

Music as a path to transformative cultural change Human Ecology Forum – April 10 2015

As most of you know by now from sharing this room at these excellent forums, I identify myself as “a musician and environmental activist”. I want to start off this session by again identifying myself in that way because, as Val has helped us recognise, identifying a personal path into a question is a vital part of understanding it. It is the first of the seven ways of knowing – the introspective – which sets us off on the journey. The first chunk of this presentation, then, is an exploration of my own journey to this starting point.

What do I mean by “musician and environmental activist”? Well, for my whole life I have been professionally and passionately focussed on these two directions – playing and listening to music, and working to protect our environment, both of them in various different ways. Many of my earliest memories have to do with specific pieces of music and David Attenborough documentaries! After school, I studied law, as a path to better informed social change, and repeatedly had to convince myself not to drop out and go be a musician. I did honours in theatre studies, with a focus on alternative political interpretations of Shakespeare. And I have spent my entire professional life juggling activism, music and family.

I think I have always instinctively felt that these two paths were running in tandem towards the same goal, that in some way they were different aspects of a larger whole. When I discovered Brecht and Weill as a teenager, and then explored what Australian composer Martin Wesley-Smith, among others, was doing with environmental themes in his music, I became convinced of it. I started to put it into practice properly around a decade ago by working to reduce my own band’s environmental footprint, and discussing what we were doing with as many people as possible. And then, two years ago, I quit my job as Christine Milne’s Communications Director to start working full time on an NGO to “facilitate, organise and inspire” the music scene to green up its act.

It was always my belief that Green Music Australia, by working at a practical level with musicians and their surrounding industry, could and would help create deep, cultural, social change. But I didn’t really know how. So I started researching it, at first with a paper I wrote under the auspices of my friend Matthew Rimmer’s Future Fellowship on Intellectual Property and Climate Change (and many of the quotes today come from interviews I conducted for that research), then on culture and environmentalism for the ACT Conservation Council, then here through the Human Ecology Forum, and now seriously discussing the prospect of doctoral research on the topic.

The word that brings it all together, for me, and what appealed to me so much about this theme of the Human Ecology Forum, is “culture”. It’s such a wonderful word, partly, as I said at my first presentation here, because it can mean so many different things to different people in different contexts, and yet still have the same underlying driving force. We have high culture and low culture, ethnic cultures, socio-political cultures, culture in yoghurt or a petri dish which makes it come alive, flourish, thrive, create something new and interesting.

The relevant definition from the Oxford English Dictionary is “[t]he ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society”. American artistic activist Arlene Goldbard defines it more poetically as “the fabric of signs and symbols, customs and ceremonies, habitations, institutions, and much more that characterize and enable a specific human community to form and sustain itself.”

Culture guides us as we make the myriad decisions that we make each day. Culture guides what we eat, whether we wear jeans, a skirt or laundered trousers, the words we use, the way we work and commute, how we engage with our children and our parents. Culture sits behind our desire to follow social mores or our willingness to break the law, whether by jay walking or shoplifting or locking on to mining equipment in an act of civil disobedience. Culture drives the way we vote, the music we listen to, the way we deal with conflict. And each of our actions feeds back on and influences culture as it continues to evolve.

Sometimes cultures are changed by natural events such as earthquakes. Sometimes they are changed by disruptive technology like agriculture, iron tools or telecommunications. Sometimes they evolve incrementally as populations grow, pushing people into closer proximity, or as waves of migrants influence a host culture. Sometimes cultures are deliberately changed by a group of people adding intentional impulses to the bigger evolutionary process they form a small part of.

Culture can be benign, influencing whether we prefer eggs or congee for breakfast. But culture can become hegemonic, driving unhealthy and unsustainable consumption, blocking certain groups of people from access to services, limiting democratic choice.

Culture, as I understand it, is at the heart of everything.

This, I suspect is obvious to all of you, but after years in politics it came to me as a bolt from the blue. And it came as I was thinking for the millionth time about the old dictum which used to be the bane of my existence:

“Politics is the art of the possible”.

I would get deeply frustrated when people told me that that meant we couldn’t set targets for deep pollution cuts or 100% renewable energy. But, having extracted myself from day-to-day politics and spent time researching widely, discussing broadly and thinking deeply, I now believe it’s true – it’s just utterly misinterpreted.

