THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON
THE STUDY OF CULTURAL 'NEEDS'

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Abstract In discussions of cultural policy, a great deal hinges on how cultural 'needs', or 'wants' or 'aspirations' are to be conceptualized, and on how they are to be empirically discovered and studied through social research. By analogy with Steven Lukes's discussion of power, three views of 'cultural needs' are examined: A 'one-dimensional' view is implicit in the methods commonly used by many public authorities in making policy: consultation with existing interest groups, survey research, and PPBS. Illustrations are drawn from some of the towns which took part in the Council of Europe's Fourteen Towns Project. The 'one-dimensional' approach, however, is atomistic and utilitarian, and largely ignores the possible existence of latent 'needs'. A 'two-dimensional' view is seen in the practice of animation socio-culturelle, which seeks to make latent 'needs' evident by exposing people to new cultural experience. The logic of animation is experimental and reformist, but it is doubtful whether it amounts to a theoretically informed and directed praxis. A 'three-dimensional' view of cultural 'needs' is seen in the writings of the Frankfurt School. For Adorno and other Frankfurt theorists, latent 'needs' are more deeply rooted in the structure of modern society. They reject current popular taste as a yardstick for policy. But their theories also involve making a distinction between 'true' and 'false needs' and 'true' and 'false' enjoyment, a distinction fraught with difficulties.

Discussions of cultural policy in Europe have for nearly a decade been pervaded by a pair of confusingly similar terms, 'democratization of culture' and 'cultural democracy' which, though rather ill-defined, are supposed to signify alternative and perhaps even incompatible strategies for policy. 'Democratization of culture' is the label applied to the attempts made over many years by local, national and international agencies to spread to wider sections of the population knowledge and enjoyment of the good things which constitute 'culture'. 'Culture', it is taken for granted, is universally recognized and accepted as consisting of the 'knowledge, accomplishments, leisure activities and appreciative capacities of the cultivated person, particularly in the realms of literature, drama, music and the fine arts'. While enjoyment of this traditional 'high' or 'highbrow' culture is, and always has been, concentrated among the well educated and usually well-to-do, it is assumed that it is potentially accessible and beneficial to everyone. This policy is often said to have failed because, in spite of it, most people are still not aficionados of Goethe, Gluck and van Gogh; most people remain apathetic, and passively diverted by the products of the mass culture. In fact, while all social groups participate in mass culture, what is known as 'high culture' is, thanks to the mass media, probably accessible to and appreciated by, if not a majority, a far higher proportion of the population in industrial societies than ever before. Studies reaching back over a much longer time-span than is common in present research would be necessary to
release', which Parsons and others have seen as the general function of leisure activities) but also for activities which arouse and then resolve a pleasurable and socially approved moderate level of excitement.

Close analysis of the long-term civilizing process indicates that social developments in this direction [of internalized self-control] produce counter-moves towards a balancing loosening of social and personal restraints. One can observe balancing counter-moves of this kind in some areas of contemporary life, among them in the field of leisure. New developments in music and the theatre, new forms of singing and dancing are examples. Perhaps the more active spectator participation in sports events which is observable even in countries which are traditionally rather reserved such as Britain is another. ... [T]he greater public tolerance with regard to the display of overt excitement in recent times shows only in a more pronounced and direct manner the general function of leisure activities, particularly that of the specific class we have mentioned. As a precise sociological term for this class is lacking, we have called it the 'mimetic' class. Most, though not all, leisure activities belong to it, from sports to music and drama, from murder films to Westerns, from hunting and fishing to racing and painting, from gambling and chess to [rock and roll] and many others.¹⁶

However, even if Elias's and Dunning's hypothesis is correct, identifying the general underlying 'need' with which discussion of 'cultural policy' has tended to be concerned does not in itself, as they themselves recognize, solve the problem of how specific 'cultural needs' are to be identified and satisfied. It is the complex issues raised by the notion of 'cultural needs' in this more specific sense which I shall now explore.

Three Views of Cultural 'Needs'

I want to discuss three possible views of the nature of cultural 'needs'. By analogy with Steven Lukes's discussion of power, they could perhaps be described as the one-dimensional, two-dimensional and three-dimensional views.¹⁷ For Lukes, the one-dimensional view of power is represented by the work of Dahl and his colleagues;¹⁸ it is 'behavioural' and 'one-dimensional' because it involves studying only those political interests which find overt expression in active involvement in politics and decision-making. Passivity and non-involvement is implicitly taken to indicate political contentment. I will argue that the mechanical use of questionnaires and similar research methods by cultural policy-makers is an expression of an analogous 'one-dimensional' conception of 'cultural needs'.

