supreme Court. In 1984 the Cable Communications Policy Act the rules were overturned, leaving the matter at the discretion of local governments who negotiated franchise agreements with cable operators.

Just as Raymond Williams criticised McLuhan's technological determinism for ignoring the political decision-making which gives technology a shape and direction, so the myth of media abundance and techno-democracy was vulnerable to a Marxist critique. The utopian belief in the liberating potential of 'community video' ignored the economic and social positioning of the video workers and their clients. Community video's infatuation with technology was criticised in Marxist terms as a mere 'culturalist illusion', implying that technology could somehow "bypass the effects of productive relationships on the social body", especially the effects of class inequality (Mattelart and Piemme 1980, 326 - 327). From a less theoretical, empirical perspective, community video ignored the educational and social inequalities which formed a barrier for many working class participants. Accordingly projects tended to serve "sectional interests in the middle class" and the prime beneficiaries of the projects were the video workers themselves, the "semi-professionals of counter-information systems" (Laulan 1977, 24 - 25); thus Michael Shamberg, having sown his radical wild oats, went to work in Hollywood.

The radical possibilities of cable distribution and the new media abundance were vulnerable to a similar anti-culturalist, Marxist critique. Public access channels and community television stations were embedded in the political economy of the nascent cable industry. In the U.S. the promise of media abundance and public access, emphasised in the 1971 Sloan Commission report on the cable industry, was instrumental in allowing the cable industry to develop with only minimal federal regulation. In Britain, Nicholas Garnham warned that community television could play a similar role at the leading edge of industry expansion, paving the way for the dismantling of public service television and "the expansion of privately operated cable financed by Pay Television" (Garnham 1978).

While from a purely technological viewpoint, cable communications made possible an increase in consumer choice (through the provision of more channels), narrowcasting to small, local communities and communities of interest, even two-way communications and 'tele-voting' through fibre-optic cables, seen from an economic perspective the cable industry was moving in an altogether different direction. The political economy of the cable industry was based on the relatively unfettered expansion of an entrepreneurial industry. The short-term goal of attracting private investment into the building of the cable infrastructure encouraged regulators and government to defer formal requirements for programme content, local control or accountability beyond a minimal framework. In the U.S. the cable industry received preferential treatment from the FCC, over the protests of the networks, because the long-term viability of the industry seemed to be uncertain. Britain would adopt a similar strategy following the 1982 ITAP (Information Technology Advisory Panel) report, entrusting the building of the industry to private investors. Because of the high initial costs of installing the cable network, British and U.S. regulation subsequently adopted a 'light touch' in order to ensure existing and potential investors were not discouraged from supporting a fledgling industry. When seen in the industrial context of precarious investments and the pressure to reimburse shareholders, the democratic promise and potential of the cable industry would recede into the background. Cynically, we might assume that the 'experiments' of the 1970s were merely a marketing ploy to sell the new industry's potential to governments and regulators; even if industry concessions to 'access' and 'community' requirements were not this calculated, Garnham's 'materialist' analysis of the industry offered a more realistic estimate of the industry's future direction in the 1980s than the 'culturalist' utopianism of media access.

Along with the technological availability of new forms of production and distribution, the other 'conjunctural' catalyst for the community television

movement, particularly in the U.S., was the political consciousness of the 1960s counter-culture. The broad anti-hegemonic, anti-institutional mood of the 'New Left' in the U.S. and in Britain during the 1960s was noted in the introduction. In the U.S. protests against the Vietnam war provided a focus for New Left activism (cf. Gitlin 1980). In turn this emphasis on protest led into demands for access to the mainstream broadcast media, in place of the ineffective 'media' of violent street demonstrations and leaflets (Barron 1973, 94 - 116). Of the legal cases discussed in Barron's survey of the origins of media access, the majority involved anti-establishment protests from the 'New Left', in opposition to government policy in Vietnam, corporate exploitation or right wing demagoguery. Through the New Left, the media access movement was also linked with the civil rights movement's assertion of individual rights against oppression by majorities (or by powerful minorities), and the defence of these rights in the courts. Accordingly, what Barron calls the "access hit parade" of the 1960s (Barron 1973, 160 - 172) became entangled with the 'rights culture' based on the rights of individuals or citizens' groups to speak, rather than the rights of the public to be better informed.

The consequence of this association between political protest, civil rights and media access was an assumption of widespread public activism and a 'rights-based' legalistic machinery. The construction of the public as highly politicised and aggressively proactive was a welcome counterpoint to the 'narcotised' audience in the theory of mass media effects; the assumption of activism was a return to the enlightenment theory of free-thinking individual citizens at the heart of eighteenth century American democracy and free press theory. However, there is no evidence that this activism applied outside a small minority, and the fiction of an 'activist public' provided a convenient mandate for those who claimed to represent their best interests; 'rights of reply' thus tended to be abrogated by the politically powerful. Similarly the legal machinery of the courts short-circuited the FCC's concern with

the context and content of broadcasting, the ecology of competing stations and viewpoints, substituting a narrow focus on single issues and the 'rights' of particular viewpoints and interests. These developments are illustrated by the exploitation of political 'right of reply' rules and the mobilisation of organised lobbying in the late 1960s and 1970s.

In 1967 anti-smoking groups demanded and were awarded a 'right of reply' to cigarette advertisements under FCC 'fairness' rules; there followed a spate of similar cases, in which advocacy groups demanded a 'right of reply' to advertisements for cars or military recruitment. By 1969, Spiro Agnew was demanding airtime for the President and using the 'fairness' and 'equal time' rules to harass broadcasters who criticised government policy (Emery and Smythe 1974, 497 - 512). The 'right of reply' favoured official political representatives, skewing coverage towards a succession of "preferred speakers" instead of expanding the range of public issues open to debate (Price 1995, 195 - 203).

In 1964 the United Church of Christ set another precedent for rights-based media access, taking a racist southern radio station to court for failing to represent the interests of the local black community; in 1969, over the heads of the FCC, the Supreme Court revoked the station's licence (Barron 1973, 194 - 198). The success of 'citizens' groups' in overturning station licence applications in the courts demonstrated the vulnerability of broadcasters to legal sanctions and organised lobbying. By threatening stations either with a 'petition to deny' their licence, addressed to the FCC, or with a direct challenge in the courts, citizens' groups succeeded in negotiating informal private contracts with local broadcasters for the coverage of particular issues and viewpoints (Barron 1973, 232 - 248; Jencks 1971). In the 1980s and 1990s citizens' groups have been replaced by professional political lobbyists, such as AIM (Accuracy in Media) and the Christian Coalition on

the political right, or Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) on the political left, all claiming to 'represent' some organised section of public opinion; the aim here is not so much to ensure a fair representation of local issues as to promote a particular political viewpoint.

Ironically these early victories in the public access campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s provided an opportunity for single issue campaigners, operating outside the accountability of public regulation, to close down debate and dialogue. Instead of increasing dialogue on matters of public importance, the new political watchdogs encouraged a mixture of political demagoguery and cautious evasion. Of course the United Church of Christ could not have anticipated that they would pave the way for Christian fundamentalists demanding consumer boycotts of advertisers supporting 'immoral' television shows in the 1990s⁸³. However, by concentrating on the machinery of media reform and emphasising a 'rights' culture in which any citizen could hold the broadcasters to account, the media access advocates of the 1960s and 1970s bought into the individualist, rights-based version of media access, turning a blind eye to the broader 'structural' contexts of media consumption and production. In the halcyon days of the 1960s New Left, it was assumed that activism was universal; all that was needed was to provide a legal opening. However, social inequalities made it unlikely that the benefits of media access would be evenly spread; the new technology and the legal machinery provided an entry point for the educated, the middle class and the politically active. Over time the media reforms first initiated in the late 1960s benefited a privileged minority, while the overall diversity of programming, of political views and of cultural and political information available to the general public did not significantly improve. Trusting in the activism of the general public, community television activists and public access

⁸³ The most recent example of religious lobbying was the threat by religious groups to boycott advertisers on ABC's 'Ellen' sitcom in May 1997, following the 'outing' of the main character, played by a real-life lesbian. Three months earlier a southern senator objected to nudity in the holocaust drama, 'Schindler's List', broadcast on NBC.

channels concentrated on opening up 'forums' and 'resources' for public use. When that policy yielded a familiar collection of private opinions instead of a reanimation of public opinion, the activists were predictably disappointed.

Both the technological fetishists and the political protesters shared a particular construction of the public as a collection of individuals with virtually limitless potential once given access to the necessary equipment and legal rights. What they generally lacked was a classic Marxist perspective on the material conditions which constrained this potential, in particular the social inequalities and the collective categories of social class and the political economy of broadcasting as a capitalist industry. This construction of the audience as unconstrained individuals meshed perfectly with the myth of consumer sovereignty; free agency in the marketplace of ideas was analogous with free agency in the economic marketplace of goods and services.

The movement for media access thus found itself aligned with the movement for economic deregulation against their common enemy, the monopoly broadcaster. However, experience elsewhere suggests that an open economic market does not translate into a free flowing market of ideas. In France and Italy, deregulation of broadcasting in the 1970s and 1980s followed a pattern of explosive diversification of outlets followed by rapid reconcentration of ownership; instead of democratising the media, grassroots political activists of the 1970s merely cleared a path for the media entrepreneurs of the 1980s⁸⁴.

In Britain and the U.S. the promise of 'community' broadcasting and media 'abundance' through cable television was similarly short-lived. The industry gradually retreated from its initial promises of local programming and local access,

⁸⁴ See Miller (1992) and Lafrance & Simon (1992) for the story of the liberation and privatisation of French radio.

abetted by 'light touch' or non-existent programming requirements in Britain's 1984 Cable and Broadcasting Act and the U.S. 1984 Cable Communications Policy Act (Wilson 1994, 35 - 36; Aufderheide 1992). The idea that increased channels would mean increased diversity of content proved equally illusory. The cable industry followed the same pattern of concentration of ownership as conventional broadcasting. In the U.S. for example, just four 'multiple system operators' delivered programming to 47% of subscribers in 1992 (Aufderheide 1992, 55); in turn the cable operators and the networks (or their parent companies) had a stake in many of the new cable channels. Pursuing a short term return on their investments, cable operators resorted to an equally familiar 'low risk' programming strategy, directed at a mass audience demographic to attract maximum subscriber and advertising income; in Britain, where the cable market is dominated by U.S. telecommunications companies, television programming is only a minor part of a marketing mix based primarily on telephony (Goodwin 1995, 680; Wilson 1994, 156). The new increase in channels has not delivered ideological competition, only a new way of recycling familiar material; in fact, given the intersecting ties of cross-ownership, diversity of outlets has not even delivered economic competition. Too late, the alliance between community broadcasters and cable operators broke down, with local programming and local accountability consigned to the late-night freak-shows of Manhattan Cable and a handful of 'local origination' programmes⁸⁵, or on the broadcast channels such novelties as the BBC's 'Video Diaries' or the globally franchised 'America's Funniest Home Videos'.

The public access and community television movement was sucked into a culturalist 'marketplace of ideas' strategy, encouraged by technological, political and economic opportunism. The eventual failure to enhance real consumer choice and real public

⁸⁵ Local origination programmes, made by the cable company to reflect local community interests and issues, represent a 'safe' alternative to local access programmes, which are produced independently by the community themselves.

participation was inscribed in the political economy of the industry and in the structural limits of consumer choice, imposed by education, class and ingrained habit. Before considering alternative models of media access based on a 'public interest' rationale, I want to consider the reasons for the failure of the 'marketplace of ideas' model in more detail.

4.6 The culturalist model: from neutral resource to common carrier

In this section I will draw on specific examples of 'public access' and 'community television' experiments in Britain and the U.S. in the early 1970s to illustrate the problematic 'culturalist' assumptions behind the 'marketplace of ideas' model of public access. In Britain, culturalist assumptions about users of community television resulted in a failure to address the 'structural' problem of social class. In the U.S. the open door policy of public access channels placed the private interests of users before the public interest of audiences. Public access experiments in the 1970s helped to build the momentum of the cable industry in the 1980s, encouraging a rhetoric of neutrality, choice and consumer sovereignty, and resulting in a formal diversification of outlets and a qualitative erosion of the public sphere of political dialogue and debate. In both countries policies of deregulation and privatisation aspired to a 'common carrier' model of broadcasting which ran counter to industrial trends towards horizontal and vertical integration.

Swindon Viewpoint was part of the first wave of British 'community television' experiments, one of five stations licensed by the Home Office in 1972. When the station began operating in 1973 it adopted a resolutely neutral, non-interventionist approach, described alternately as the "neutral resource model" (Halloran 1976, 28) or the "resource centre" model (Croll and Husband 1975, 27). In the spirit of culturalist optimism, the problem of access was to be addressed in purely technical

terms and 'structural' barriers of class and economic inequality were ignored. Inspired by the 'hit parade' of 1960s US media access, the British model assumed a near-universal spread of competence and activism, once the purely technical problems of equipment and training had been solved. In fact in the first 8 months of operation, 65% of those initiating programmes were categorised as 'middle-class' despite a majority of cable subscribers described as 'working class' (Croll & Husband 1975, 31). This middle class dominance was part of a broader pattern of middle class voluntarism. A subsequent community television experiment in Dumbartonshire was one of a series of experiments exploring the impact of leisure activities on 'quality of life' (Bennett 1977; Leisure 1977); the official report into these experiments found that increased provision and outreach had failed to have any significant impact on the "social structure of participation in leisure activities" (Leisure 1977, 163). The new 'leisure' facilities were used mostly by middle class individuals and voluntary associations, partly because they were better connected and better informed, partly because they tended to predominate in the local voluntary sector.

Community television's tendency to attract mostly middle class users was exacerbated by the reliance on 'representative' local groups as channels for community involvement. Swindon Viewpoint answered to the 'Swindon Community Television Association', described by the researchers as a "professional oligarchy" (Croll and Husband 1975, 26). The Dumbartonshire project was similarly reliant on preexisting 'community' contacts made through the 'Quality of Life' programme. The problem with such established channels of community involvement is that many 'representative' groups (eg. Tenants' Associations, Parent Teacher Associations) typically lack the financial resources or constitutional muscle to be truly 'representative', relying instead on self-selecting volunteers. The open door policy of community television also attracted media literate individuals and activists, who

again tended to be predominantly middle class participants often with eccentric, 'unrepresentative' views. As a result of the failure to develop any more proactive approach to community outreach, the 'neutral resource' of community television was thus largely appropriated by preexisting interest groups, self-appointed community 'representatives' and middle class individuals. This reproduced the pattern of increased 'community' provision across a range of services in Dumbartonshire, tending merely to reinforce existing patterns of involvement and local power structures; in the case of Swindon Viewpoint, the external research team noted that neutrality "was in some cases counter-productive" (Croll and Husband 1975, 36).