If we accept the limits of what is currently possible – and the vast majority of our politicians, media, and environmental and social activists broadly do – we will never successfully face up to the deep challenges we face as a society, from preventing catastrophic climate disruption to building genuine social and economic equality to true Indigenous liberation. But neither can we just baldly declare we are going to do the impossible. Within the confines of the existing socio-political culture, it is literally impossible.

Our job is to change what is possible.

And “what is possible” is fundamentally a cultural question, wrapped up in how we collectively and individually conceive of the world around us and our place in it.

Going back to the political and legal theory I’d studied much earlier, and forgotten because the culture of politics and political change as currently practiced shut it out of the realms of the possible, helped me lock onto these ideas.

I searched around about this idea that culture, by framing the way we understand our world and our place in it, by limiting or expanding our social and political discourse, consequently underlies and circumscribes our behaviour. One of my favourite expressions of it, from Arlene Goldbard, sets it out as: “our capacity to act is conditioned on the story we tell ourselves about our own predicament and capabilities.”¹ My other favourite, from American activist, Daniel Hunter goes like this: “Politicians are like a balloon tied to a rock. If we swat at them, they may sway to the left or the right. But, tied down, they can only go so far. Instead of batting at them, we should move the rock.”² I would expand that to say it’s not just politicians – it’s all decision-makers. And we all make decisions. We are all balloons tied to the rock of our culture.

It’s fascinating to me that climate scientists are way ahead of campaigners in recognising that culture is key to climate change, driving the social norms that create it and holding back the necessary social, political and economic change to address it.

Climate scientist, Kevin Anderson, quoted in the RSA’s *A New Agenda on Climate Change*, says that the numbers are so stark that what we have to do is “develop a different mind-set – and quickly.” Similarly, Graeme Pearman, told my study that “Climate change is really a human question, it’s not primarily a physical science question at all. It’s about what humans perceive they want or need.”

I really like how the RSA explores that idea:

[E]nergy demand is driven by perceived ‘need’, but this sense of need is highly contingent from a historical or cultural perspective. Global perception of energy demand is driven by the social practices ... we come to view as normal (eg two hot showers a day, driving short distances, regular flying), features of life relating to contingent norms of cleanliness, comfort and convenience rather than inherent features of human welfare.

If what we perceive to be necessary in our lives is culturally driven, then any solutions must also grapple with culture and seek to change it.

Political theory got there a century ago, if not more. Gramsci understood culture as central to his conception of hegemony. He developed Marx’s theory of class dominance to cover a critical point of power dynamics – that those in power will seize control of the arena of ideas as much as they will

¹ Arlene Goldbard, *The Culture of Possibility: Art, Artists and The Future*, Waterlight Press, 2013, loc 193.

² Daniel Hunter, *Strategy and Soul: A Campaigner’s Tale of Fighting Billionnaires, Corrupt Officials, and Philadelphia Casinos*, Smashwords, 2013, Chapter 10

the traditional arms of coercive power. Power is held by controlling the discourse, and the deepest way to contest power is to contest those ideas at the cultural level.

Chomsky writes that power is held over us only with our consent, and powerholders actively manipulate and 'manufacture' consent. In writing that "[t]he smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum,"³ Chomsky could have been describing ABC's QandA.

I don't think it's any accident that these two great theorists, Chomsky and Gramsci, were both linguists. Because language is the most obvious way in which we express to each other our understanding of the world and our place in it. Language is the most sophisticated way in which we expand or limit our ideas of what is possible.

But what if there were a deeper way than language? Something that predates sophisticated political debate and sits evolutionarily deep within us?

It is absolutely no accident that the word culture has artistic connotations as well as deep political meanings. If culture is about our understanding of our world and where we belong in it, art is one of the first and best ways in. Art is how we make sense of our world and how we find our place in it. Art, including music, is one of the earliest human impulses. Actually it predates humanity, and is found in many other species, from mating calls to territorial marking to group bonding. Musical instruments are some of the earliest discovered tools, found in some of the oldest archaeological digs.