The two-dimensional view of power is represented for Lukes in the work of Bachrach and Baratz,¹⁹ who go beyond Dahl in recognizing that passivity does not necessarily indicate contentment and that latent political interests may exist which fail to find expression in the political process. Their conception remains 'behavioural', however, because they assume that latent interests can be discovered by observing and questioning the people and groups who are not involved in politics. I shall argue that the practice of socio-cultural animation embodies an analogous two-dimensional view of cultural 'needs'.
The three-dimensional view of power is more controversial. It acknowledges the possibility that people may be so conditioned by their life in existing society that they fail to recognize and may even actively reject their own latent interests. Obviously this view involves accepting the difficult Marxist distinction between ‘true’ and ‘false’ consciousness, and related ideas like the fashionable notion of ‘hegemony’ associated with Gramsci. I shall draw on the writings of the Frankfurt School to illustrate an analogous three-dimensional view of cultural ‘needs’. There is a major problem here, however: do either latent political interests or latent cultural ‘needs’ in this ‘three-dimensional’ sense have an empirical status? How can they be said to exist if they do not manifest themselves in any form of behaviour, even verbal behaviour? Does the inference that they exist depend on the prior acceptance of a social theory which purports to demonstrate what their interests (political or cultural) ought to be? If so, quite apart from the anti-democratic tendencies which Popper has claimed underlie such historicist theories, is the result so very different from the prior acceptance of cultural and aesthetic standards embodied in the idea of ‘democratization of culture’?

This analogy with Lukes’s arguments about power is a useful systematizing device, but of course it does tend to wrench implicit views on ‘cultural needs’ out of wider systems of thought. What I call the one-dimensional view is essentially rooted in utilitarian and economic thought. Animation, as Zygmunt Bauman has pointed out, with its effort to transcend the performer/spectator dichotomy, is clearly linked to Sartrean or Heideggerian ‘authenticity’. Not that practising animateurs need be conscious of this link, any more than administrators are generally conscious of their implicit philosophical assumptions. The most noticeable distortion is perhaps suffered by the Frankfurt School; readers will recognize that I deal in isolation with only a limited aspect of their Hegelian-Marxist thought. Nevertheless, the systematizing device proves its value.

The One-Dimensional View in Practice: ‘Administrative’ Cultural Democracy

The one-dimensional view of cultural ‘needs’ is implicit in the way many public authorities go about formulating policy. In the Council of Europe’s ‘Fourteen Towns Project’, the practices employed by several municipal administrations were observed in detail. Most of the participating towns had expressed their assent to the goal of ‘cultural democracy’. For example, Annecy (France) declared that ‘anyone who so desires should have free access to the cultural activity of his choice, whatever his social status’, and Krems (Austria) that ‘it will be the task of the Culture Committee to support all creative and spontaneous cultural ideas, to help materialize them and to create in a democratic spirit “culture for everybody”’. Unfortunately, such well-meaning but vague rhetoric has very limited value as a guide to detailed decision-making, in the choice of one course of action against another, which scarcity of resources makes inevitable. The difficulty is that if some statement of an objective as broad as ‘cultural democracy’ is adopted as the ‘end’ of cultural policy, then the range of ‘means’ which can lead towards that end becomes
infinite. If, on the other hand, the ends of policy are defined in too specific a manner, then there may be only a single way to achieve it, and decision-makers are confronted with no choice between alternative means. Thus, the traditional ‘input-budget’ method of financial administration often imposes on a local authority such objectives as ‘to run the municipal library, museum, swimming-pool (or whatever) in much the same way as we have in the past’. As the Town Clerk of Exeter (England) self-critically wrote:

the Capital Programme, whilst perhaps the Council’s major policy document, was inadequate and meaningless as an important public document since it was simply a list of construction projects financed in a particular way, put forward and approved without any clear supporting statement of what Council or corporate objectives were being pursued and why items that were approved were regarded as being priorities in trying to achieve those objectives.23

How, then, is a public authority which is committed to the goal of ‘cultural democracy’ to decide by what means this goal would most effectively be pursued? To some extent, improved administrative and decision-making procedures can help. Among the fourteen towns, both Apeldoorn (Netherlands) and Exeter experimented with forms of programme budgeting or PPBS (Planning, Programming, Budgeting Systems), in which specific measures are related to progressively more general objectives through whole chains of ‘means’ and ‘ends’. In principle, there are three stages in the preparation of a programme budget. The planning stage involves the selection of ultimate aims and identifying the broad sectors of activity through which they are to be pursued. The second stage is concerned with drawing up policy programmes for each of these sectors, listing the specific means for the attainment of the general objectives. The final stage, budgeting, extends the means-ends chain right down to specific items of public expenditure.