The failure to reach beyond these unrepresentative minority interests resulted in a disappointingly trivial and parochial programme content. Programming centred not on the broader concerns of local politics but on the problem of dog faeces on pavements⁸⁶. When a controversial issue was eventually raised, passive attempts to stimulate discussion, for example the policy of 'outward referral' in Swindon and the 'right of reply' in Dumbartonshire, fell flat, apparently due to community apathy. Of course these disappointments would not matter if such parochialism genuinely reflected the needs and interests of the audience; however, a survey of viewers in Swindon pointed to a preference for hard information and features (especially local politics and services) over community 'viewpoints' (Croll and Husband 1975, 11 - 12). The 'open door' policy at Swindon failed to address public information needs, providing instead an outlet for separate individual 'viewpoints' and interest groups, all too disconnected from the real concerns of the majority of viewers.

The 'neutral resource' tactic, as with the nineteenth century settlement house, reflected a self-effacing ethic on the part of the professional amateur. At

⁸⁶ This anecdote from an informal interview with Oliver Bennett, former director of Vale Television in Dumbartonshire.

Swindon, the project director was anxious to avoid exploiting the community by imposing either his own political views (playing 'Robin Hood') or the management team's technical proficiency (Dunn 1977, 33); in Dumbartonshire, team members found themselves consciously holding back from intervening in community decision-making (Bennett 1977, 7). This reticence may reflect not just a theoretical neutrality but a recurrence of the self-abnegating guilt of the nineteenth century settlement resident. The problem with such an approach or 'non-policy' (Bennett, *ibid.*), is that it comes perilously close to 'laissez-faire', leaving novices to learn from unnecessary mistakes and closing down the framework of opportunities when their real interests may have been better served by a professional presentation of their views, rather than an amateur experiment with the means of communication. A more active production role for station staff would have diluted community involvement in process but might have allowed greater community control over product; Swindon Viewpoint eventually found that a substantial percentage of users preferred initiating programmes over participation, while others valued post-production (editing) over producing material from scratch (Croll and Husband 1975, 32). Despite the animateurs' attempts to 'demythologise' the production process, researchers found that "part of the value to participant groups was precisely this 'myth' of television" (Croll and Husband 1975, 39).

In the U.S., public access channels were shaped by the same logic as their British imitators. In Manhattan, where the public access experiment was most fully developed in the early 1970s, production centres operated on a 'first come, first served' basis. There was resistance to formal organisation of access facilities and channels, following the liberal / libertarian assumption that the random, chaotic quality of public access represented an asset, not a liability (Othmer 1973, 53). As in Britain, the access channels tended to be dominated by a handful of regular users, supplemented by eccentric fringe groups (*ibid.*, 57).

The rights-based orientation of public access channels resulted in an increasingly introverted, self-indulgent output, described by its critics as “vanity video” and “a pathetic, homemade version of entertainment” (Engelman 1996, 259; Aufderheide 1992, 58). Increasingly ‘narrowcasting’ on the public access channels referred to an introverted conversation which seldom reached beyond the closed circle of participants. A 1972 audience survey of cable viewers in Manhattan indicated that a higher percentage wished to participate than admitted to viewing the channels regularly (7% and 5% respectively) (Othmer 1973, 23); the implication here was that participants (or would-be participants) outnumbered the viewers. By the 1980s the public access centres had moved from an oppositional ethos grounded in community involvement towards an emphasis on individual expression and career advancement; in Manhattan, New York University’s pioneering Alternate Media Center was reborn as the ‘Interactive Telecommunications Program’, the move from community resource to media training centre reflecting the policy trend (Engelman 1996, 257 - 261). Critics complained that the oppositional, community-building potential of public access had been defeated by industry neglect and underfunding, and by the individualistic tenor of programme-makers (Aufderheide 1992, 58 - 62). In the context of proliferating ‘special interest’ cable channels and the growing professionalisation of the public access channels, the new generation of public access programmes often appeared little more than an underfunded, eccentric parody of ‘legitimate’ broadcasting.

The failure of public access channels to provide a genuine alternative to commercial broadcasting stemmed from their individualist, rights-based version of free speech. Discarding the eighteenth century distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ forms of speech, public access channels failed to connect with the general concerns of audiences; in some instances programmes were perhaps only comprehensible or

meaningful to the individuals who produced them. Where many of the earlier programmes had claimed to 'represent' a community of interest to a wider public, later offerings operated within a closed circuit of arcane references or showcased individual egos; instead of building a public forum for dialogue, public access thus consisted of a string of disconnected monologues which further heightened the privatisation of the public sphere. The difference lay not so much in content as in orientation; for many public access programmes the audience might as well not have existed⁸⁷. Public access users were ready to assert their individual rights to free speech but were rarely prepared to answer the "much bigger question" posed by free speech scholar Zechariah Chafee: "freedom for what?" (Chafee 1956, 328).

By focussing on the private rights of the speaker instead of the public information needs of the listener, public access had become part of the 'marketplace of ideas' tradition in U.S. broadcasting; in the 1980s public access channels were integrated into a wider pattern of proliferation without diversity. This proliferation provided a formal spectacle of diversity (more outlets, more speakers, more 'noise') without delivering a substantial diversity of content (different opinions, different world views, public debate). The disconnected, unreal quality of public access television spilled into the newly abundant media of the 1970s and 1980s, especially the structure of television news. The spectacle of diversity allowed a quantitative increase in available information without necessarily making that information comprehensible or accessible. 'Spectacular', non-analytical presentation made television news especially difficult for audiences to assimilate. Douglas Kellner has described the effect of narrative closure, 'objectivity' and other screening devices which contribute to the "greying of reality" in news programmes (Kellner 1990, 112 - 117). Similarly Todd Gitlin (1980) has described the effects of extensive media

⁸⁷ As Othmer notes, few groups sought feedback from their audiences (Othmer 1973, 33); phone numbers posted for public comments at the end of programmes provided an opening for public comments, but were seldom used.

coverage on the 'New Left' student protests against the Vietnam war. Removed from any comprehensible analytical framework, political protest was reduced to colourful spectacle and political radicals were converted into media celebrities, condemned to a "symbolic politics" without constituency or content (Gitlin 1980, 156 - 176). Marcuse described the rhythms of U.S. television news as an alternation of "gorgeous ads with unmitigated horrors" (Marcuse 1965, 97). The effect of such rapidly alternating perspectives was to undermine critical judgement, reducing world events to a bizarre spectacle. Rational judgement is suspended and real events and fictions become virtually equivalent. Programmes and advertisements collapse into each other with overlapping credit sequences, extended trails for successive programmes, even news trails which match appropriate news stories to entertainment programmes.

For the 'culturalist optimist' school of media studies (Fiske, Willis, Hebdige), the cacophonous 'white noise' of the media flow is precisely what makes television viewing a liberating experience; the removal of 'official' judgement and analysis, the stringing together of unrelated images and events and the alternation of 'fiction' and 'reality', while disturbing for conservatives, may 'liberate' audiences, providing an opportunity to exercise their 'symbolic creativity'. This argument is consistent with a 'marketplace of ideas' model of broadcasting and a culturalist, libertarian theory of media effects which places its faith in the individual choices of consumers shopping for ideas. The counter-argument is of course that the ideas on display in this market are remarkably similar, because a system based purely on economic competition between broadcasters cannot be expected to yield competition between ideas; instead of pursuing diversity of content, a commercial system will naturally aim to reduce risk and maximise profit by duplicating successful formulae.

‘Public access’ channels have become part of this movement towards media ‘noise’ and a purely quantitative increase in ‘diversity’. By the early 1990s Engelman estimates that around 2,000 access channels were broadcasting for approximately 15,000 hours per week, more programmes than the networks put out over an entire year (Engelman 1996, 260). The difference between this formal proliferation of ‘private’ voices and a reanimated public sphere can be summarised in three related distinctions. Firstly, public access channels are oriented towards the speech rights of the broadcaster, not the public information needs of listeners; once the first rush of political activism subsidised, these rights were claimed not by ‘community groups’ but by individuals. Secondly, as a result of the emphasis on speakers over listeners, public access programmes rarely provide an entry point for debate, either with viewers or with other broadcasters; each programme exists in its own ideological vacuum. Thirdly, this self-contained, disconnected quality is reproduced in the wider world of television ‘abundance’, especially in television news; while new channels have become available, the mass of new ideas and information has not been placed in any coherent framework and offers no clear entry point for audiences. These distinctions return us to the distinction between the ‘marketplace of ideas’ and the ‘public service’ model of broadcasting. Where the ‘marketplace of ideas’ trusts in the quantitative availability of different sources of information, entertainment and self-fulfilment and the rational choices of individual consumers, the ‘public interest’ rationale demands that these sources be framed within a shared concept of the common good.

The ‘neutral resource’ model of media access is premised on a ‘common carrier’ model of broadcasting. The two key features of a common carrier are the guarantee of universal access and the separation of the means of distribution from the means of production. Examples of ‘common carrier’ status are telephone companies or taxis; common carrier status (or in Britain, ‘public utility’ status) is normally required of a

monopoly distribution network, so that for example, a telephone company must make its connections available to other operators without discrimination. The separation of distribution and production, as at Swindon Viewpoint (Dunn 1977; Halloran 1976, 77) is likewise intended to prevent abuse of monopoly power; if a telephone company owns a network, it is barred from competing against other users of that network by offering rival services, as with British Telecom's attempts to carry video services over conventional telephone lines⁸⁸. While this arrangement removes the threat of legal liability, it also removes the opportunity of financial profit; a common carrier cannot be charged if a telephone chat line or a public access programme is obscene or libelous, nor can it enter the same market as a service provider.

If we extend 'common carrier' status into a general principle in broadcasting, as suggested by Pool (1983), two problems arise. First, the industry is moving towards integration of production and distribution, attempting to roll back existing 'common carrier' regulations, as with British Telecom's current demands to be allowed into the domestic cable market (House of Commons 1995; Goodwin 1995). Under these circumstances, as the Sloan Commission recognised over twenty years previously (Sloan 1971, 147 - 148), it is highly unlikely that private investors and companies will agree to support a 'common carrier' network, fibre optic or otherwise, and then stand back while other companies and investors reap profits by selling products and services over this 'common' network. Integration of production and distribution offers increased profitability and reduced risk, resulting in 'convergence' between telephony, broadcasting and information services; thus U.S. telephone companies invest in British and European cable companies and vice versa, or computer software companies buy up computer hardware companies. As products and services distributed by broadcasters, computer networks or telephone companies become

⁸⁸ BT's 'common carrier' status is currently in dispute; see Goodwin 1995, House of Commons 1995).

virtually interchangeable, the distinction between 'production' of media services and 'distribution' of media becomes problematic. Today the key to profitability is neither production nor distribution but the licensing of copyrights over the dissemination of information; on the internet, 'distribution' has become the 'product'. In these circumstances it is difficult to apply 'common carrier' status; questions of 'liability' and 'ownership' in the media have become extremely difficult to disentangle, as illustrated by the U.S. Congress's convoluted attempts to introduce a Communications Decency Act for the Internet.

The second problem for a 'common carrier' network is that, like the 'neutral resource' model of community television, it fails to take account of 'structural' inequalities among users and the information needs of consumers. With the removal of editorial discrimination, the only qualification for access to a common carrier is ability to pay; inevitably this tends to favour commercial use. The imposition of 'must carry' rules on U.S. cable operators in 1984 legislation obliged cable operators to carry 'local' stations, which included the affiliates of the big three broadcasting networks; in 1992 home shopping channels succeeded in becoming part of the 'must carry' package (Price 1995, 168). On the other hand, with the reduction in non-leased public access channels, opportunities for access for non-commercial groups or non-profit organisations have actually diminished over the same period.

The 'common carrier' thus returns us to the problems of a 'marketplace of ideas' and the 'neutral resource' model of public access. Three problematic assumptions emerge from this model as it developed in the early 1970s. Firstly, by overlooking inequalities of class, education and media literacy, the 'neutral' model assumes that access is the same thing as equality. Secondly the model focuses on the process of communication from the perspective of participants rather than on the product as it

affects audiences, assuming that an aggregation of individual voices amounts to a civic dialogue; in the U.S., the cacophony of public access channels was highly individualistic and did little to create dialogue between broadcasters and audiences, or between different broadcasting groups. Thirdly, the public access movement assumed that the industry would voluntarily provide an effective space for oppositional and alternative viewpoints on more than an experimental, temporary basis. While public access channels limp on in the U.S., they provide little in the way of a genuine alternative public sphere; instead they offer a sideshow of eccentricities which gives sufficient appearance of pluralism to disguise an industry trend towards economic and technological integration and cultural homogenisation. Price's cynical view that access in U.S. broadcasting has been "a means of legitimating the dominant voices by showing a toleration of difference and dissent" (Price 1995, 195) is supported by the use of access channels in the early 1970s as a means of legitimating the emergent cable industry.

The flawed assumptions of 1970s access experiments stem from a 'marketplace of ideas' model premised on the individual rights of communicators and the fictive construction of an audience of consumers shopping for ideas in a free and open market. If we want to get beyond the libertarian model of free speech and a merely quantitative definition of pluralism, we are returned to the problem of defining a normative 'public interest' and 'affirmative' obligations for broadcasters as the basis for some form of regulation.

4.7 Access and the public interest: theoretical background

Having rejected a 'marketplace of ideas' model of public access, I now want to explore an alternative, 'public interest' rationale. Where public interest broadcasting draws on the idealist tradition of Reith and Arnold, 'public interest access' depends

upon a slightly different conceptual framework, in which 'the search for a common culture' gives way to a more modest attempt to define a 'public sphere'. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to theoretical, judicial and practical aspects of this attempt.

'Public interest' broadcasting assumes that broadcasting should serve a collective common interest; the definition of this common interest and the best way to serve it remain moot. In British and other European countries, state-supported 'public service broadcasting' institutions have defined the public interest in relation to national identity, although the character of this 'national identity' has frequently been contested (Price 1995, 60 - 80). British and European governments have also assumed that the 'public interest' is best served by a unitary national broadcasting system; this system has depended on a system of national monopoly, underwritten by government regulation. State regulation and financial support have also insulated the system from external competition in the marketplace. In this section I will consider the theoretical rationale for a 'public interest' model of media access.