This instinct for music as a way of finding and cementing our place in the world developed into hymns and other religious music, ethnic musics which still bind many of us so deeply, national anthems, and protest songs.

Artists have always reflected and been part of cultural change – consider our conversation at the recent forum about Turner's work moving from rural idylls to industrial landscapes over the course of his life, and Vivaldi and Bach reflecting different aspects of early Enlightenment culture. Further, artists, as cultural leaders, have been involved in driving social change over centuries, if not millennia, from civil rights to union organising to queer rights to feminism to democratic and human rights and more.

According to William Danaher, "[m]usic and rhythm have been central to human history, in part, by motivating humans to act for the benefit of the group over and above themselves."⁴ As John Street notes, "From Plato to the Frankfurt School and beyond, the case has been made for regarding music (especially popular music) as a source of power".⁵

³ Noam Chomsky, *The Common Good*, Odonian Press, 1998, 43.

⁴ William Danaher, 'Music and Social Movements' (2010) 4(9) *Sociology Compass* 811, 813.

⁵ John Street, "'Fight the Power": The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics' (2003) 38 *Government and Opposition* 113, 116.

In an article entitled “The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics”,⁶ Street looks at the use of campaign songs in contemporary election campaigns and discusses how the CIA’s Voice of America, as well as national anthems such as “God Save the Queen”, can be considered “a form of state propaganda”, before moving to the more explicit use of militaristic and/or folk music by the Soviet, Nazi and South African apartheid regimes.⁷ In each of these cases, the internal justification for this propaganda art appears to be around issues of identity politics, branding or the simple abiding belief that music has the power to exercise or undermine social control.

The corollary of the promotion of certain *desirable* art as propaganda is the direct censorship of *undesirable* art. Street notes the prohibition of jazz and Jewish music under the Nazis and the banning of Fela Kuti’s music in Nigeria, amongst other examples.⁸

Many authors⁹ have noted that censorship invests music with a power it may not have possessed or intended until the act of censorship itself. Shane Howard raises the banning of the “Devil’s interval”, or augmented fourth, by the mediaeval church as an example of this.¹⁰ However, Howard and others reflect that these kinds of clumsy interventions reveal a very real power of art that those seeking social control and fearing art understand. Guy Abrahams of Climarte, in my interviews, fascinatingly reflects that it may be the very uncontrollable nature of the arts and how they convey meaning that strikes fear into the heart of totalitarian regimes: “because they recognise that it’s not something that can be controlled.”

Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks in their excellent book *Playing for Change*, thoroughly examine the role of music in social movements, covering issues such as recruitment, conversion and mobilisation, diffusion vs containment of ideas and activity, experience and participation, and collective identity.

They define political music through its role in driving change:

political music implies that existing arrangements are not natural... [and are] susceptible to change... if opposed... [Music] is also political if it helps achieve the tasks necessary for mobilising such opposition.¹¹

So, music can be used by political forces to help drive opposition and resistance, and, on the other hand, musicians can of their own accord exercise their political voice. In some cases, these desires and aims are consistent; in others, there is a clear decision by political forces to co-opt musicians.

⁶ John Street, “‘Fight the Power’: The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics” (2003) 38 *Government and Opposition* 113.

⁷ John Street, “‘Fight the Power’: The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics” (2003) 38 *Government and Opposition* 113, 114-115.

⁸ John Street, “‘Fight the Power’: The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics” (2003) 38 *Government and Opposition* 113, 117.

⁹ John Street, “‘Fight the Power’: The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics” (2003) 38 *Government and Opposition* 113. See also Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012); Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Shane Howard, interview, 26/03/14.

¹¹ Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 20.

The use of Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" by Ronald Reagan's 1984 presidential campaign is among the most famous examples of co-option, the songwriter being deeply unhappy that his music's intended critique of his country's treatment of Vietnam veterans was used as a simplistic patriotic anthem for a campaign he did not support.¹² Just last week we saw John Schumann deeply disturbed by Reclaim Australia's cooption of his song "I was only 19" at their racist rallies.

A more cooperative approach was taken by early union organisers and the Communist Party in the USA, bringing in non-involved musicians to recruit supporters. Most famously, the Industrial Workers of the World, better known as the Wobblies, saw folk music as central to their project, publishing their Little Red Songbook with regular updates throughout the last century, and directly inspiring songwriters such as Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie.