Apeldoorn’s Burgemeester explained that his town’s evolving system of ‘democratic integrated planning’ was

democratic, in the sense that we are trying to involve as many of the local inhabitants as possible in it actively; integrated, in the sense that we endeavour to keep in view all departments of local government and their relationship to one another, and also to synchronise as far as possible all developments in the life of the community in all its different facets.24

Exeter’s ‘Corporate Plan’ aimed to ‘provide a framework of decision-making which could enable the elected members of the authority to make conscious choices between alternatives in the light of objectives which have already been properly identified and accepted’.25

But precisely what kind of information is it necessary to provide for this kind of rational decision to be made in the cultural and recreational field? How, in other words, are cultural ‘needs’ to be identified for the purpose of administrative policymaking? One kind of information certainly required is an analysis of the level of existing cultural provision. Discussing the application of PPBS techniques to the leisure field, H. P. Hatry suggested gathering the following kinds of factual
information: the number of different recreational activities available; the number of acres of recreational land of various types per thousand inhabitants, perhaps in relation to any proposed national standards; for indoor activities, the number of square feet or number of seats per head of the population for each type of activity; the ratio of attendance to capacity as a measure of popularity; the length of queues, waiting times, customers turned away as indices of overcrowding; and so on. The list could be infinitely extended.

But such facts do not speak for themselves; facts never do. Data of this kind are not enough as evidence of the extent to which even the conscious cultural ‘needs’ of the people at large are being adequately met, or of the directions in which they would like to see improved provision. Indeed Hatry himself goes on to suggest three further kinds of information useful for policy-making in this field which, though vital, he admits to be far less easily quantifiable. They are:

- Number of persons unable or unwilling to take advantage of available leisure-time opportunities who would if they could (categorized by the reason for their disuse of available opportunities).
- Number of persons who could use currently unavailable leisure-time opportunities if made available.
- Some measure of overall pleasurableness and sufficiency of leisure-time opportunities.

In other words, policy-makers sooner or later find it essential to try to discover people’s cultural ‘needs’ by sounding public opinion in one way or another.

But how is this to be done? A traditional and still indispensable method is to listen to the views expressed on behalf of their members by the leaders of the innumerable voluntary associations which exist in every town. This has one advantage: the ‘need’ felt for a particular kind of cultural pursuit by those who take part in an association has at least manifested itself in practical activity and not merely as a verbal attitude. It also has a disadvantage: associations represent minority interests in a double sense. First, each association articulates the demands of a few dozen or a few hundred enthusiasts for a particular leisure-time interest, from rifle-shooting to opera, and since each of these groups is tiny in relation to the whole population, there is no simple formula by which a public authority can establish some order of priority among the diverse demands made upon it. Is the rifle-range ‘needed’ more than the opera-house? Which will produce most public satisfaction per unit of expenditure? Secondly, even when considered en bloc, associations scarcely represent the whole population, because we know that in all Western industrial societies about half the people do not belong to a voluntary association of any kind. Among those who do, the culturally already privileged tend to be over-represented.

Public authorities therefore frequently feel compelled at least to supplement consulting cultural interest-groups with attempts to take soundings directly among the population at large. Most of the towns involved in the Fourteen Towns Project carried out surveys of the present cultural and leisure interests of their citizens, and two of them tried to use opinion surveys as part of the decision-making process — in effect as a means of discovering latent ‘needs’.
In Apeldoorn, the process of *Inspraak* or ‘talking together’, a kind of cyclical dialogue between the authorities and the public, has become a central and continuous part of the policy planning process. *Inspraak* was pioneered in the policy area of town planning, and later extended to the cultural field. In the first stage, the authorities draw up a large report outlining the present situation and alternative policy options for the future. This is then summarized and distributed as a broadsheet to every household and to associations. A form for comments is provided, and the replies received are then used by the City Council in fixing final objectives, reconciling them with each other, and planning expenditure forward over a number of years. This method has the advantage that, in soliciting people’s views, it provides them with a great deal of factual evidence to help them come to an informed opinion. In consequence, some of the replies received from organizations were of an exceptionally high standard. But only 3.5% of households responded, which scarcely suggests that this is a way of reaching the normally passive and silent citizen.