Applying the public interest rationale to the argument for media access, the common 'public interest' is no longer seen in 'unitary' terms but as a diversity of competing viewpoints which are 'representative' of a pluralistic culture and society; this redefinition accords with more recent models of public service broadcasting, from the BBC under Hugh Greene in the 1960s to Channel Four in the 1980s. 'Public interest access' thus attempts to reconcile the pluralism of the 'marketplace of ideas' model with the collective, communal emphasis of public service broadcasting. In discussions of media theory, this balancing act corresponds with attempts to define a 'public sphere', following the lead of Habermas (1962/1992); in discussions of policy, it is related to the attempt to reinvent 'public service broadcasting' to take account of the shifting boundaries of the 'public interest'. The old version of public

service broadcasting, typified by the pre-war BBC under Reith, was based on a confident sense of national identity and national consensus. That national version of the 'public interest' is now under attack from below, as local communities and diverse 'communities of interest' assert their collective identities, and from above, as global economic and cultural forces in broadcasting intersect across the boundaries of the old nation state (Sandel 1992b). Accordingly media policy is expected to operate at a global level, taking into account the international dimensions of the industry and global questions of equity (MacBride 1980, 47 - 67; Garnham 1986, 52 - 53).

In this section I will review the theoretical literature describing the 'public sphere' as a model for media policy. During this review I will raise what I consider to be the key problems for a concept of 'public access' grounded on a 'public interest' rationale: how and by whom is the 'common interest' or 'community' to be defined, and what are the underlying assumptions about audiences?

Habermas (1962/1992) described a 'bourgeois public sphere' in eighteenth century Europe, within which private individuals came together 'as a public', engaging in 'rational-critical public debate' (Habermas 1962/1992, 30); debate in this 'public sphere' informed action in the political sphere. The emergence of the public sphere was linked with the rise of bourgeois individualism and market economics. While acknowledging that access to this 'public sphere' was in practice limited by education and property ownership to a 'small minority' (ibid., 84 - 85), Habermas nevertheless idealised the eighteenth century public sphere and lamented its historical decline through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This decline was as much due to the erosion of the 'private sphere' as the corruption of the 'public sphere'; Habermas described a loss of subjectivity on the one hand ("the deprivatised province of interiority was hollowed out by the mass-media" - p. 162), and on the

other the replacement of genuine critical debate by the charade of “representative publicity” in which the ‘staged display’ of political decision-making was presented for ‘legitimation’ and ‘acclamation’ (ibid., 196 - 222). The “public of critically reflecting private people” had thus been replaced by an ersatz illusion of political participation which disguised the “refeudalization of the public sphere” (ibid., 181 - 195). The solution to this problem, according to Habermas, echoing John Dewey (1930, 1935), was to move beyond the merely defensive “injunction-like” individual rights of the “liberal constitutional state” towards an “active promotion” of collective or ‘social’ rights (Habermas 1962/1992, 227 - 228). The media could play a key role in this task through the promotion of “critical publicity” (as opposed to ‘staged’ or ‘representative’ publicity) and the reestablishment of the “communicative interconnectedness of a public” (ibid., 249).

Habermas’ argument about the ‘public sphere’, especially the idea of collective rights and media responsibility, is thus connected with a ‘public interest’ rationale for media policy and media access. Applying this argument to the two policy dilemmas noted above, the definition of the ‘public interest’ and the definition of a ‘public’, Habermas’ position is more complicated than some of his critics acknowledge. The most frequent criticism of Habermas is that his public sphere idealises the opinion-forming liberal, bourgeois intelligentsia, thereby excluding the majority of the population (Hohendahl 1979, 104 - 109; Dahlgren 1991, 6 - 7); furthermore, the historical basis for Habermas’ public sphere is questionable, resulting in a nostalgic attempt to recreate a ‘lost world’ of community and consensus which may never have existed in the first place (Curran 1991a, 82 - 83; Hohendahl 1979, 95 - 99). According to his critics then, Habermas has constructed a collective ‘public interest’ out of the private interests of the eighteenth century middle class; like the slave-owning democracies of Pericles or Jefferson, the ‘common interest’ here disguises the class interests of a powerful minority. The

liberal variant on this Marxist 'class-based' critique is that the attempt to constitute the 'public' of the 'public sphere' as a 'collective subject' is unworkable; any attempt to create a normative public interest is destined to fail, because individual interests can never be submerged in consensus and 'collective identity' (Hohendahl 1979, 99 - 102).

Habermas' version of the public sphere is more open-ended and pluralistic than these criticisms suggest. His principal aim is to construct "the communicative network of a public opinion made up of rationally debating private citizens" (Habermas 1962/1992, 247); this is not the same thing as an idealised pattern rooted in the past, nor a socially engineered consensus based on a normative 'common interest', with its concomitant dangers of romanticism, nostalgia and covert (class) bias. The keynote is flexibility based on a multitude of 'counter-public spheres' and a multitude of identities and roles; commenting on Habermas's attempts to clarify or redefine his position in the 1970s, Peter Hohendahl suggests that the "early liberal public sphere as an ideal pattern" has been replaced by "an open, emendable system which can be developed further through collective learning processes" (Hohendahl 1979, 116 - 117). The concept of a series of inter-connected 'partial social systems' perhaps provides a glimpse of a way through the thickets of post-national identity politics; instead of pursuing a unitary national 'public interest' it might be possible to link together different loyalties based on different communities of interest and place, a series of inter-connecting 'public interests'. The other distinguishing feature of Habermas' public sphere is the interdependency between the 'private' and 'public' spheres; the individual, grounded in the private sphere of individual experience and economic freedom, is free to participate in the public sphere of critical debate and it is precisely this individualism which makes debate 'critical'. From a Marxist perspective such individualism is the privilege of the bourgeois, while from a liberal perspective the attempt to build a 'collective identity' from these individual building

blocks is oppressively totalitarian. Habermas belongs to a tradition which includes John Dewey, Lewis Mumford and Raymond Williams which argues that individualism and collectivism are not irreconcilable opposites but mutually supportive; thus Habermas' 'intersubjectivity' is not unlike Williams' 'structure of feeling' in describing an interaction between individual and collective experience.

Returning to the 'public interest' model of broadcasting, Habermas suggests that collective interests are multiple, interconnecting and dynamic; he also suggests that the construction of the audience needs to take into account their different roles, identities and loyalties rather than attempting to aggregate them in unitary blocks. This construction, like the 'ethnographic' perspective in audience research proposed by Ien Ang, with different 'selves' defined by "the multiplicity of situated practices and experiences in which television audiencehood is embedded" (Ang 1991, 165), suggests a public sphere based on debate and difference, not on smooth consensus.

In the U.S. a theoretical 'public interest' rationale for media access was available in the U.S. Constitution (the communitarian interpretation of the First Amendment) and in broadcast regulation (Part 1 of the FCC's 'Fairness Doctrine'). In 1969, this rationale received a significant boost with the U.S. Supreme Court's judgement in the court case *Red Lion Broadcasting vs. FCC*. While the case centred on the individual model of free speech, individual free speech was to be protected not as an end in itself but as a means of promoting collective goals; in the phrase of the Alexander Meiklejohn, individual free speech is seen to have "collective good consequences" (Horwitz 1991, 33). These collective good consequences include an informed citizenry and rational public debate. *Red Lion* thus stood at the crossroads between a private, rights-based view of media access and a 'public interest' view which stresses the virtues of public dialogue, debate and accessible information as necessary attributes of a functioning democracy.

In the original dispute a political journalist and author, Fred Cook, had demanded a 'right of reply' under FCC rules to an attack broadcast by the Reverend Billy James Hargis on a small Pennsylvania radio station. The radio station had refused, the FCC had intervened and the radio station's owners, Red Lion, had taken the FCC to court. In its judgement, the Supreme Court shifted the focus of the case from private rights to public responsibilities. At issue was the FCC's mandate to regulate broadcasting in the 'public interest, convenience and necessity'. First the Court unequivocally adopted an affirmative view of the First Amendment; the goal of the First Amendment was "producing an informed public" (US 1969, 392). Accordingly, "it is the purpose of the First Amendment to preserve an uninhibited market-place of ideas in which truth will ultimately prevail, rather than to countenance monopolization of that market, whether it be by the Government itself or a private licensee" (ibid., 390). The right to free speech "did not embrace a right to snuff out the free speech of others" (ibid., 387). Secondly the Court reaffirmed part 1 of the Fairness Doctrine, arguing that "it is the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the broadcasters, which is paramount" (ibid., 390). Broadcasters were therefore "obligated to give suitable time and attention to matters of great public concern" and should demonstrate "a willingness to present representative community views on controversial issues" (ibid., 394).

With its expansive view of broadcasters' responsibilities and its vindication of the FCC's broad mandate to enforce these 'public interest' obligations ("a power 'not niggardly but expansive'" - US 1969, 380), *Red Lion* was a landmark in broadcasting law and gave great encouragement to the media access movement (Barron 1973, 137 - 149). However, the judgement was also compromised by a familiar set of contradictions. In their judgement, the Supreme Court had skilfully stitched together the 'private rights' and 'public interest' rationales for access.

Broadcasters were obliged to open their programmes to 'representative' views, but they were also expected to prioritise "speech concerning public affairs", satisfying the collective informational needs of a notional 'public'. *Red Lion* was partly a refinement of the 'marketplace of ideas', challenging monopoly and privilege in the search for a 'perfect marketplace' (Horwitz 1991, 32 - 34); yet it also hinted at the need to serve a collective 'public' with shared needs, beyond the separate 'representative' interests of groups and individuals.

For media access advocates the importance of *Red Lion* lay in the affirmative concept of broadcasting 'fairness'. What Barron calls "the legal imposition of affirmative responsibilities" in broadcasting (Barron 1967, 1674) was the flipside to the libertarian, First Amendment absolutist defence of individual rights of broadcasters and citizens. The privilege of addressing a mass audience carried a social cost and access to a mass audience was conditional on a constructive use of that privilege. The problem of course lay in agreeing what precisely these 'affirmative obligations' might cover. The Supreme Court acknowledged the dangers of majoritarian tyranny in this 'communitarian' position, noting that its ringing endorsement of FCC powers was not a mandate for censorship or direct intervention in programming (US 1969, 395). Again the problem lay in defining which 'public' was being served or protected, and what the common 'interest' of this public might be.

Habermas' conceptual framework of the public sphere and the U.S. Supreme Court's argument that broadcasters' have 'affirmative' obligations to 'represent' communities provide a theoretical starting point for 'public interest access'. However, there is a tendency in these theoretical debates and models describing 'ideal' communication systems to remain trapped at a high level of abstraction (cf. Curran 1991a, 1991b; Garnham 1983; Dahlgren 1991; Elliott 1986). Discussion

of the public sphere also tends, as Curran notes, to focus on a narrowly political interpretation of the public sphere as a forum for competing political loyalties, ignoring the latent political contents of competing cultural products and images (Curran 1991b, 32 - 33). While I believe these theoretical debates are useful and will return to them in due course, I want first to consider the practical dilemmas of public interest access, beginning in the U.S.

4.8 Public interest access: 'the community of neutrality' and 'the community of loyalties'

In this section I will relate the theoretical arguments of the previous section to the US public broadcasting system. I will explore some of the conflicts in US public broadcasting policy in relation to a theoretical contradiction between two versions of community, the 'community of neutrality' and the 'community of loyalties'.

'Public interest access' describes the attempt by broadcasters to reconcile the 'marketplace of ideas' model of broadcasting, based on individual rights and pluralism, with the 'public interest' model, emphasising collective obligations and consensus. This balancing act is associated both with the new generation of public service broadcasting (Greene's BBC and U.S. Public Service Broadcasting in the late 1960s, Channel 4 in the 1980s) and with the 'community' broadcasters of the 1970s and 1980s. The problem with this balancing act is that it repeatedly teeters on the edge of the same reductive patterns as its precedents; if we overemphasise the public interest, we risk new forms of political and cultural closure and hierarchy, but if we abandon the attempt to define some overarching public interest, we open up a new marketplace of ideas in which irresponsibility, monopoly and fragmentation are the only norm. This dilemma is the subject of this section.

The balancing act of 'public interest access' reflects a fundamental contradiction between two conceptions of community and two ways of 'constructing' the media audience. At one level, community describes the point where individual and collective interests and experiences intersect; the geographical 'community of place' or the 'community of interest' form the basic building blocks of 'community broadcasting' and underpin the pluralism and accountability sought by the post-Reithian BBC under Hugh Greene, Channel Four's eclectic diversity and the U.S. system of localised public service broadcasting established in 1967. I will refer to this version of community as the community of loyalties. At the same time 'community' in broadcasting also refers to a consensual framework within which these competing local clusters of interests and experiences can interact. For local 'community' broadcasters this broader framework is the cosy consensus of 'the whole community' in a particular area, overarching 'special interests' and minorities; for national broadcasters, the framework is the 'national interest' and describes the cohesive political public sphere of dialogue and debate which transcends local loyalties, seen as essential to a democratic state. I will refer to this version of community as the community of neutrality.

Obviously these two versions of community are liable to come into conflict. Local communities of loyalty may acquire their cohesiveness directly from their fear of the broader community of neutrality. For example in Sweden, racist groups in Malmö used neighbourhood radio stations (närradio) to campaign in 1985 elections, thereby offending collective social norms of tolerance and justice in the broader Swedish public; similarly in the former Yugoslavia, territorial, political and ethnic conflicts were initially fuelled by broadcasters playing upon audience 'loyalties' (Price 1995, 47 - 49). In British and U.S. public service broadcasting the conflict between the local community of loyalty and the national community of neutrality has emerged in questions of taste and decency. In the U.S. public broadcasting system the

combination of local production units and national networking capability results in frequent clashes between stations over acceptable levels of quality or over political content, exacerbated by the imbalance between the larger, wealthier stations which through their purchasing power are able to impose their tastes on the system as a whole (Powell and Friedkin 1986, 253 - 255).

More important than the inevitable conflict resulting from these competing conceptions of community is the question as to how either conception measures up to the reality of what Ang calls “the social world of actual audiences” (Ang 1995, 13). According to Ang, broadcasters solve the problem of never knowing how, why or by whom television is really watched by conjuring up a fictional image of their audience. This fiction serves to reinforce the “institutional point of view”, objectifying the complex processes of television viewing around static categories to be manipulated by policy makers and marketers. In Ang’s terms, what I have labelled the community of loyalty and the community of neutrality are no more than convenient fictional categories.

The myth of a national common cultural framework lay at the heart of Reith’s vision of broadcasting as a national monopoly and of the ‘trusteeship’ model of U.S. commercial broadcasting in ‘the public interest’. Rather than directly challenge this idea of consensual broadcasting, community media advocates simply transferred it to the local level, aiming to create a local public sphere (‘lokale Öffentlichkeit’) based on an assumption of ‘common interest’ and ‘shared relevance’ and an elision of ‘local and ‘community’ media (Hollander and Stappers 1992, 21 - 22). Local public service broadcasting follows the same logic. In the U.S. the Carnegie Commission saw localism as a guarantee of community involvement (Carnegie 1967, 87 - 88); in Britain official reports and parliamentary white papers expected BBC and commercial local radio to make “a significant contribution to the democratic life of

local communities” (Wright 1982, 50). The ‘local community’ was seen as the cornerstone of public service broadcasting and the building block for democratic politics; by making local politicians and local political issues accessible, local media would mobilise a grassroots political involvement. The myth of a ‘community of neutrality’, open to all yet devoid of any materially defined characteristics, was thus used to support a connection between cultural democracy and political democracy.