Later, the Highlander Centre, one of the first activist training centres in the world, involved a substantial focus on music, recruiting and training musicians and workshopping campaign songs. "We Shall Overcome" is the most famous of many protest songs of the 1960s that had its origins there. Spirituals and blues became a key part of the fight for civil rights in the USA just as Jimmy Little, Yothu Yindi and many others made their music a part of their fight for Indigenous self-determination here in Australia. Macklemore's Same Love and Katy Perry's I Kissed a Girl, while less explicitly political, can be seen as part of the cultural shift to normalising homosexuality in recent years.

So how, and in what ways, does music have this powerful effect?

Well, this is what I'm hoping to test in my doctoral research, if I take that plunge. But I believe it can be divided into three distinct roles:

1. music affects the way we receive ideas;
2. music affects and interacts with the way we see the world and our place in it in such a way as to shift cultural norms; and
3. music can shift and reprioritise values in such a way as to enable transformative cultural change.

The first of these is in many ways the most self-explanatory, and is certainly the most thoroughly explored in existing literature.

Affecting the way we receive ideas can be as simple as drawing attention to an issue and passing on information about it. On that level, we can consider the role of the musician as celebrity, singing about an issue, playing at a benefit gig such as Live Earth or Band Aid, taking part in the fossil fuel divestment campaign. While it is often superficial engagement, this can nevertheless be a crucial role for musicians, recruiting more supporters from their fanbase, helping raise much needed funds, and ensuring that those already involved stay inspired.

¹² Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 92.

The central question here is what is the role of the musician as messenger? Climate communications expert Suzanne Moser talks about the credibility of a messenger being context dependent. We might trust a scientist to inform us of scientific information, but not necessarily on policy responses. We wouldn't trust a priest to explain science to us, but we might trust them to articulate a moral response. Musicians have neither scientific credibility nor moral standing. But they do have cultural credibility, and it is in their role shaping and guiding culture that they become powerful messengers.

This cultural role is what Billy Bragg, among the world's most celebrated 'political' songwriters, is tapping into in his response to this question:

I think you have to reveal to the audience that you don't have all the answers and that you yourself are not completely sure that you know what you're doing, you're just trying to make the best of it, same as everyone else... It's not about offering answers, it's asking the right questions... It's the audience that has the answers.¹³

As well as humility, authenticity is key to musicians' involvement. I think this is why many musicians are so interested in Green Music Australia. They see that, if we can help them take important first steps, they will be in a better position to engage with their audiences authentically on the issues.

But musicians have something beyond the potential of being humble and authentic messengers. They are not simply talking on the street. They are singing, or at least talking in the context of their music, in the context of their performance. They are interpreting the information they are conveying through their music, presenting the ideas in a way which engages their audience emotionally. Suzanne Vega's song *Luka* opened space for discussion of child abuse, for example, far more effectively than any words she could have said.

Music, in other words, frames the ideas, and primes us to accept new frames. It opens our hearts as well as our minds through invoking emotions, memories, social constructs and more.

Framing is, of course, a word that comes from the arts. The word itself paints a picture of a work of art within a frame which directs the viewer's focus, providing a specific perspective.

While George Lakoff, the grandfather of framing, does not explicitly address the use of arts, two specialists in the field who have followed him, political scientist Brendan Nyhan and neuropsychologist Drew Westen, do draw attention to it. Nyhan's most relevant contribution in this area arises from his practical examination of Lakoff's revelation that "[i]f the facts do not fit a frame, the frame stays and the facts bounce off".¹⁴ He has conducted studies into such "disconformation bias [and]... resistance to corrections"¹⁵ to identify appropriate ways to help people to accept new frames. The results of these studies show that both graphical representations and "priming" can be

¹³ Billy Bragg, quoted in Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 214.

¹⁴ George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant* (Scribe, 2004) xv, 17.

¹⁵ Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, *Opening the Political Mind? The Effects of Self-affirmation and Graphical Information on Factual Misperceptions* (Dartmouth College, 2011).

effective in shifting the frames of debates sufficiently to alter people's understanding of certain "facts". Graphical representation can involve mathematical graphs and tables or more artistic works representing the issue in question. Priming can be anything from smiling, or actively boosting the self-confidence of the subject, to playing music that triggers certain feelings, making the subject more receptive to new frames and messages.