In Exeter two surveys achieved a higher response rate, but were of such a simplistic kind that the information they yielded was of dubious value. In 1971, the Council sent out a very simple postal questionnaire to every household in the city. It contained only three questions, one of which read, ‘What services or amenities would your household like to see provided or improved upon by the City Council?’ No pretence was made that this survey represented an in-depth analysis of public opinion, but the fact that the most frequently mentioned desires were for more swimming pools, more sports facilities in general, and more playing areas, was used to justify the high priority given at the time to the construction of a swimming pool and sports centre. One cannot help wondering whether the survey results were not used to legitimate the choice of priorities already arrived at. Shortly afterwards, Exeter also carried out a door-to-door interview survey in connection with the proposed establishment of Community Associations in various parts of the town. The questions asked by the interviewers were delightfully vague:

*What are your present leisure-time interests?*

*What other new activities would you wish to participate in in the future?*

*Should new opportunities for leisure become available, would you be prepared to assist in any way? And if so, what?*

These questions, needless to say, yielded little in the way of reliable data useful to policy-makers, and the episode really only amounted to a campaign to promote interest in the Community Associations. The very crudity of the Exeter surveys, however, attracts attention to the assumptions underlying them, and provokes criticisms which prove equally applicable even to much more sophisticated survey techniques.

The assumptions underlying all survey research are extremely democratic and egalitarian to a fault. One man’s opinion is as good as another’s; as Friedrich Pollock pointed out, when social scientists speak of an individual’s opinion, they traditionally mean the content of a person’s consciousness, without any judgment being made as to its truth or
untruth. If someone thinks two and two make four that is as much his opinion as if he
thinks two and two make five... In one kind of judgment there is an adequate
relationship to the objective state of affairs; in the other there is not... The concept of
opinion which lies at the basis of opinion research takes no account of this distinc-
tion... It operates with a subjective concept of truth, without even a glance at the
problem of the objective.33

In Apeldoorn, energetic efforts were made to give people an objective basis on
which to form their opinion, though some observers may see the broadsheet also as
an opportunity to manipulate public opinion. Unless such information is made
widely available, however, the cultural ‘needs’ revealed by survey research will, as
Pollock’s argument suggests, be ‘needs’ of a quite subjective kind. For example, in a
town which has swimming pools but no indoor sports hall, a survey might reveal
popular demand for more pools yet none for a sports hall, because the citizens have
no experience of sports halls and are unaware of what one might have to offer them.

A second assumption of opinion surveys, Pollock went on to note, is that
‘everyone has his own opinion about everything’. By proceeding on this
assumption, ‘opinion research runs the risk of seducing people in the interviews it
conducts to express opinions they do not instinctively hold, opinions which are not
theirs at all’.34 In Apeldoorn, where it was hoped that most households would
return their Inspraak forms but no pressure was exerted on them to do so, only 3.5%
were returned; this fact might be interpreted as evidence of how far from the truth
it is to suppose that everyone has an opinion about everything. In Exeter, in
contrast, the face-to-face presence of an interviewer on the doorstep undoubtedly
tended to ‘seduce’ people into expressing opinions which were ‘not theirs at all’,
especially as the vagueness of the questions made it almost impossible for the
conversation to proceed without the interviewer leading the respondent by
suggesting some possible future leisure activities.35

Even taken on its own individualistic assumptions, historically rooted like
economics in utilitarianism, opinion research generally fails as a means of obtaining
information about ‘needs’ useful in policy-making.

What public authorities would typically like to know – what indeed they
generally mean when they speak of cultural ‘needs’ – is how many people will
actually make use of one sort of cultural facility as against another if they were
provided. The difficulties of predicting practical behaviour from verbally expressed
opinions are notorious.36 Answers given in interviews to questions like ‘In what
other new activities would you like to participate in the future?’ or even ‘What are
your present leisure-time interests?’, give no guidance as to the real degree of
commitment implied. If the interviewer, or indeed a forced-choice questionnaire,
leads the interviewee by suggesting possible lines of interest, it is tantamount to
offering people free goods – if no cost in terms of time, money or energy is
specified, people are likely to express their assent to an enormous range of
suggestions, and still not participate when the opportunity is actually provided.