This ideal of a local ‘neutral space’ for community involvement, especially political involvement, was a direct extension of the nineteenth century settlement house’s universal, ‘neutral’ community of culture, removed from sectarian and class interests. The educational mission of U.S. public television can be seen as a continuation of the ‘self-improving’ educational institutions of the nineteenth century⁸⁹. The unattainable ideal of neutrality may explain why U.S. public broadcasting continues to be criticised for its ‘middle class’ conservative undercurrent, even though the diversity of its programming and its audiences compares favourably with the more crudely segmented approach of commercial broadcasting.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), created in 1967, extended the U.S. ‘public interest’ access model introduced in *Red Lion*. U.S. public broadcasting was thus premised on a ‘neutral’ public sphere within which ‘alternative’ viewpoints could be articulated and within which ‘the public’ could become involved in dialogue and debate in ‘public’ issues. At the same time it sought to ‘represent’ the various ‘communities of loyalties’, the minorities and ‘special interest’ groups excluded or marginalised by commercial broadcasting.

⁸⁹ Revealingly the Carnegie Commission’s 1967 manifesto for public television reproduced the testimonial of E B White, comparing public television to “our Lyceum, our Chautauqua” (Carnegie 1967, 13).

The dual challenge for public broadcasting in the U.S. was to define a normative, collective 'public interest' and to define its relationship with its audience. Without this normative framework, public broadcasting would become no more than a glorified public access channel, with competing groups demanding their 'right' to be heard and separate audiences tuning into 'their' programmes and ignoring the rest. Public broadcasting responded to this challenge in two ways. First, separate, competing communities of interest and their constituent perspectives were framed within a highly professionalised, 'neutral' world view which drew on U.S. broadcasting's tradition of 'objectivity' and balance, modelled on the FCC's old standard of 'fairness'. Secondly, U.S. public broadcasting, in the public service tradition, constructed its audiences as a public of citizens, not a market of consumers. Modelled on eighteenth century Enlightenment ideals of 'citizenship', it was assumed that this idealised public was be interested in debate and dialogue involving issues affecting their lives, not just in immediate 'gratifications'. Individual taste would thus be shaped by memberships of communities and social responsibilities.

As with the British 'community television' experiments of the 1970s, the idea of 'neutrality' in U.S. public broadcasting remained highly suspect. Studies of public television's programmes, including the flagship news programme 'McNeill-Lehrer Newshour', have confirmed a tendency to favour 'establishment' viewpoints and spokespersons over 'minority' or 'oppositional' perspectives (women, ethnic minorities, trade unions) (Aufderheide 1988; Hoynes 1994, 72 - 85), while cultural offerings tend towards a pastiche of 'respectable' culture, drawing heavily on bland British imports. These observations suggest that public television, like commercial television, is pitching a 'safe', inoffensive programming strategy in order to attract advertisers and a 'consensual' viewing public. Three related explanations have been

offered for this 'mainstreaming' effect; the first is economic, the second professional, the third organisational.

First, most critics agree that the conservative tilt in U.S. public service broadcasting has an economic basis, with the system's insecure funding base, dating especially from the Nixon presidency in the early 1970s and the attack under Reagan in the early 1980s, resulting in an increasing dependence on advertising income or 'underwriting' and subscribers⁹⁰. The needs and interests of 'underwriters', subscribers and internal fundraising staff have inevitably influenced programming policy, favouring a predominantly 'safe' (non-controversial, reassuring) programming mix directed at middle class opinion formers, consumers and subscribers in the audience.

Secondly, the professional journalist's cult of 'objectivity' has neutralised and sanitised controversial opinions within a reassuringly bland framework, much like the 'media frames' in commercial television criticised by Kellner (1990) and Gitlin (1980). While this neutralising effect is partly a reflection of professional journalistic and production codes in television news (Entman 1989, 39 - 74), in public television the 'realm of expertise' has been predominantly white, male and middle class (Aufderheide 1988). Professional 'neutrality' here shades into an exclusion of dissidents and minorities, as with the McNeill-Lehrer Newshour's preference for 'civil interviewing' over strident confrontation and for 'official' interpreters over 'activists' (Hoynes 1994, 85; 76 - 80).

⁹⁰ In 1973 public television received 70% of its funding from the public purse and less than 30% from 'private' sources. In the early 1980s public funding declined and private funding dramatically increased; by the mid-1980s public television relied on private sources for over half of its income. In 1990 the 53.4% proportion of 'private' income included 21.9% from subscribers (three times 1973 figures) and 16.8% from business (four times 1973 figures) (Hoynes 1994, 92). 'Enhanced underwriting', introduced in 1984 as part of the Reagan-inspired deregulation of public television advertising, was little more than a euphemism for advertising. (For more details, see: Hoynes 1994, 15 - 17; 93 - 107; Rowland 1976, 127 - 130; Rowland 1986, 260 - 269; Powell and Friedkin 1986; Engelman 1996, 193 - 5)

The third explanation offered for public broadcasting's conservative 'frame' is organisational (Rowland 1976, 120 - 127, 132 - 133; Engelman 1996, 168 - 169). It is argued that the balance of power between the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and member stations was undermined during the Nixon presidency. The effect was to centralise production decisions within the CPB and a handful of larger stations, and to centralise programming decisions within conservative local boards, resulting in a conservative, 'mainstream' bias at local and national level.

While these factors have undoubtedly had a constraining effect on public television, I believe that the central problem for U.S. public television has not been the insidious imposition of middle class control, but the pursuit of an unattainable ideal of 'neutrality' in its audience. The community of neutrality, based on a fictional construction of the television audiences as disinterested 'citizens' ruled by their best selves, is a nineteenth century invention. As in the nineteenth century, the conscious shedding of class interest may itself be seen as a product of middle class guilt; self-denial and the cult of service reflect a strand of middle class opinion at odds with its own inheritance of privilege and 'useless' education. In this sense 'neutrality' may be seen as a form of middle class self-deception, not as a devious attempt to reintroduce elite control and 'hegemony' under the cloak of consensus. The problem for U.S. public broadcasting has not been 'middle class control' so much as its deference to a non-existent consensus.

A similar deference to a 'neutral', consensual community prevails at the level of British local broadcasting, reflected in its "bland and breezy consensual style" (Wright 1982, 53). Commercial local broadcasters in Britain use the fiction of the 'whole community' to relegate other community ties (ethnic background, class, common interests) to the status of 'special interests'. Thus the managing director of

Radio Hallam in Sheffield argues that to broadcast 'minority' programmes would be "selfish and indulgent" and "a firm switch-off for everybody else" (MacDonald 1978) while according to Piccadilly Radio in Manchester, "every programme broadcast to a narrow minority excludes an alienated majority" (Crookes and Vittet-Philippe 1986, 131). Politically, this argument rests on the idea that audiences are unitary collective entities with clearly demarcated interests and tastes; any attempt to define audiences as complex, diverse entities with multiple, conflicting needs is rejected as a form of sectarian special pleading.

The community of loyalties is no less 'fictive' than the community of neutrality. Here instead of a 'neutral' consensus, 'community' broadcasting is based on clusterings of common interests, ethnicity, taste or age bracket or on geographical boundaries. The attempt to define cultural and political loyalties according to geography is the great red herring of 'community' broadcasting. Politically 'community' issues are not confined to the local level; as Crookes and Vittet-Philippe note, most economic and political decisions affecting individuals and communities are made higher up the line at the national (or international) level, overriding the "deliberately marginal structures" of local community broadcasters (Crookes and Vittet-Philippe 1986, 131). Culturally, individuals do not necessarily conform to the 'ideal type' of the community consensus, seeking to escape community ties either by attaching themselves to some larger, external aggregate (consumerism, the global village) or to alternative 'minority' sub-cultures within the normative consensus (youth cultures, ethnic groups). In a study of cable television viewers in Norway, K Lundby has noted differing degrees of 'territoriality' and 'distancing' in viewers; some identify closely with the local 'territorial' community, some want to distance themselves from local attachments, while others seek both 'territoriality' and 'distancing' simultaneously. In turn Lundby notes 'cosmopolitan' and 'local' orientations in viewers corresponding with 'outward' and 'settled'

relations to local communities; these different orientations are satisfied by different types of media, with subjects in one community in the study preferring local, community channels and the other preferring transnational satellite channels (Lundby 1992). Lundby concludes that local television appeals to “a shrinking base of settled people in a given territory - essentially enclaves in the society at large” while “the “outward-oriented part of the population is growing and seeking new channels in order to feed their distance-oriented mode of interaction and communication” (ibid., 40)

Attempts to hold broadcasting accountable to a collective ‘community of loyalties’ have repeatedly failed to allow for the fluid, multiple attachments observed by Lundby. In the 1980s the Dutch ‘pillarised’ broadcasting system, based on audience ‘membership’ of discrete religious and political communities, was undermined by a combination of internal (commercial) and external (satellite) competitors who challenged audience loyalties by providing a ‘post-loyal’ programming mix (Abramson et al. 1988, 190 - 210; Smith 1973; Price 1995, 68 - 69). The subsequent reforms of Dutch broadcasting in the 1987 Media Act contained an acknowledgement that audiences did not conform to the fixity of ‘pillarisation’ and that loyalties were more fluid than a fixed attachment to a single ‘community’. In their research into British radio audiences, Barnett and Morrison found that individual attachments to communities, whether based on geographical or ‘voluntary’ ties, tended to be flexible and conditional (Barnett and Morrison 1989). The result of this flexibility is that community broadcasters are often superseded by commercial, ‘post-loyal’ broadcasters, as occurred in France and the Netherlands in the 1980s. The ‘post-loyal’ broadcaster may form a temporary alliance with the ‘community’ broadcaster in order to defeat the common enemy of monopoly broadcasting, only to abandon its local attachments for a more schematic, generic

programming strategy when the economic reality of commercial competition begins to bite.

On the one hand audiences are modelled according to a 'community of loyalties' in which individual preferences are modelled according to the fixed categories of geography, social class, race, or 'sub-culture'; this logic results in the diversity-by-numbers of Dutch pillarisation or the U.S. experiment in 'ownership access', whereby the FCC sought to guarantee a particular brand of ethnic content by granting ownership of a station to a particular ethnic group. On the other hand, audiences are expected to rise above these merely local loyalties in order to participate in a 'community of neutrality', where debate and dialogue replace separatism and 'special interests'. Neither of these versions of 'community' reflects the real experiences and interests of audiences; consequently the community broadcasters have found themselves under attack from 'post-loyal' commercial broadcasters better able to cope with the unpredictable whims of consumer demand.

If audiences are 'post-loyal' and 'community' is no more than a convenient fiction, we are returned to the atomised individualism of the marketplace of ideas. Yet this model of broadcasting, as noted in the previous section, is based on a similarly 'fictive' construction of audiences, namely the idea that audiences are merely consumers whose various needs can be satisfied by a sufficient range of products and services. I believe that audiences' needs and wants are more complex, and that a media system must satisfy collective as well as individual needs. To discover a way through the 'public interest' and 'marketplace of ideas' rationales for broadcasting and media access, we must return to Habermas's public sphere, applying a more fluid, multiple idea of community and identity beyond the static consensus of fixed communities.

4.9 Splitting the difference: community and postmodernity

In this section I will close the current chapter by examining how new definitions of community and individual identity open up new possibilities for cultural and media policy, suggesting how a modern 'democratic' media system might respond simultaneously to competing 'materialist' and 'idealist' assumptions about culture's relationship to the community and the individual.

Commentators attempting to define 'community' have noted a shift in Western societies over the last thirty years from territorial communities of place to "multiple social networks"; this shift is linked with improved communications, improved transport and changing patterns of work and residence (Wellman 1979, 1204 - 8; Wilmott 1989). The shift may also be at least partly dependent on social class; Wilmott notes that the traditional working class 'territorial' community, based on long residence, shared workplace, kinship ties and lack of transport appears to be in decline, while the middle class enjoy easier access to more disparate, more fluid social networks (Wilmott 1989, 13 - 17). The 'liberated' model of community described by Wellman depends on the ability to forge and sustain a "loosely bounded web" of multiple connections in place of "tightly bounded solidary communities" (Wellman 1979, 1216). From a feminist perspective, the 'new' forms of community may be especially liberating for women who have been forced into subservient roles in the older 'involuntary' community (Friedman 1992). While the consensus among commentators seems to be that the new, multiple forms of community are gradually taking the place of the older, rooted communities of place, the trend may not be universal. 'Multiple social networks' depend upon a degree of social and economic mobility, and are more likely to develop among the relatively affluent middle class; they are also more likely to develop among the young, among city dwellers and

among those who are dissatisfied with 'traditional' social roles (Barnett and Morrison 1989, 52).

Applying these trends to 'community' media, 'local media' depend primarily upon working class communities of place rather than middle class communities of choice, and are more likely to appeal to rural communities and older people than to city dwellers and the young (Barnett and Morrison 1989, 57 - 69). By the same token, city dwellers are likely to demand other forms of 'community media' based on life-style or ethnic identity rather than location, as in the range of youth-oriented music and ethnic radio stations in London (*ibid.*, 70 - 71).

New patterns of allegiance or community and new forms of 'community media' among young urban audiences are also related to new forms of ethnic identity. Not only are British and U.S. cities characterised by an increasingly diverse mix of races, religions, languages and cultures, but also individual citizens are likely to characterise their ethnic and cultural background as an intersection of loyalties; this is the phenomenon of the "modern hyphenate citizen" noted by the 2000 Partnership in Los Angeles (2000 Partnership 1991, 7). This confused sense of ethnic identity is for many immigrant communities a matter of necessity, caught between an estranged 'parent' community and an inhospitable 'host' community; meanwhile white ethnic groups may undergo a similar identity crisis as a matter of choice, as they attempt to reinvent themselves or to escape burdensome associations and affiliations (Price 1994, 50 - 54). The contemporary convergence of ethnic minorities and young bohemians in British and American cities can be seen as a repetition of the shared identity crisis of middle class college graduates and European immigrants in the nineteenth century settlement house. For ethnic minorities, race routinely emerges as a more salient factor in defining community identity than social class (Price 1994,

59); for immigrant groups, race is clearly also likely to be a more salient factor in determining identity than geographical location.