Rosenthal and Flacks note that "music can serve as a 'prime' that triggers a complex interpretive schema in which specific situations are linked to a framework of more general beliefs."¹⁶ Whether it be hearing Aretha Franklin singing "Respect" triggering frames about gender roles, or simply the positive social atmosphere of a gig and emotions triggered by the music itself, music can act powerfully as the kind of prime Nyhan identifies and thus help the process of shifting frames.

Drew Westen's neuropsychological studies into the way the brain makes political decisions have very clear implications here. His central relevant conclusion is that emotions are the most powerful political communications tool, since political decisions are not made "rationally", but subconsciously. Westen specifically addresses the role of music as critical to emotional engagement around messages. He notes, for example, that it has been "shown in a series of experiments that something as subtle as varying the musical score in a political ad can alter its power to persuade", something that has long been known by advertisers and film makers.¹⁷

Shane Howard of the band Goanna is convinced of music's "emotive force". His analysis of the impact of his song "Let the Franklin Flow" is that the message was carried more powerfully because of the music's "capacity to open the soul, and in a way prepare us for a transformative message."¹⁸

For Charlie Mgee of permaculture dance band Formidable Vegetable Sound System, the role of music in priming audiences is central to the philosophy behind the band. The music is "a way for people to get together as a group and enjoy themselves. And when they're transformed to that state of enjoyment it's really a lot easier to get messages through about more serious issues."¹⁹

This is a practical demonstration of John Dewey's writings on aesthetics and the power of art to create shared experience,²⁰ as well as Martha Nussbaum's view that "the arts and literature develop our ability to empathize."²¹

And that brings us to the second aspect – how music affects and interacts with the way we see the world and our place in it in order to potentially shift cultural norms.

The way we see our place in the world can also be expressed as identity, and that is a question Rosenthal and Flacks explore in some detail.

¹⁶ Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 124.

¹⁷ Drew Westen, *Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* (PublicAffairs, 2008).

¹⁸ Shane Howard, interview, 26/03/14.

¹⁹ Charlie Mgee, interview, 17/03/14.

²⁰ Nancy S Love and Mark Mattern, *Doing Democracy: Activist Art and Cultural Politics* (SUNY Press, 2013), 128.

²¹ Nancy S Love and Mark Mattern, *Doing Democracy: Activist Art and Cultural Politics* (SUNY Press, 2013), 10.

“Identity processes are inherent in all movements, [a]nd music is the way many first try on that identity... Indeed, music is a major resource for identity construction in contexts that are remote from the political”. “Music and group identity,” they say, “may become so intertwined as to be synonymous in the minds of group members and outsiders”.²²

Andrew Ross, writing on youth music and culture, notes that:

the level of attention and meaning invested in music by youth is still unmatched by almost any other organised activity in society, including religion. As a daily companion, social bible, commercial guide and spiritual source, youth music is still the place of faith, hope and refuge. In the forty-odd years since “youth culture” was created as a consumer category, music remains the medium for the most creative and powerful stories about those things that often seem to count the most in our daily lives.²³

One of the important roles for music in this identity process is as a social legitimiser. “While the music creates the bond,” Rosenthal and Flacks say, “the listeners of punk may then be motivated to carry out their political ideals not because the music ‘says’ they should but because many others feel the same way and that it is acceptable to express those opinions.”²⁴

Charlie Mgee has found this very process at work in his audience engagement:

I think it’s essential to the movement, in fact I think it’s essential to any kind of group action, in that it creates an identity among people, and a sense of belonging. It makes them feel validated as part of a group. If everyone’s there listening to music about climate action or permaculture or whatever, just them being there, having a good time together, enjoying that, is bonding them in a way that validates what the music or the art is about. That was the idea behind my project... to actually take something that not many people were talking about and just make it fun without pressing the actual ideas too heavily onto anyone, and then through that really drive it home and try to bring that enjoyable positive context into what you’re talking about. Which is an interesting experiment, but it seems to be the way that it works. And I really think that music is the most powerful tool we have for bringing people together.²⁵

As well as building a broad sense of shared identity, music plays a critical role in helping create, maintain and cement internal movement identity amongst campaigners. Shane Howard recalls the large number of songs written to support the Franklin River campaign which never reached the level

²² Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 94.