This problem is related to the question of ‘interpersonal comparisons of utility’
which looms in the background of theoretical work in welfare economics.37 If the
object of public policy is implicitly still to promote, in Bentham’s famous words,
'the greatest happiness of the greatest number', we need to have some idea of the relative value different people place on various goods or activities. For this, the mere enumeration of verbally expressed likings or interests is of very limited use. Economists are now generally agreed that the axiomatic foundation of demand theory is the principle of 'revealed preference'. To put the matter crudely, demand is best measured by offering goods for sale and observing how much people buy of each and at what prices. By extension, in the last resort, the 'need' or demand for any kind of cultural or recreational provision can only be observed by providing it and watching how people react. It is obviously quite impossible simply to provide some vastly expensive cultural facility just on the off-chance that it will prove to be 'really needed'. The fact remains, though, that head counts of popular interests are a poor basis for predicting actual cultural behaviour.

So it is not surprising that the Exeter surveys of various districts of the town failed totally to predict whether or not a Community Association would succeed in each district. In this sense, they failed to discover whether a Community Association was 'needed'. Nor did the lists of people's claimed leisure interests and 'needs' bear any discernible relation to the actual activities subsequently provided by the Community Associations which were established.

The deficiencies of survey research as a means of discovering cultural 'needs' are fundamental. The random sample, questionnaire and interview schedule, so beloved of researchers, which treat the respondent as an isolated 'individual', symbolize the static and atomistic assumptions implicit in much contemporary sociology. 'Individual opinion, which appears to current opinion research to be the elementary unit, is in actual fact', argues Pollock, 'an extremely derivative, mediated thing'. Nor is it legitimate to regard the outcome of summing and averaging individual responses as constituting 'public opinion'. 'Reference may be made to public opinion only when there is something like a group structure which is of one voice'. Or, as Pollock's Frankfurt colleague T. W. Adorno expressed his objections to sociological atomism:

One cannot in sociology advance from partially valid statements concerning social phenomena to ones of a broader - even if still limited - application, in the way that one could deduce from observations on the properties of a single piece of lead the properties of lead in general.

To predict the success or failure of some form of cultural provision - which is what administrative agencies tend to mean when they talk of cultural 'needs' - in fact necessitates studying not just individual attitudes, but the real social groups and social networks which exist in a community. And in a social network, one man's opinion is not as good as another's; some people's location within it enables them to be more powerful, influential, or effective than others.

In sum, the one-dimensional view of cultural 'needs' can be detected in several of the procedures administrative agencies use in making cultural policies. In consulting voluntary associations and pressure groups, they can be reasonably confident that they are listening to real groups expressing opinions their members actually do
hold. But the resemblance to the one-dimensional view of power seen in the work of Dahl is obvious; it takes account only of those 'needs' which have already found overt expression in active involvement. The one-dimensional view is less obvious, but no less real, in the use of survey methods to reveal cultural interests or 'needs' among the population at large; these do not reveal latent 'needs', but assume that people are subjectively aware of their unmet but manifest needs – even if they have no experience of the objective means by which these might be met.

The Two-Dimensional View – 'Animation'

Animation socio-culturelle has in the last decade become an integral part of the cultural scene in France, Belgium and Italy. The term, and to some extent the roles and activities it designates, are still relatively unfamiliar in Britain and Scandinavia. The San Remo Symposium in 1972 defined animation as follows:

Animation is that stimulus to the mental, physical and emotional life of people in an area or community which moves them to undertake a range of experiences through which they can find a greater degree of self-realization, self-expression, and awareness of belonging to a community over the development of which they can exercise an influence. A stimulus of this kind seldom arises spontaneously in modern urban or even rural societies, and it has to be contrived as something additional to the normal circumstances of daily life.

More succinctly, James Simpson writes that 'socio-cultural animation means cultural liberation – an emancipation which is necessary before masses of our peoples can participate in a genuine cultural democracy'. While these definitions contain many value-laden expressions, proponents of animation claim that unlike conventional policies for the 'democratization of culture', a policy of animation does not rest upon the judgment that one form of culture is superior to another. Animateurs claim not to be popularizing activities assumed a priori to be valuable, but rather to be attempting to widen the repertoire of cultural experience available to people. The choice among that repertoire remains the people's. The fundamental value-judgment of animation is in fact a remarkably utilitarian one: it is the axiom familiar in welfare economics that, ceteris paribus, a wider range of choice among alternatives can only increase or maintain an individual's welfare, not diminish it.