‘Postmodern’ formulations of a crisis in personal identity thus have specific roots in changing patterns of British and U.S. society, especially in the context of urban living. We can expect the modern ‘hyphenate’ citizen to assume a number of different roles in relation to a range of different, sometimes overlapping communities. The tendency towards multiple roles and attachments is exacerbated by similar tendencies in modern media. First of all, as noted by Ang (1991) and Silverstone (1990), the qualitative experience of watching television is complicated by context and content; viewers draw on a multitude of different social roles while identifying with ‘polysemic’ television texts. While role-play is not taken to the extremes of interactive media such as computer games, television offers similar possibilities both for escapism and for oblique recreations of ‘real’ social situations. Secondly, the quantitative impact of multiplying channels and the fractured flow of ‘non-stop’ programming encourages a similar multiplicity of responses.

Returning to Habermas’ public sphere, reformulated according to Hohendahl as a series of interconnecting ‘counter-public spheres’ and ‘partial social systems’ (Hohendahl 1979, 116), a more fluid and flexible version of the ‘public interest’ becomes available. The ‘public interest’ is open and emendable because, according to Hohendahl, different ‘norms’ are “constructed from identity projections” (ibid.) and individuals are constructed from different ‘memberships’ of different communities. This idea of multiple, overlapping ‘public interests’ is not to be equated with straightforward cultural relativism because values and meanings are negotiated collectively, both within and between competing groups. Similarly, the idea of multiple social roles replaces the private / public dichotomy in Habermas’s original eighteenth century version of the public sphere.

This concept of a multi-dimensional public sphere offers a potential compromise between 'public interest' and 'marketplace of ideas' versions of broadcasting. The 'marketplace of ideas' is premised on private rights and individual transactions between consumers and producers; while it challenges the vested interests of monopoly broadcasters and the fiction of a 'mass' public, the model fails to account for collective needs based on public rights to information as the cornerstone of a democratic political system. The 'public interest' model is premised on a collective, common interest to which broadcasters owe public duties and obligations; this system avoids the atomism of individual 'rights' but is based on static, collective categories of 'community' which bear only a 'fictive' relation to the real social world of audiences. There is also a danger that the fictive 'public interest' is coopted by some private interest group which claims to 'represent' the public will (the state executive, professional lobbyists, political or religious extremists) and used to exclude minorities and opponents. The multi-dimensional public sphere is premised on an idea of individual identity shaped by a shifting pattern of collective interests; this pattern reflects the multiple roles and memberships available to the individual, while at the public level it describes a collective public interest which is continually being renegotiated according to different interactions between groups and individuals.

This attempt to redefine the relationship between private rights and the public interest has recently been the subject of a debate between 'communitarians' and 'liberals' (Avineri and de-Shalit 1992; Kymlicka 1992; Mulhall and Swift 1992; Etzioni 1995). Where the debate in the 1960s centred on the allocation of material goods and rights of ownership, the debate in the 1980s and 1990s has taken a more metaphysical turn, centring on theories of the 'self'. John Rawls, usually identified as a 'liberal', has used the concept of an 'unencumbered self' or an 'original

condition' as a rhetorical device to describe the attempt to set aside personal self-interest in the search for 'objective' social justice; Rawls' 'original position', like Schiller's distinction between 'person' and 'condition' describes two separate tiers in identity, the public and private self, but he also implies (like Schiller) that these selves cannot be separated. Ultimately, Rawls suggests that 'objective' social justice (a collective, 'normative' value) remains an unattainable ideal because the individual 'unencumbered self' cannot step outside collective beliefs, interests and values. Meanwhile 'communitarians' have echoed Rawls' dualism, describing a 'thick' and 'thin' self, with the autonomous, individual self encrusted with layers of collectively negotiated values and meanings, the product of a loose aggregate of socialising influences analogous to Williams' 'structure of feeling'; while communitarians tend to see these ties between the individual self and the community not as 'voluntary associations' but as inevitable facts, both liberals and communitarians describe a multiplicity of such associations ('nesting multi-memberships') and a complex interaction between individual and collective identity. In a repeat of the Marxist debate over 'determination' in the 1970s, communitarians and liberals in the 1980s and 1990s differ only in the degree of importance they attach to external 'socialising' influences on the individual; where they agree is in shunning either a purely autonomous or determinist view of individual identity and stressing a mutual interaction between individual development and collective allegiances and influences.

Using the idea of a private self and a public self (based on multiple loyalties or memberships), it is possible to sketch the requirements for an 'accessible' and 'democratic' media system. First, the needs of a 'hyphenate' citizen are not to be met by a single 'public interest' broadcaster; any concept of 'public service' broadcasting must be both pluralistic and capable of reinventing its own categorisations, instead of becoming trapped in static constructions of 'what the

audience wants / needs'. Such a system is likely to require public subsidy, since reliance on advertising income has, in the past, pushed broadcasters towards advertiser-friendly aggregates of consumers, determined by fixed demographic categories which have little to do with real audience interests and behaviour. Secondly, broadcasters need to take account of the different ways television programming is watched. Specifically, we can make a distinction between the 'public' and 'private' needs of the viewer (Aufderheide 1992, 60 - 62). According to Aufderheide, while commercial, entertainment-oriented television is designed to satisfy the 'private' needs of individual consumers, public, non-commercial television aims to satisfy public needs for information. Public television assumes that its audience is 'public-spirited'; the standard for judgement in assessing the 'public interest' according to William Melody should be "what does the public need to know in order to function most effectively as a responsible citizenry in a participatory democracy?" (Melody 1990, 36). It is clearly unrealistic to expect audiences to behave as 'public-spirited citizens' all of the time; for part of the time they will also behave as private consumers. Public interest and public access channels have always represented a marginal part of the U.S. broadcasting system when measured in terms of audience share; however, they are likely to have a powerful effect on viewers on the occasions when they watch (Aufderheide 1992, 60). The 'public interest' broadcasting channels will therefore be expected to exist alongside commercial entertainment channels, posing familiar problems of competition and viability.

Finally, public access and community broadcasters must recognise the distinction made by Monroe Price between 'open' and 'closed' terrain of free speech (Price 1995, 216 - 223). 'Closed' channels target specific communities and have no responsibility to appeal to those outside these communities; the open terrain of broadcasting meanwhile aims to promote a common culture between different

communities, through shared events, a shared political sphere and a dialogue between separate interest groups. Price notes that the current trend is towards closure, with channels not only focusing on “intense diasporic communities” but also setting up economic barriers (pay-per-view, premium cable channels) which separate out the information haves and have-nots, while the open terrain of broadcasting is being gradually abandoned. Access advocates have in the past tended to pursue a ‘closed’ version of media access in which ‘representative’ channels narrowcast to a specific audience. This community-building, ‘diasporic’ form of broadcasting is undoubtedly important, especially for minorities and other groups marginalised from ‘mainstream’ broadcasting. However, public access advocates also need to promote some form of dialogue between these divergent channels of communication, allowing viewers to transfer allegiances and experiment with alternative ‘memberships’, hence avoiding the static, monolithic fixity of so-called ‘community’ broadcasting. The analogy here is with the search for ‘open-minded space’ in urban planning (Walzer 1986), or the need for access to “centralised mainstages” alongside “culturally specific resources” in arts policy (Yoshitomi 1991, 205 - 206). Such ‘open-minded space’ provides something other than a ‘marketplace for ideas’, a space “designed for a variety of uses, including unforeseen and unforeseeable uses, and used by citizens who do different things and are prepared to tolerate, even take an interest in, things they don’t do” (Walzer 1986, 470).

In trying to imagine what a two-tier broadcasting system might look like, I believe we must begin with the idea of multifunctionalism. Different media offer different opportunities for ‘open’ and ‘closed’ communication. The most recent example has been the various uses of the internet, where ‘closed’ forms of communication (private e-mail messages, specialist information services, ‘chat’ rooms and bulletin boards) coexist with ‘open’ forms (the world wide web, electronic publishing, the

practice of internet 'surfing'); it is also possible to blur these distinctions, by making private conversations public or by switching from an 'open' forum to a private e-mail. The promise of the internet today is an ironic reminder of the earlier technological utopianism of 'new media' in the 1970s; it remains to be seen whether the system can retain its flexibility and multiple uses in the face of increased commercial exploitation and official censorship. For the time being however, the internet is an exception to the rule of specialisation, closure and privatisation of the public sphere, and may offer lessons for broadcasters. 'Interactive' television has until now been either pipe dream or gimmick; it is however possible to imagine a combination of public access channels, teletext services and specialised cable channels functioning like a computerised 'bulletin board' or newsgroup, with or without the added novelty of genuine two-way communication. Similarly it is possible to imagine a televised equivalent of the world wide web, based on ongoing live coverage of public affairs and 'raw' news (C-SPAN's coverage of the US Senate and Congress is a current example) through which the viewer may 'surf' without interference from official mediators. Finally we can imagine connections between private (closed) and public (open) channels. Private forms of communication may become public, as with the BBC Community Programme Unit's Video Diaries, giving private stories a public significance, or the Gulf Television's Project's leap from narrowcast 'access' programming to national coverage by way of the U.S. public broadcasting network (Paper Tiger 1991 35 - 38). Public channels might likewise splinter into private discussion groups, using the televisual equivalent of hypertext.

Of course such a flexible, multifunctional system of broadcasting would require a reversal of the current trend towards homogeneity, 'streamlining' and monofunctionalism (the single function being the provision of mass entertainment); it would also require an active public prepared to 'use' television in unaccustomed

ways, the kind of unpredictable public described by Ien Ang and Paul Willis. Private enterprise has always been ready to exploit new functions of television for profit, from home shopping to telephony; public broadcasters need to do the same. Finally, if public 'multifunctional' television is to coexist with a privatised system still fixated on a 'mass' public of passive consumers, any new 'two-tier' broadcasting system would also require a reversal of the current laissez-faire approach to media monopolies; public broadcasters and local broadcasters would need to be ring-fenced, allowing them the space and resources to experiment, not just to survive. A genuinely multifunctional broadcasting system is unlikely to flourish in a 'free' market where the bottom line concern is with delivering passive audiences to advertisers.

Returning to the 'open' and 'closed' distinction, and to the two versions of media access described in this chapter, I would argue that these forms of broadcasting are actually complementary. Broadcasting has a role to play in defining and reinforcing distinctive individual and community identities and in providing a platform for eccentric and marginal points of view; it also has a responsibility to provide opportunities for collective deliberation and exchange. Such a view of the 'public interest' in broadcasting is premised on a polycentric view of social structures and a multiperspectival view of individual identity; 'communities' are not fixed entities but are born out of competing and conflicting loyalties which are continually being renegotiated. As Gerald Yoshitomi notes, American citizens "live on the hyphen" (Yoshitomi 1991, 214); broadcasters must be prepared to live on the borders between 'open' and 'closed' terrain, between collective and private needs and interests.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Contradiction and Equilibrium

In this study I have described an 'incurable structural contradiction' between two conceptions of culture, the idealist concept of culture as a transcendent 'general perfection' and the materialist concept of culture as a 'superstructure' determined by social and economic relations. This contradiction has spilled into other concepts, in particular into competing theories of a 'common culture' and 'community' as the basis for 'cultural democracy'. Over the last hundred years, these contradictions have erupted into 'moments' of crisis, including (but not limited to) the four 'moments' reviewed in this study. During the crisis, different factions have mobilised to promote 'new' cultural policies, reacting against the supposed limitations of 'established' cultural policies of the past. However, rather than breaking with the past, these competing factions have succeeded only in rearranging the pattern of inherited contradictions into a new, temporary equilibrium, perhaps with a different centre of gravity. In time old contradictions have resurfaced, and the cycle has been repeated.

In this conclusion I want to link this pattern of contradiction and crisis to a current perception of 'post-policy' and 'collapsing rationales' in contemporary cultural policy (Bennett 1995). In particular I want to return to the idea of a 'common culture' as the basis for a revived cultural democracy and consider whether this notion must indeed be consigned to the intellectual scrap-heap.

Personally I find 'letting go' of the intellectual props of cultural idealism and cultural materialism extremely difficult. This is not merely nostalgia; the effects of 'post-policy' are arguably already upon us, reminding of what we stand to lose if we

discard 'outmoded' ideologies of the past. Perhaps it is possible to construct our own 'unstable equilibrium' out of the ideological wreckage of 'idealist' and 'materialist' conceptions of culture and community, a new 'usable past'. In the last remaining pages of this study I am not going to present a blueprint for such a reconstruction, only to argue that the attempt is both necessary and not entirely hopeless.

I will begin by reviewing 'materialist' and 'idealist' assumptions in recent cultural policy and cultural analysis. I will argue that these positions are indeed no longer convincing, either theoretically or pragmatically / empirically. I will then consider two possible reactions to this collapsing intellectual framework. The first position is a kind of intellectual resignation which accepts the inevitability of 'post-policy'. The second position is an attempt to rediscover what is valuable in the old intellectual positions and to reconnect them with a revitalised search for 'cultural democracy'. Finally I will return to the alternative theoretical tradition, advanced by Williams, Gramsci, Habermas and others, which attempts to bridge the 'incurable' contradiction between materialism and idealism. Can the 'politics of equilibrium' provide an alternative rationale for cultural analysis and cultural policy, a new basis for 'cultural democracy'?

5.2 Breaking Point: Materialism and Idealism Revisited

In this section I will explore the impacts of 'materialist' and 'idealist' assumptions on cultural policy and analysis. I will argue that the historical pattern, in which contradictory assumptions are momentarily reconciled only to re-erupt into fresh conflicts, can also be applied to our own situation. Familiar assumptions have been stretched to a new 'breaking point', leaving cultural policy and analysis in a state of confusion.

The impacts of idealist and materialist assumptions on cultural policy and analysis in this study fall into three phases. First, in the initial phase of cultural policy formation, 'materialist' and 'idealist' assumptions have provided various policy makers with coherent but competing rationales for cultural policy. By playing upon these competing and often contradictory assumptions it has been possible to mobilise coalitions of stakeholders in support of various 'new' cultural institutions and policies. Thus in the late nineteenth century different strands of middle class opinion drew on competing idealist and materialist rationales in their support for the new 'free' institutions and contradictory arguments were mobilised by supporters of the public libraries in the House of Commons. However, behind this coalition lay deep contradictions between different expectations and beliefs; Jane Addams, Robert Woods, Samuel Barnett, national 'Progressive' politicians and local philanthropists may all have subscribed to 'the university settlement idea' but they did so for very different reasons.