²³ Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* (Routledge, 1994), 3.

²⁴ Rob Rosenthal, unpublished work extracted in Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 165.

²⁵ Charlie Mgee, interview, 17/03/14.

of popularity of “Let the Franklin Flow” but “on the ground, those songs are lifting people’s spirits, they’re galvanising the intention, and reminding people why those issues are important.”²⁶

Tim Levinson, the DJ Urthboy, finds the perfect metaphor for this role, speaking passionately about the importance of “preaching to the choir”:

which I have no qualms with whatsoever. It’s one of those condescending comments ... that dismisses all this value, that misses the point of how vital it is to preach to the choir, to support what the damn choir is singing, to be the band behind the choir!²⁷

One of the most powerful roles for music in social and cultural change, then, is the power of artistic work infused with that sense of identity to spread ideas wider. As Rosenthal and Flacks say:

What begins percolating isn’t a coherent ideology, but... “structures of feelings”, part emotional, part rational, a heady brew of social ideas, fashions, music, and so forth, both precursor to a developing ideology and more than simply an ideology, involving “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt” by each individual.

That brings us to the other aspect of affecting the way we see the world that music and musicians can very effectively engage in: prefiguring – modelling new behaviours and behavioural norms.

Music and musicians, as cultural leaders and influencers, have a critical role to play in their behaviour, both on stage and off.

Rosenthal and Flacks highlight the example of British multi-racial “2-Tone” bands presenting a reality in which “race divisions were not inevitable.”²⁸ The same process took place on the edges of the civil rights movement in the USA, with black and white jazz musicians, for example, sharing stages and working together.

The importance of modelling behaviour has major implications for the lifestyles of conspicuous consumption that some celebrity artists lead. It is also a key driver for efforts to practically “green” the arts, such as by Julie’s Bicycle, Green Music Australia, the SLOW BOAT conference,²⁹ and others. While an artist is, perhaps unconsciously, modelling excessive consumption, any work they do to promote sustainability cannot succeed as it lacks authenticity. By consciously shifting their behaviour to modelling greener lifestyles and business practices, artists can effectively contribute to changing cultural norms and thereby amplify their individual actions by, in some cases, several orders of magnitude.

²⁶ Shane Howard, interview, 26/03/14.

²⁷ Tim Levinson, interview, 13/03/14.

²⁸ Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 115.

²⁹ Tipping Point Australia, *Greening the Arts: Thinkpieces for Zero Carbon Future and A Survey of Sustainable Arts Practices* (October 2010), 9.

Musicians do not, of course, model behaviour simply as individuals, or even as celebrities. Their art plays a key role in their ability to influence, thanks to its emotional pull, its ability to “prime” us for accepting new frames, and its cultural power to create coherent meaning out of disparate elements. As Rosenthal and Flacks explain:

In this role as soundtrack of our individual and collective lives, music not only takes part of its meaning from its setting, but also organises our memory of that setting, the symbol that ties it together in an accessible package, thus contributing to the meaning we attribute to it in later recollections.³⁰

Charlie Mgee has an intriguing perspective related to these ideas that is worth exploring – that music can perform a mnemonic function, placing an idea or set of behaviours into people’s “cultural repertoire that acts as a reminder and a pointer”. In coming to this theory he draws on:

the ancient roles of music which were aimed towards direct action – I’m thinking along the lines of the work songs, the sea shanties. In a way, musicians are the shanty people, guiding us along this course of change. Sea shanties were traditionally work songs that were mnemonics to help people engage in action that would get them somewhere they were trying to go, or to achieve a particular function in their community or culture.³¹

Mgee compares this to the modern use of jingles by advertisers, using catchy, simple and repetitive music to, as he puts it, “encode public mnemonics” that can trigger certain decisions and behaviours in a given situation. He is experimenting with that approach in order to hopefully trigger environmentally sustainable behaviour:

so that when people are put in particular situations that are challenging to their lifestyle or particular circumstances arise, a song is inspired to come into their head that helps in that situation... [In that way] music is just a way that you can set people up to have the answers available when their troubles arise.