In the second phase of policy development, coalitions between 'materialist' and 'idealist' rationales have disintegrated into mutual recrimination and factional conflict, as with the stand-off between ideological puritans and pragmatists in the British community arts movement in the 1980s or the conflicts between local administrators and federal directors of the federal arts projects in the 1930s. At the psychological level, contradictory and competing assumptions have also been internalised by many of the cultural missionaries, artists and activists committed to a 'democratic' culture, for example, the nineteenth century settlement worker who turned her external doubts over the meaning and value of a 'culturalist' educational tradition into an internalised process of self-disgust, self-denial and self-doubt, or the 'committed' artists who attacked their own bourgeois individualism in the 1930s.

The third phase of impacts takes place not at the level of cultural policy but in cultural theory and analysis. Here the process of coalition and disintegration (factional conflict, internalised self-accusation) in the formation of cultural policy and institutions has been subjected to contradictory 'materialist' and 'idealist' critiques. Thus there have recurred in this study radically different accounts of 'democratising' cultural institutions and policies, from the competing 'heroic' and 'hegemonic' accounts of the nineteenth century library to the more recent debates between 'culturalist optimists' and 'cultural determinists' over the relationship between culture, community and class and over the 'ideological effects' of the media.

In each of these three phases, the stitching together of 'materialist' and 'idealist' assumptions in order to rationalise the construction of cultural institutions and cultural policy positions, whether at the level of policy formation or of retrospective analysis, is highly unsatisfactory. Once we pick apart the assumptions behind each moment of 'unstable equilibrium' and expose the underlying idealist and materialist positions, we are left with two fundamentalist belief systems, neither of which is convincing. In the late twentieth century, the underlying 'materialist' and 'idealist' assumptions which prop up cultural policy have again unravelled and been stretched to breaking point. Exposed in all their naked, threadbare extremity, they are no longer convincing as a basis for cultural policy or cultural analysis. If we are going to try to stitch them back together, we must first attempt to revise them, removing some of their excesses. Alternatively, we can simply discard 'idealism' and 'materialism' altogether and enter the brave new world of 'post-policy' and 'anti-theory'; however, I will argue that this 'postmodernist' position carries its own dangers.

Based on the scheme outlined above, I will begin by picking out what I believe to be the ‘fundamentals’ of cultural idealism and materialism in cultural policy formation. I will then consider how ‘second phase’ conflicts have brought latent contradictions between these ideological positions into the open, and how these conflicts have in turn been reproduced in cultural analysis (phase 3). Applying this model to our contemporary situation, the three phases described below define a ‘breaking point’ in cultural policy and analysis, setting the framework for the remainder of this conclusion.

Phase 1: Materialism, Idealism and Cultural Policy Formation

In a materialist theory of culture, culture is determined by ‘social relations’; in other words different ‘artistic’ cultures (culture as works of art) will arise out of different ‘anthropological’ or ‘sociological’ cultures (culture as the way of life of a particular community or social class). Crucially, the artistic ‘superstructure’ (works of art, ‘texts’, artists themselves, all the processes of artistic production and consumption) is seen to be subordinate to and dependent upon the ‘productive forces’ of the ‘base’ (for example social class, the political economy of the culture industry, dominant political and economic structures). The secondary, subordinate place of artistic production and consumption in the materialist scheme results in a kind of contempt for artistic culture based on its ineffective, dependent status (the source for the ‘secret self-contempt’ noted by Lasch and the sense of ‘uselessness’ experienced by Addams). Taken to its extreme this ‘materialist’ logic results in a blinkered populism, based on a reductive and stereotypical view of the relationships between class, community, culture and the individual.

‘Populist’ cultural policies are based on a distinction between an ‘authentic’ culture which is the product of social class or ‘community’ (the materialist ‘base’) and an

artificial culture which is created through the patronage of the elite. Thus both Holger Cahill and Jane Addams sought to preserve a popular folk culture rooted in indigenous communities (eg. the revival of handicrafts in the Hull House Labor Museum, the preservation of American folk arts in Cahill's Index of American Design). At the same time both attacked the rootless artificiality of contemporary culture; Cahill criticised European masterpieces and Parisian salons as representing an art which was 'dislocated' from its social context, while the young Addams reflected on the 'burden' of culture which separated her from the realities of ordinary experience during her 'grand tour' of Europe. In contemporary cultural policy, this logic leads to attacks on subsidised 'elite' culture because it has ceased to connect with the common culture of 'ordinary people' or 'the working class' (cf. Braden 1978).

Populist attacks on elite culture cut across the political spectrum. For a leftist like William Morris, the irrelevance of 'bourgeois' art stems from its removal from "the labour of the mass of mankind"; thus "art under plutocracy" degenerates into mere "sham ornament" and "upholstery" (Morris 1884/1979, 62 - 67). Morris's arguments lead inexorably to the conclusion that it is only through the abolition of 'sham' art that 'true' art can flourish; only by crossing the 'river of fire' and creating the new society can we recover the lost harmony between art and labour. For the right, Morris's nostalgic medievalism is replaced by an idealisation of a coherent national consensus; thus in Nazi cultural policy, authentic culture must relate to the 'natural' tastes of 'ordinary, decent citizens', not to the decadent tastes of minorities and degenerate art dealers. For the 'New Right' the popular will is expressed through the market; subsidy and state interference only serve to distort this market's efficient operation by creating artificial centres of production and consumption. In each case, it is only through the abolition of a perverse, 'artificial'

culture that an accountable, 'authentic' culture can be 'spontaneously' created by the people.

While the British Left deployed a leftist populist rhetoric against the Arts Council in the 1970s, it was left to the American Right to take the populist argument to its logical conclusion in the late 1980s. Although they attacked 'unaccountable' artistic subsidies as the source of an 'irrelevant', elitist culture, British community artists, unable to escape their own debilitating 'grant addiction' (Kelly 1984), had a vested interest in the system's survival. In the U.S. a coalition of political opportunists, free marketeers and moral majoritarians, broadened the attack on a handful of 'unaccountable', 'anti-American' artists into a wholesale attack on federal patronage (Bolton 1992). Unlike the British critics of Arts Council policy, they felt they had nothing to lose.

The U.S. 'culture wars' of the late 1980s were sparked by a few photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano which, it was claimed on their behalf, had offended the sensibilities of conservatives and Christians. Neither artist's work could be said to have been a product of subsidy. In Mapplethorpe's case the only public funding involved had gone to the gallery which organised the touring exhibition; Serrano had only received a small NEA grant, not specifically tied to the offending 'Piss Christ' photograph. Both artists owed more to the 'free market' of private galleries and individual collectors than to the NEA. Nevertheless, the controversy was turned into a populist attack on the NEA, with Senator Jesse Helms proposing an amendment preventing the NEA from funding work which was offensive to the 'values and beliefs' of the American people. By focusing on the NEA's 'elitism' and 'alienation' from majority opinion and values, the American conservative right successfully exploited precisely those arguments for community accountability and social responsibility which had been deployed by Holger Cahill in

the 1930s and by British community artists in the 1970s⁹¹. Whether hostile 'community' feeling was a response to the work of the artists or the NEA or to the accompanying political and media blitz is highly debatable⁹².

This populist position leads logically to a policy of 'laissez-faire'. If 'authentic' art is determined by communities in defiance of the artificial machinery of state-subsidised 'elite' culture, there can be no justification for interfering in the 'spontaneous' processes of cultural production. Base will determine superstructure. From a political left perspective, this position translates into a faith in 'the community' or 'the working class' as the source for a new, authentic culture emerging spontaneously from the grassroots. Strictly speaking, the community artist or amateur who genuinely believes in this alchemy has to pretend he or she does not exist, melting into the background in order to give community creativity centre stage. Similarly government intervention in culture has to be disguised as non-intervention in order not to preempt local initiative; as Hoggart noted in 1976, "you want a spontaneous autochthonous culture, and you have to try and bring it to life by government action" (Simpson 1976, 92). For the right, the assumption is that the free market will respond efficiently to consumer demand, with every community getting the culture it deserves, ignoring the market's crude aggregation of individual wants into collective approximations of 'what people want' and the incompatibility between different 'markets' (the market for profit, the market of ideas, the market for loyalties) each operating at cross purposes. In spite of the right's faith in the free market and the the left's faith in community, whenever local communities have

⁹¹ Ironically a leftist critique of artistic 'irresponsibility' was also available in the U.S. culture wars (cf. Becker 1990). However, leftist critics of Mapplethorpe were in a quandary, unwilling to lend support to the other side of Helms' political agenda, an opportunistic bid for the votes of the conservative, Christian right. With a few exceptions, most of the left-wing contributors to Bolton's book maintained a scrupulous political silence, preferring to defend Mapplethorpe and Serrano in purely aesthetic terms (cf. Carole S Vance, in Bolton 1992, 108 - 114).

⁹² As Bolton notes, most of the public had not heard of Mapplethorpe or Serrano before the affair broke "and they did not seem to get very exercised about them once they had" (Bolton 1992, p. 14). Visitors to the exhibition, prior to the controversial Washington showing, were similarly mixed in their response to the work.

received access to cultural resources (a library, a community television station), cultural consumption and participation have tended not to follow predictable lines of accountability and 'common interest'; instead different factions, primarily the upwardly mobile lower middle class and middle class activists and volunteers, have taken advantage of the opportunities and moulded the new cultural resources in their own image.

The materialist conception of culture assumes that cultural consumers and producers will behave in predictable ways based on a simplistic, determinist model of the relationship between 'base' and 'superstructure'. It follows that 'community' or 'class' represents a consensual block vote in favour of a particular brand of culture; thus the working class, gay men and black people will automatically support the production of 'working class', 'gay' and 'black' culture respectively. Not only is this patronising, it assumes a coherence in the common culture of 'class' or 'community' which rarely exists in practice. The assumption that every 'community' will produce its own coherent 'culture' overlooks the complex intersecting needs and interests which undermine any notion of community 'consensus'. The notion of 'the British working class' or 'ordinary, decent Americans' being reproduced in a coherent, unified, 'authentic' culture ignores precisely those sub-divisions of taste and sub-cultural versions of community referred to by Serrano and Mapplethorpe; Serrano and Mapplethorpe positioned their work in relation to one set of 'sub-cultural' communities (eg. gay, Hispanic, ex-Catholic) and provoked opposition from others (eg. white, Protestant, straight). Attempts to classify audience needs in terms of demographic categories based on class, race, geography or 'community of interest' ignore these multiple community memberships, the 'hyphenate' sense of cultural identity and the multiple uses of the media and cultural resources which make cultural consumers unpredictable. Finally, the determinist logic of materialism results in a kind of revolutionary fatalism on the

left or a laissez-faire free-market liberalism on the right, with interventionist culturalist policies seen as at best a harmless diversion, at worst a dangerous distortion.

The idealist conception of culture takes the unpredictability of individuals and communities as its starting point. Social class, 'community' and the political economy of culture are seen to be of a secondary level of importance in the production and consumption of culture. Through culture, individuals are granted an opportunity to perfect their 'best selves'. The idealist conception of culture therefore focuses on the magical acts of individual transformation, not the collective patterns of community and class. It is not that the cultural idealist is unaware of these patterns; it could be argued that 'cultural idealists', such as Roy Shaw, Richard Hoggart or Matthew Arnold, have a more sophisticated understanding of social class than many of their materialist opponents. However, the cultural idealist believes that the distinctions and barriers which define separate communities and classes can be transcended or dissolved through culture. Accordingly an 'idealist' cultural policy is concerned primarily with access and education; because individuals are not 'determined' by their social position or their private beliefs, the gift of culture opens opportunities for all, but will be received only by the few as an act of individual 'free' choice. Cultural artifacts are seen in similarly anti-determinist terms, as a universal common good, not the possession of a particular social class, and cultural institutions are seen as ideologically neutral; there may be physical and metaphorical barriers which need to be broken down through education, but great art is seen to be universal. Cultural policy therefore consists in making the best available to the most and awaiting the improving consequences on individual 'character'.

The whole machinery of cultural and educational improvement, the public libraries, university extension, settlement houses, the Open University, the BBC, the Arts Council, is premised on the belief that individuals can choose to detach themselves from their everyday social circumstances and receive the gift of culture, 'one by one', as a matter of personal choice. Secondly it is assumed that cultural institutions can (again, provided they choose to do so) exist outside and independent of the determining structures of social and economic power.

However, the evidence in this study suggests that cultural institutions can never be wholly ideologically neutral, no matter how they try; nor can the 'culture' that they promulgate be stripped of its specific roots in a particular class or community or history. Thus the cultural institutions of the late nineteenth century appealed especially to an upwardly mobile, white-collar constituency, precisely because such institutions represented an exclusive and privileged world of genteel middle class living. The 'neutral' media resource centres of the 1970s had a similar in-built middle class bias, requiring a level of creative and technical proficiency which favoured a self-selecting, educated minority, not a broad social mix.

Individual free choice is similarly constrained by the individual's material roots in a collective 'culture' of class and community which idealist cultural policy seeks to dissolve or deny⁹³. Matthew Arnold recognised that the decision to accept the gift of culture was a form of self-sacrifice, a surrender of one's 'ordinary self' in order to perfect one's 'best self'. That sacrifice of one's 'ordinary self' entails a denial of the 'class' culture that cultural idealists dismiss as a sociological fantasy or self-involved philistinism. For the politically and economically vulnerable, the surrender of collective cultural identity in pursuit of cultural self-improvement represents an

⁹³ Winding up a Council of Europe seminar on 'socio-cultural animation', Roy Shaw claimed that there has been no distinctive tradition of British working class culture since the Industrial Revolution (Shaw 1978, 60)

act of cultural self-destruction, cutting off a vital source of collective support and resistance. The settlement workers, who so readily 'sacrificed' their own middle class culture by plunging into the 'classless' settlement house, could not understand why their working class neighbours should feel reluctant to abandon their own ethnic, class and family ties; in the minds of the settlement workers, the separate 'material' culture of the immigrant working class either did not exist or was merely an extension of their 'ordinary selves', an obstacle to real enlightenment.

Structurally, neutrality is threatened externally by the 'political economy' of the culture industry, internally by the 'post-loyal' cultural consumer. Externally the 'neutrality' of the new infrastructure is vulnerable to commercial take-over and the reprivatisation of public resources. Attempts to ring-fence a 'local public sphere' in the television and radio markets have proved ineffective; most of Europe's 'free' radio and television stations of the early 1980s, like the 'local' broadcasters of the early U.S. system, were rapidly re-absorbed within commercial networks. The same reprivatisation of the public domain can be observed in the commercial take-over of British town centres (Worpole 1992), or on the internet, where 'neutral', unfiltered access to information and ideas is increasingly being funnelled through service providers, 'gatekeeper' technologies and commercial websites. Once the 'neutral' communications infrastructure is established, it is repeatedly coopted or reabsorbed by commercial entrepreneurs whose concern is not localised cultural autonomy, but profit. Internally the pursuit of a 'neutral' communications infrastructure or a 'perfect market' ignores the unpredictability of individual consumer demand and the interlocking multiple loyalties which lie behind the facade of unitary communities; as with the pillarised Dutch media system, a 'perfect' communications infrastructure based on community representation may ultimately be too monolithic and too static to cope with the multiple strands of 'post-loyal' consumer demand.