Shane Howard calls prefiguring “future-dreaming” and he sees the role for “the artist to psychologically prepare people for change, or to explain change” as “very subversive at times.”³² This is because art can be and is used not simply to challenge certain behaviours but to actively change very deeply held views of the world.

Angharad Wynne-Jones, from Tipping Point Australia, fascinatingly reflects that this “comes back to the inherent value of art-making in and of itself as an activity that resists the economic pressures, that can be done outside or alongside or subvert the... dominant economic paradigm.”³³ One of the questions I want to explore more deeply around this is whether music, as an experiential activity

³⁰ Rob Rosenthal and Richard Flacks, *Playing for Change: Music and Musicians in the Service of Social Movements* (Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 88-89.

³¹ Charlie Mgee, interview, 17/03/14.

³² Shane Howard, interview, 26/03/14.

³³ Angharad Wynne-Jones, interview, 14/03/14.

rather than a material good, can in some way act as an inherently anti-consumerist force, if separated from the commodifying process of the mainstream industry.

This is where the role of prefiguring and modelling dovetails with the deepest layer of all – shaping and reshaping the very culture through which we understand our world and our place in it.

Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, in their seminal work *Music and Social Movements*, describe the interaction between arts and social change activism as a “source of cultural transformation”. Just as artistic culture can influence and shift broad culture, the broader cultural environment can have an impact on art, creating a fascinating and potent interweaving of the two. For example, “the resurrection of bluegrass music, as well as many other traditional musics, was inspired by the civil rights movement, and its actualisation of history, its linking of the past with the present”.³⁴

More specifically, they argue that the participation by artists such as Brecht and Weill, Dylan and Baez, in social movements not only helps create our cultural understanding of those movements, but also had an impact on their art, engendering a creative feedback loop. Indeed, their “engagement was objectified in their art, and the movement thus came to be embodied in them.”³⁵

[B]y combining culture and politics, social movements serve to reconstitute both, providing a broader political and historical context for cultural expression, and offering, in turn, the resources of culture - traditions, music, artistic expression - to the action repertoires of political struggle.

The composer John Luther Adams, who spent years as an environmental activist before dedicating himself to music, explores this idea about his own practice in an article recently published at Slate:

My work is not activism. It is art. As an artist, my primary responsibility must be to my art—and yet, it’s impossible for me to regard my life as a composer as separate from my life as a thinking human being and a citizen of the earth. Our survival as a species depends on a fundamental change of our way of being in the world. If my music can inspire people to listen more deeply to this miraculous world we inhabit, then I will have done what I can as a composer to help us navigate this perilous era of our own creation. For me, it all begins with listening.³⁶

The deepest layer of cultural communications and campaigning currently being researched, in my opinion, is that of values mapping and how activating certain values can support or repress other values. The Climate Change Advisory Group notes one aspect of this strand of research:

³⁴ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

³⁵ Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 12.

³⁶ John Luther Adams, “Making Music in the Anthropocene: How should artists engage with times of crisis?”, *slate*, February 24, 2015, http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2015/02/john_luther_adams_grammy_winner_for_become_ocean_discusses_politics_and.single.html

Undue emphasis upon economic imperatives serves to reinforce the dominance, in society, of a set of extrinsic goals (focused, for example, on financial benefit). A large body of empirical research demonstrates that these extrinsic goals are antagonistic to the emergence of pro-social and pro-environmental concern.³⁷

As mentioned, Angharad Wynne-Jones posits that, on this level, the arts are in and of themselves presenting a different set of values, prefiguring a different world, “not unrelated to the fact that it doesn’t make financial sense as an industry”. In this way, artists, other than the tiny number of hugely successful celebrity artists, present quite a different picture of “what it is to be successful in a society that pretty much values economic success over anything else”.³⁸ Artists express ideals of intrinsic values as success quite contrary to the broader cultural context in which extrinsic measures of wealth and status define success.