To summarise, the materialist conception of culture requires policy makers to follow a reductive 'determinist' template which ignores unpredictable individual needs and the complexities of real communities. The idealist conception of culture underestimates the importance of social class and collective experience in shaping individual cultural needs. Both assume the existence of a 'common culture', albeit in contradictory forms. The materialist imagines a series of 'common cultures' based on clear lines of demarcation between unitary, unified communities. The idealist imagines a universal, 'neutral' common culture within which these same lines of demarcation can be dissolved. Neither of these perspectives adequately describes the complexities of 'real' communities and the unpredictability of individual behaviour.

Phase 2: Conflict and Exposure

Once the assumptions behind 'materialist' and 'idealist' cultural policies are isolated and exposed, they appear fundamentally misguided, sometimes absurdly so. Yet the 'fundamentals' of materialist and idealist assumptions are often difficult to pin down because they are rarely exposed in their 'pure' form. Instead they merge and overlap in the contradictory, indistinct and barely articulated rationalisations of real cultural policies and institutions, some of which have been considered in this study. In this context the rare 'moments' of outright conflict and contradiction provide cathartic moments of clarity when underlying assumptions are briefly dragged into the open, before the familiar round of compromise and self-deception begins again and the 'real' cultural policy assumptions of competing stake-holders are deftly reconciled into a bland, 'consensual' mission statement.

In the 'moments' of crisis and contradiction considered in this study, some of the most violent upheavals have occurred not at the original point of departure for the 'new' movement (the attack on the 'establishment'), but as a second phase of internal conflict within the new movement (factional conflicts, mutual recriminations). In this category we can include the internal arguments within the settlement movement between Addams and Woods over 'Americanisation' during the First World War (or between Barnett and Beveridge over the value of 'culture' in Britain), Hallie Flanagan's battles against New York producers and regional administrators, the bitter splits within the community arts movement. During this phase of internal upheaval, the original coalition between 'idealist' and 'materialist' factions begins to fall apart; ideological differences and latent assumptions, which were previously overlooked in the rush for reform, are now starkly exposed.

This phase of internal conflict and self-doubt has also emerged at a psychological level. As with Jane Addams' semi-autobiographical portrait of a young settlement resident, or the arts graduate who becomes an arts administrator and guiltily rejects Leavisite culturalism in favour of a relentless, 'professional' practicality and a self-conscious rejection of 'culturalist' assumptions, the self-abnegating attack on the 'burden' of culture is not merely fashionable posturing, it betrays what Lasch describes as the "secret self-contempt" of the cultural and educational elites (Lasch 1965, 349). As in the nineteenth century, conflicting tendencies are intensified by education, in the struggle between generalist 'cultural' education and vocational, 'practical' training. Caught in the crossfire between humanist traditions of 'education' and a burgeoning vocational training sector, many of today's arts administrators have become frighteningly adept in jargon and wilfully contemptuous of their earlier philosophical and theoretical investigations. In the settlement house this conflict was internalised as a guilty self-accusation, preventing the individual from coming to terms with her true cultural identity; instead she sought refuge in a

middle class fantasy of community and a self-abnegating anti-culturism. Freighted with a cultural inheritance at odds with the zeitgeist's demand for 'useful' vocational skills and utilitarian pragmatism, the culturally privileged seek to dissolve their social and educational distinction in the middle class fantasy of cosy, indeterminate (classless) 'community' and 'useful' practical tasks.

An example of this 'second phase' of internal conflict at the institutional level was the Greater London Arts Council's 'community arts' policy in the early 1980s. The policy document, 'Community Arts Revisited', commissioned in 1981 and eventually published in 1982, consciously positioned GLC policy as a 'revisionist' attempt to redefine community arts policies developed over the previous decade (GLC 1986, 140 - 146). In the document, the GLC's policy advisers took the original attack on Arts Council policy and turned it back upon the community artists themselves: community artists had never shed their idealist faith in culture as a common good and their sentimental view of 'community' as a cosy consensus, ("a bourgeois democratic 'general interest'"). Here the conflict between the 'culturalist' assumptions of many individual community artists and the rigidly determinist logic of the movement's ideologues was brought into the open. The GLC policy took its materialist assumptions seriously. Different art forms were praised or buried, based on the assumption that artistic form was a product of social class and historical conditioning; 'popular' art forms (video, outdoor events, circus arts) were thus considered more accessible to the majority of Londoners than 'nineteenth century' art forms (opera, theatre, dance). Audience needs were similarly classified according to a hierarchy of deprivation, with some groups (eg. the Irish community) classified against their wishes as 'minorities', others (eg. the white working class) overlooked. Finally artists themselves were categorised according to the same rigidly determinist logic. Thus certain 'bourgeois' artists were identified with a 'middle class agenda' and 'dominant cultural forms'. The GLC Community Arts

Sub-Committee was particularly suspicious of the Association for Community Arts and deliberately excluded the professional community arts sector from consultations during the creation of the new community arts policy⁹⁴.

Domestic disputes tend to be the most violent. In this case neither side emerged with much credit. The vague 'idealist' notion of a universal, 'consensual' community, which undoubtedly inspired many of the community artists of the day (and probably still does), was mercilessly attacked by the GLC's policy advisers; this 'community' excluded many marginal social groups and minorities while privileging artists themselves as a self-appointed leadership. Meanwhile the GLC's own 'materialist' version of community appeared no less arbitrary and exclusive in its crude categorisations; admittedly policy was being formulated at breakneck speed, with the emphasis on getting the money out quickly, in the face of judicial challenges regarding the legality of the GLC's 'expansive' policy mandate⁹⁵. However, what these hasty bureaucratic formulations of policy exposed was a crude determinist logic which had little understanding of the complex dynamics and multiple memberships of real communities; artists who were excluded under the new policy were surely right to complain that one closed system had been replaced by another.

In this 'second phase' of community arts policy, contradictory materialist and idealist assumptions were brought into the open and their inadequacies exposed through a process of mutual accusation. The old arguments for a common culture, the idealist notion of 'community consensus' and the materialist notion of fixed boundaries and clear lines of determination linking community, class and culture,

⁹⁴ Interview with Alan Tomkins, author of 'Community Arts Revisited', March 1995.

⁹⁵ Interview with Alan Tomkins, as above. The GLC's own policy advisers would later make the telling admission that "we had to choose to spend the money *or* make the policy" (GLC 1986, 37). For the judicial restrictions under the 1972 Local Government Act, see Mulgan and Worpole (1986, 79 - 85)

have by now been stretched to breaking point. Before considering the implications of this terminus for contemporary cultural policy, I want to review a similar 'breaking point' in cultural analysis.

Phase 3: Cultural analysis, from theory to anti-theory

Cultural studies have alternated between an idealist view of culture and cultural institutions existing in a rarefied, ideal realm at arm's length from collective self interests and everyday circumstances, and a materialist view of culture and cultural institutions as 'determined' by class interests. Based on these assumptions, the search for a 'common culture' has been viewed alternately either optimistically as a 'heroic' narrative of pioneering cultural institutions and individuals, or sceptically as a 'hegemonic' attempt to impose middle class cultural authority on the working class. Critical orthodoxy has swung between these two extremes in a continuing academic 'war of position'. Thus in media studies the 'empirical' audience research of the 1940s and 1950s, highlighting the 'free agency' of audiences and broadcasters, was replaced by the analysis of 'ideological effects' in the 1970s, based on a 'materialist' analysis of social and economic structures 'encoded' in the media. This in turn provoked a culturalist backlash in the late 1980s and 1990s with the emergence of 'audience theory' and the self-referential language games of postmodernism, returning us to a view of cultural production and consumption as indeterminate and unpredictable.

The materialist school of cultural analysis is seductive for two reasons. First the vantage point of materialism flatters the cultural critic, placing him above and outside the business of cultural policy which is made to appear banal and ineffective. Securely entrenched in "the elegant simplicity of a vulgar Marxism" the materialist

critic accuses his subjects of failing to see beyond the “mirage of idealism” to the ‘real world’ of class relations, of economic and political power (Mattelart and Piemme 1980). Secondly, the patterns of social class and material effects have a pleasing symmetry, allowing the analyst to ‘position’ cultural policies and institutions according to a preconceived series of social and economic coordinates. Instead of providing an analytical tool, the theoretical template of ‘determinism’ here becomes a form of intellectual closure, reducing complex cultural processes to abstract theoretical categories. What is missing is any sense of how ‘culture’ and ‘class’ are reproduced, reinterpreted and ‘handled’ by competing objective realities and subjective experiences. As in Thompson’s irascible attack on the neo-determinism of French structuralist theory (Thompson 1978), cultural criticism is in danger of losing the plot, degenerating into “a game of ‘chicken’ in which each theorist strives to be ‘more revolutionary than thou’.”⁹⁶

The ‘culturalist’ approach to cultural analysis is no less reductive. Here the critical machinery of ‘ideological effects’ is resolutely ignored, allowing the critic to focus on the magical processes of cultural creativity and cultural consumption. Liberated from considerations of ideology, class, economics and history, cultural institutions and policies are considered to be ideologically neutral. Thus the search for a ‘common culture’ is taken at face value as the pursuit of a neutral ‘general perfection’, not the product of competing factions each struggling to mould cultural institutions in their own image and interest. The various strands of idealist or culturalist analysis, from the ‘heroic’ account of nineteenth century cultural institutions to the ‘uses and gratifications’ school of media research and ‘postmodern’ analyses of value-free cultural consumption share a tendency towards complacency. The failure to analyse the broader picture of social and economic

⁹⁶ “Isolated within intellectual enclaves, the drama of ‘theoretical practice may become a substitute for more difficult practical engagements. Moreover this drama can assume increasingly theatrical forms, a matter of grimaces and attitudinising, a game of ‘chicken’ in which each theorist strives to be ‘more revolutionary than thou’” (Thompson 1978, 184 - 5).

relationships encourages a naive faith in 'consumer sovereignty' and 'open' cultural texts as the basis for a 'common culture'.

From a methodological viewpoint, neither of these modes of cultural analysis is promising. We are offered a Hobson's Choice between too much theory or too little. What is needed is a more flexible analytical framework, in which awareness of the connections between material forces and cultural production and consumption is not translated into crude determinism.

Given the apparent failure of 'idealist' / 'culturalist' and 'materialist' forms of cultural analysis to account for the multiplicity and contrariness of real cultural institutions, policies, consumers and practices, one possible response is to reject theoretical frameworks altogether. E P Thompson's 1978 attack on Althusserian structuralist theory signalled the beginning of an 'anti-theory' backlash in British and U.S cultural studies. Thompson's attack on a relentlessly 'over-determined' theory of culture and society in the 1970s has been succeeded by postmodernist predictions that we have reached 'the end of theory'. As with the collapsing definitions of 'community' and 'common culture' noted above, the old theoretical formulations no longer seem viable; more specifically, neither the materialist-Marxist tradition, premised on the determining categories of class (or 'community', race, gender), nor the idealist-culturalist tradition, premised on cultural transcendence, seem to offer a convincing explanation of the relationship between real cultural policies and institutions and their social contexts.

5.3 'Letting Go': postmodernism and cultural policy

If the old formulas no longer seem viable, perhaps the time has come to dispense with them altogether. This is one response to the contradictory and mutually

destructive conceptions of 'community' and 'common culture', exposed throughout this study and dragged into the open in recent debates on cultural policy and analysis. Arguably this is precisely what has happened in contemporary cultural policy; having passed through a phase of confident mobilisation and a second phase of mutual recrimination, the community arts movement's initial challenge to cultural policy makers seems to have fizzled out. All that remains is a patchwork of threadbare concepts (empowerment, accountability, community, etc.) incorporated into the jargon of arts policy but rarely taken seriously in practice. In this section I will attempt to outline what I see as the consequences of 'letting go' of the materialist and idealist assumptions which have provided cultural policy makers and cultural institutions with an ideological framework (admittedly one that is shot through with contradictions). I will focus on two trends in particular, 'instrumentalism' and 'specialisation', or niche marketing.

The postmodern rejection of totalising 'meta-theories' in the 1980s, together with the 'post-marxist' rejection of class analysis, is not altogether new. There is a parallel between our current position of 'post-policy' and the fall-out from previous moments of crisis reviewed in this study. These moments of crisis have passed through an initial period of mobilisation in which the contradictions of 'old' cultural policies and institutions are exposed and exploited and a new coalition proposes a 'new' position. A period of 'unstable equilibrium' has then been succeeded by a second phase of internal dispute and debate within the new movement, leading up to the 'breaking point' referred to above. For the American settlement movement this breaking point was reached in the years immediately preceding American entry into the first world war; for the federal arts projects a similar point was reached in the 1940s before American entry into the second world war. Here underlying utilitarian and culturalist assumptions repolarised cultural policies and institutions. Old rationales came under attack and the first generation of leaders found themselves

either marginalised or excluded by a new emphasis on professionalism and political expediency; Jane Addams found her internationalism and pacifism out of step with a new emphasis on 'Americanisation' and patriotic mobilisation for war, while Hallie Flanagan's exclusion in the 1940s was more drastic, with the entire Federal Theatre Project abolished and most of the remaining federal and regional directors either sacked or placed in ineffectual administrative roles.

In the ensuing period of fall-out, the trend to an 'instrumental' cultural policy has taken two forms. The first has been the imposition of expedient bureaucratic functions (service provision, the will of the state(s), utilitarianism). The second has been a kind of policy fetishism; old ideological positions have been formally repeated, but new policies bear little resemblance to the old ideals. We are left with the empty husks of bureaucratic language, or 'simulacra' of discarded ideologies. Examples of this include the reduction of Cahill's idealised communion between artist and community to the utilitarian application of artistic talents to propaganda posters and camouflage design, the reduction of Flanagan's arguments for cultural decentralisation and democratisation to a matter of geographical deconcentration and 'states' rights', the replacement of Addams' tolerant 'neutral zone' for American immigrants by the universalisation of American values in settlement 'Americanisation' programmes during the war.

In these historical examples, the policy vacuum left by contradictory and collapsing policy rationales was filled by a pragmatic, bureaucratic 'common sense'. A few terms and concepts may have survived, but they were no longer translated into effective ideological principles and practices. In the more recent example of post-1980 community-oriented cultural policy in Britain, a similar process has taken place. The gap left after the community arts movement destroyed itself through inner faction and resurgent contradiction in the early 1980s has been filled by a new

instrumentalism where the only guiding principle is a utilitarian response to short term needs. The process began with the GLC's attempt, outlined above, to build a community-based cultural policy from scratch, based on 'materialist' assumptions in their 'pure' form. Following the GLC's abolition in 1986, the bureaucratic structures and language created by the GLC were enormously influential on 'community-oriented' cultural policy. Bureaucratic categories of need, the reductive typology of different art forms ('high' and 'low' culture), segregationist models of community and the mistrust of 'unaccountable' artists have all found their way into contemporary local authority arts policies. Yet the ideological principles behind the GLC classifications, basically a crude form of Marxist determinism, have been lost in translation. Accordingly, all that remains is a commitment to 'serve' the 'needs' of the 'community', with precious little thought given to what these various terms might mean in practice.

The tendency to instrumentalism has been reinforced by the prevailing economic orthodoxy of 1980s cultural policy; having discovered the 'economic importance of the arts' in the late 1980s (Myerscough 1988), cultural policy makers, especially at the local level, downplayed the social impacts of the arts in order to concentrate on the economic benefits of new cultural initiatives, pursuing an instrumental policy of short term economic development whose long term social effects remained untested. The success of cultural policy initiatives was accordingly measured according to extrinsic benefits, for example the provision of temporary employment, the attraction of inward investment, the selling of icecreams and the filling of hotel rooms. Several commentators (Bendixen 1994, Bille Hansen 1995, Van Puffelen 1996) have commented on the partial nature of Myerscough's analysis; not only does instrumental cultural policy avoid any assessment of the non-economic costs and benefits of cultural provision, it also complacently avoids a larger consideration of the structures of political and economic power through which the trickle of

economic benefits and opportunities are channelled. This complacent dismissal of the Marxist 'meta-narrative' is of course perfectly attuned to the seasoned pragmatism and relentless practicality of the professionally trained arts manager.

'Instrumental' cultural policies at the local level contain residual elements of materialism and idealism. First, the idealist promise that culture can change or transcend material reality is reduced to a more limited promise, that cultural activity might produce new jobs in the local service economy, or provide a means of publicity. Secondly, residual 'materialist' assumptions are reproduced in the argument that cultural needs are determined by the base of material conditions, according to bureaucratic categories of need (welfare, education, public health, social services). What is missing is any broader analytical framework; instrumental cultural policy is concerned neither with the larger 'materialist' problems of cultural equity and political economy, nor with the 'idealist' search for a unified common culture. Instead, policy is measured out in localised 'impacts' and piecemeal 'improvements'. Instrumentalism can be seen as a form of 'post-policy' because it is driven by a response to particular situations and short-term needs rather than any coherent ideological programme. This pragmatic absence of ideology is of course itself ideological; the lack of a coherent rationale for government intervention leaves cultural institutions at the mercy of the market and cultural policy in thrall to short term political and economic interests.

The second form of 'post-policy' I wish to consider, related to the first, is the tendency towards niche marketing and specialisation. Here the failure of 'materialist' and 'idealist' concepts of 'community' to account for the particularities of individual taste, intersecting 'multiple memberships' and 'hyphenate' cultural identities is translated into a search for ever smaller market units. The trend to niche marketing in contemporary media, especially in television, was noted in chapter 4;

instead of the idealist tradition of Reithian public service broadcasting, premised on the possibility of a 'universal' common culture, specialist multi-channel cable networks work on the principle of diversifying product to meet diverse consumer needs. Specialisation is also a response to the 'post-loyal' cultural consumer; where the 'materialist' broadcaster attempted to predict consumer needs according to collective categories determined by shared material conditions (ie. demographics), the 'post-loyal' broadcaster has taken this process a stage further, in pursuit of ever smaller, preciser market segments, in place of the old 'fictive' approximations. Profitable markets are therefore sub-divided into more specialised 'sub-markets', as with the proliferation of specialised sports programmes on cable and satellite channels, or the replacement of 'general interest' magazines by specialist publications devoted to specific lifestyles (new lads, young parents), even to specific products (Volkswagen cars, premiership football teams). Even the old-style British community arts centres of the 1960s and 1970s have had to change their spots, forced to pursue a more specialised role as they attempt to define a distinctive market brand in order to win paying customers, visiting artists and funders; instead of appealing to 'the whole community' in a local area (with support from the local authority), they are under increasing pressure to carve out a distinctive niche as specialised regional venues (as part of the RAB's regional 'portfolio').

The logical extension of this trend towards market segmentation is the 'market of one', where cultural products and services are customised to meet the individual needs of a particular consumer; service providers on the Internet, including CompuServe, now offer a customised clippings service which supplies the consumer with a specified range of information on preferred topics. The functional convergence of personal computing, telephony and television will shortly open up similar possibilities for a wide range of cultural products and services. Here 'post-policy' is a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* of the old (materialist-Marxist) logic; the

frantic sub-directories of individual taste have replaced the confident aggregates of class analysis.

Specialisation in cultural production and the 'market of one' are a reflection of the collapsing 'materialist' and 'idealist' rationales for cultural policy, specifically the notion of 'community'. However, the new 'specialised' institutions make their own reductive assumptions about consumer demand. Niche markets and postmodern theories of cultural consumption assume that consumer demand can be satiated by customised products based on individual wants, without reference to collective needs; they assume that individuals do not crave the collective security blanket of a 'common culture' which has been so discredited in theory and in institutional practice. Yet the continuing popularity of 'mass' spectacles (sporting events, the British monarchy at home and abroad, soap operas) suggest that individuals are not yet ready to 'let go' of the idea of community, even if it survives only as a 'fictive' spectacle (Coronation Street, after all, bears as little relation to 'real' working class community life as it does to modern Manchester).

The danger with rejecting 'meta-narratives', whether in cultural theory or in cultural policy, is that we succumb to a despairing inactivity; since it is impossible to come up with a convincing 'total theory', either we surrender to a sublime pragmatism or we pursue some absurd managerial simulacrum of the old rationale. Yet those critics who lament 'the poverty of theory' or 'collapsing meta-narratives' are not necessarily proposing an apocalyptic 'end of theory'; rather they are arguing that the grand totalising theories of the past must be replaced by a more sophisticated theoretical framework more consistent with empirical observation and contemporary conditions. 'Postmodernism' is after all consistent with the rhetoric of academic 'originality', where opposing theories are built up and knocked down in order to prove the greater sophistication of one's own 'original' synthesis, salvaged from the

wreckage of those same discarded meta-narratives. In concluding this study I will consider how such a synthesis might be applied to the materialist and idealist 'meta-narratives' of community and culture.

5.4 'Holding on': revisionism and synthesis

Having rejected the extremes of 'idealist' and 'materialist' conceptions of culture and community as the basis for cultural policy, it remains to be seen whether something can be salvaged from their remnants. In particular I want to reconsider the idea of a 'common culture' by resorting to 'revisionist' and 'heretical' variants of orthodox 'materialist' and 'idealist' positions.

I will begin this recovery programme with the 'revisionist' theories of Gramsci, Hall, and Williams. What these theorists share is an attempt to rescue predictive models of materialism and determinism in orthodox Marxism, arguing for a more flexible understanding of the relationship between culture, community and 'material conditions'. For example, Williams described his concept of 'cultural materialism' as an attempt to rescue Marx from "the naive dualism of 'mechanical materialism'", a conceptual aberration Williams identified not with Marx himself but with the "dominant" tradition of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Marxism (Williams 1977). As noted in the introduction, Williams' metaphor of 'the guiding string' (Williams 1958, 269) replaced the absolute determinism of base-superstructure Marxism with a looser collective pattern (the 'structure of feeling') in which various internal and external influences set outer limits to an indeterminate, unpredictable process. Cultural production and consumption were thus seen to enjoy a 'relative' autonomy, and material conditions were 'handled' in different ways by individuals. While a degree of cultural autonomy and free agency has been incorporated into the system, Williams (like Gramsci and Hall) nevertheless insists

that structures of economic and political domination still matter; we may not be 'determined' by our social and economic coordinates in a wholly predictable way, but these factors will have a significant influence upon our behaviour and our 'culture'.

Habermas has undertaken a similar rescue operation for the cultural idealists in his concept of the 'public sphere'; here the eighteenth century notion of an inclusive, 'universal' deliberative community has given way to a more sophisticated model of multiple overlapping, 'counter-spheres'. The 'idealist' common culture is replaced by an idealised theory of communication; according to Habermas' revisionist idealism, we may not all share the same 'common culture' but we can at least speak the same language and communicate within a unifying and unified framework (the so-called 'ideal speech situation').

If we bring these remnants of 'materialist' and 'idealist' arguments together, we can begin to construct a model of 'community' and 'common culture' in which individuals are neither wholly determined nor wholly undetermined by their culturally specific roots. This version of 'community' accords with the 'ethnographic' research into television audiences described by Ien Ang and Roger Silverstone (Ang 1991, 160 - 165; Silverstone 1990). Here communities are defined by overlapping demographic categories (race, family, gender, age) and 'communities of interest' which intersect and contradict each other.

The idea of 'multiple memberships' also requires a revised concept of individual identity. Liberals and communitarians have debated the relationship between individual identity and collective 'norms' and values. According to the liberals, individual identity consists both in the 'unencumbered' self and in the particular needs and wants defined by collective self-interest; for the communitarians,

individual identity consists in the 'thick' and 'thin' self, based on 'embedded social roles' and 'voluntary attachments' respectively. Both liberals and communitarians concur in making a distinction between an autonomous self capable of free agency and a 'thick' self determined or shaped by the successive 'encrustations' of social networks. 'Community' and 'individual identity' are thus seen to operate at more than one level. The communitarians refer to the multiple social memberships which shape individual identity and collective values; the liberals refer to the overarching framework within which competing self interests are negotiated and compromised.

If we apply these models of community and individual identity to cultural policy, we are returned to the 'two-tier' model of 'open' and 'closed' cultural resources outlined in chapter 4, as with Gerald Yoshitomi's demand for a "parallel system of support" combining "culturally specific resources" and centralised "mainstages".

'Closed', culturally specific resources reinforce cultural differences and discrete cultural identities, providing a mosaic of potential cultural identities for the individual to explore or reject. Communitarians argue that the construction of localised institutions, for example churches, families, schools and community councils, should be supported by the state, recreating de Tocqueville's model of "a pluralistic society laced with communities and voluntary associations" (Etzioni 1995, 22). These "organised public spaces" will reinforce community loyalties and common values; closed, culturally specific resources provide the individual with a framework of fixed cultural reference points, even if they are ultimately rejected.

Liberals counter that the emphasis on local institutions betrays the conservative, moralistic agenda of communitarianism; liberals seek a 'neutral', non-institutionalised 'open' public space as a forum for individual development and 'free choice'. Here the emphasis is on creating an 'open terrain' in which individuals can

construct their own cultural identities through a network of 'voluntary attachments'. Criticising the latent oppressiveness of "communities of circumstance", liberals have accordingly sought to create "communities of choice"; Friedman describes the liberating effect of 'communities of choice' from a feminist perspective, allowing women to escape conventional gender roles and pursue alternative models of identity (Friedman 1992).

Taken separately, the 'liberal' and 'communitarian' models of community share many of the respective assumptions of the 'idealist' and 'materialist' conceptions of community already referred to. The liberal position shades into a 'free market' ideology and the culturalist myth of consumer sovereignty. The communitarian position resembles the materialist model in its reliance on fixed points of reference and the weight of social conditioning.

Again, if we bring the liberal and communitarian arguments together, we can perhaps begin to cancel out some of their respective deficiencies. Combining a network of localised culturally specific resources with guaranteed access to an indeterminate public sphere of 'open' cultural resources might allow individuals to cross the boundary between 'neutral' and 'specific' versions of community. These transitions, between culturally specific resources (special interest magazines and media, ethnic cultural resources, local news services) and 'open' cultural resources (the internet, internationally syndicated music and television), depend upon access and opportunity. The difficulty, of course, is in accommodating these different dimensions of culture and community within a coherent, accessible framework. However difficult this balancing act may prove to be, the alternative is to accept a growing separation between a 'global' culture, disconnected from the interests and needs of culturally specific communities, and a 'local' culture which turns in on itself, preventing access to alternative 'communities of choice'.

'Letting go' of the conceptual framework of idealist and materialist conceptions of culture and community creates a policy vacuum. As noted in the previous section this vacuum is filled by instrumental policies and the logic of the marketplace. Yet if we 'hold on' too tightly to materialist and idealist conceptions, we succumb to the extremes of 'determinist' and 'culturalist' policies and assumptions reviewed in this study. On the one hand, a rigidly materialist theory of culture insists on grounding cultural consumption and production in ever smaller localised units and sub-categories, trapping the individual in a cage of determinist cross-references and sub-categories. A pure idealist conception meanwhile refers outwards to an indeterminate, 'universal' common culture, where localised identities must be cast off. The political cost of holding onto these conceptions is reflected in the immense gulf between localised, materialist 'cultures' and a national, even supranational, 'common culture'. While the Western elites cling to an idealist rhetoric of universal brotherhood, where all countries are created equal but some have larger trade deficits, many smaller states, already marginalised by the the new world order of trade without frontiers, have retreated into ancient religious and tribal loyalties.

Conceptually, if we are to bridge the gap between 'closed' and 'open' terrain in cultural policy, we need a more flexible definition of community and culture which no longer insists upon determination or absence of determination in cultural consumption and production. In Williams' 'structure of feeling' and Habermas' 'public sphere' the hard boundaries between a determined sphere of closed, localised, culturally specific resources and a universal sphere of open, universal, globalised, common cultural resources become less rigid; a dialogue is opened.

Michael Sandel has described the need for a new 'post-national' democracy. Noting that the nation-state is "too large to give expression to particular communal identities

and too small to cope with global economic forces”, Sandel recommends a new principle of subsidiarity in government, combining devolution of political authority to “localised spheres” with a universalisation of individual human rights: “Any agenda for revitalised self-government and the effective empowerment of smaller-scale communities must contain the devolution of power to smaller units and the universalization of rights on a supranational level” (Sandel 1992b). Such a system would draw on a “revitalized federalism” in the U.S. and on the new European regionalism. Post-national political democracy requires a new concept of cultural democracy. Individuals require access to a communitarian, materialist culture determined in the last instance by culturally specific conditions; they also need to escape from predetermined social roles and predispositions into the ‘neutral’, ‘open-minded’ culture of a generalised ‘public sphere’. Admittedly the distinction between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ culture requires further research and analysis; admittedly it will be difficult to dislodge the equation of ‘community’ with localism and of ‘universality’ with the national interest. However, a two-tier system, combining cultural communities and ‘post-loyal’ cultural resources, may offer a step forward in the search for cultural democracy.

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