Perhaps the most fascinating concept of all, and filled with opportunity for the role of the arts in driving climate action, is raised in a recent paper published by Common Cause suggesting that “engagement in arts & culture... [in and of itself can] encourage values that support well-being, social justice, and ecological sustainability”.³⁹

This is an idea that has been instinctively noted before. For example, Guy Abrahams notes, from his experience, that “[b]eing artistically active, even for people who aren’t artists, is a way of accessing ways of thinking which they normally don’t.”⁴⁰ Wynne-Jones extends her point about art not making financial sense into this deeper context:

One of the things I see artists that I work alongside doing brilliantly is opening up spaces of meaning that are different to the transactional meanings that we have in the economy that’s driven by material gain and capital. Really just the very presence of art and creativity can create a different understanding of the world and currency within the world which feels to me fundamental... In that sense I think that all art, no matter whether it proclaims itself to be socially motivated or politically motivated, has that capacity and makes that offer if it’s engaged with.⁴¹

The evidence base in the values mapping work takes this to a fascinating new level. The values of creativity and curiosity sit on the map amongst the values collectively referred to as “intrinsic”, close to the values of care for the environment, social justice and universalism, and opposite “extrinsic” values, such as desire for more material possessions, wealth, social status and power. Professor Tim Kasser writes that:

³⁷ Climate Change Advisory Group, ‘Communicating Climate Change to Mass Public Audiences’ (Working Document, September 2010), 6.

³⁸ Angharad Wynne-Jones, interview, 14/03/14.

³⁹ Professor Tim Kasser, in Mission Models Money & Common Cause, *The Art of Life: Understanding How Participation in Arts and Culture Can Affect our Values* (2013) <<http://valuesandframes.org/download/reports/The%20Art%20of%20Life%20-%20MMM%20and%20Common%20Cause.pdf>>, 8.

⁴⁰ Guy Abrahams, interview, 14/03/14.

⁴¹ Angharad Wynne-Jones, interview, 14/03/14.

If we accept the sensible proposition that engagement in arts and culture activates values such as “curiosity” and “creativity,” then the implication from research on the value circumplex would be that the intrinsic portion of the human motivational system could be encouraged and strengthened, while the extrinsic portion could be suppressed, as a result of participating in arts and cultural activities... [A]rts and cultural activity are realms of human life in which people frequently report strong feelings of flow and engagement, and in which people often engage for the solely intrinsic reasons of self-expression, creativity, and exploration. As such, it may be that the more that one engages in artistic activity for these kinds of intrinsic reasons, the more the intrinsic portion of the motivational system will be strengthened, and thus the weaker extrinsic values will become.⁴²

This is an area I am extremely keen to research further.

A clear lesson from history and theory is that not only can artists play a pivotal role in social change, but that such change is unlikely to occur unless cultural processes are at play, because social change is cultural change. The ability of arts and artists to draw people together around a new conception of the world is second to none.

7 ways of knowing

1. Identity - who am I!!! Music central to identity formation
2. Physical - can music affect the way we observe physical phenomena?
3. Social - music as a language, or a conduit for language
4. Ethical - music as a way of sharing ideas of good and bad
5. Aesthetic - obvs
6. Sympathetic - music as a conduit for connection between people, and people and our environment
7. Reflective - music as a way of bringing different ideas and views and ways of knowing together. Also music is closely associated with MEMORY - organising memory of events in a coherent set of feelings.

“As a composer, I believe that music has the power to inspire a renewal of human consciousness, culture, and politics. And yet I refuse to make political art. More often than not political art fails as politics, and all too often it fails as art. To reach its fullest power, to be most moving and most fully useful to us, art must be itself. If my work doesn’t function powerfully as music, then all the poetic program notes and extra-musical justifications in the world mean nothing. When I’m true to the music, when I let the music be whatever it wants to be, then everything else—including any social or political meaning—will follow.”⁴³

⁴² Professor Tim Kasser, in *Mission Models Money & Common Cause, The Art of Life: Understanding How Participation in Arts and Culture Can Affect our Values* (2013) <<http://valuesandframes.org/download/reports/The%20Art%20of%20Life%20-%20MMM%20and%20Common%20Cause.pdf>>, 10-11.

⁴³ John Luther Adams, “Making Music in the Anthropocene: How should artists engage with times of crisis?”, *slate*, February 24, 2015,

http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2015/02/john_luther_adams_grammy_winner_for_become_ocean_discusses_politics_and.single.html