The ceteris paribus assumption is frequently not strictly met, since new cultural opportunities often involve increased public or private costs. Nevertheless, it is a recurrent theme of animation that in contemporary society it is not merely the minorities conventionally regarded as socially deprived, but the mass of the people who are culturally impoverished. They are confined by barriers of inherited attitudes and contemporary circumstances to a pitifully narrow spectrum of experiences, communication, expression, and the personal and social activities that go to make for a style of life and competent citizenship. The target for animation is therefore a substantial part of the population 'living in circumstances of hygiene, comfort and even prosperity, but socio-culturally impoverished and deprived, their ignorance of this fact being itself a symptom of their deprivation'.
How then is this 'cultural liberation' to be achieved? How are these latent 'needs' to be made manifest and fulfilled? Animation socio-culturelle takes two forms, one more narrowly cultural, the other very broadly social in focus. In the narrower sense, it is more or less synonymous with what in Britain are generally known as the 'community arts'. Travelling theatre groups may sally forth into streets, pubs and factories. Artists may lead people in painting murals on the ends of terraces. Youth clubs may decide to throw open their doors to people of all ages, and transform themselves into social and cultural centres for everyone. Animation in this sense may not seem so different from traditional attempts to popularize the arts, except that animateurs try particularly to involve people actively, not just as spectators, and in trying to find out what most appeals to people, modify their activities accordingly, whether or not that conforms to prior cultural standards. Emphasis is placed instead on 'creativity' (or, at any rate, on 'spontaneity'), 'communication' and self-expression. Animation in the broader sense, however, may lose any direct connection with 'culture' in the traditional sense, and may instead use local issues such as neighbourhood planning or road schemes as vehicles for 'creative', 'spontaneous' expression and communication. In Namur, a team of animateurs even used the spillage of noxious chemicals in a road accident as the occasion for a local animation exercise. Some animateurs', notes Simpson, 'appeared to demand from governments a well-salaried freedom to foment among the people expressions of discontent with the existing order of society and conditions in their communities and neighbourhood'. Conflict has in fact often arisen between animateurs and the authorities, so that some practitioners, such as Jean Hurstel at Montbéliard, though continuing to 'foment discontent', stress that locally elected political representatives are the proper channel through which to express it.

How does animation differ from the 'one-dimensional' view of cultural 'needs' discussed before? To begin with, its assumptions are certainly not atomistic; by its nature it involves working with real groups in the setting of local social networks. Secondly, it entails the recognition that if people really do have latent cultural 'needs', these will not become manifest simply through asking questions. Rather, exposure to new cultural experience is necessary to make people aware of them; in this sense, animation may be said to incorporate the principle of revealed preference. For this reason, it may also be said to take a two-dimensional view of cultural 'needs'.

Jean-Marie Moeckli has argued that the logic of the process of animation resembles that of experimental research methods:

The very nature of [the animateur's] activities, close to that of a research project, implies error, which should in some way be integrated into the plans and behaviour of the animateur. Error is not here a 'mistake', and it must be limited and exploited with new progress in view.

Yet doubts may remain whether animation amounts to a theoretically informed and directed praxis. Has it yet led, and will it ever lead, to cumulative knowledge of typical cultural 'needs'? Does it lead to conclusions which can be embodied in
successful policies — not only better cultural policies in the narrow sense, but also for example better town planning and better education which would make possible a culturally and socially richer life for the mass of the people? If not, can it have any lasting results, and can it amount to anything more than a series of ad hoc local initiatives, valuable in themselves, but leading nowhere in particular?

Moeckli’s analogy between animation and research is a two-edged sword, for it leaves animation open to criticism precisely at those points where it does resemble empirical social research. Adorno argued that

empirical social research confuses the epiphenomenon — what the world has made of us — with the thing itself.... The thing-like method postulates a reified consciousness in those whom it subjects to its experiments.52

In other words, if a researcher investigating people’s musical taste asks them to choose between the categories ‘classical’ and ‘popular’, he is presupposing that they experience what they hear according to these categories. They probably do. But as long as the social determinants of this sort of reaction are omitted from the survey, the conclusions it comes to, though correct, are at the same time misleading; they suggest that the division of musical experience into ‘classical’ and ‘popular’ is a final one, somehow part of the natural order of things.53

Now it is true that animateurs try to offer people new experience. Yet their activities are relatively peripheral to the major social determinants of the cultural and social impoverishment to which they object. So the methods they actually use seem to imply that they believe these determinants to be relatively superficial, and any latent cultural ‘needs’ to lie not far below the surface. The prisoner is not heavily chained, and ‘cultural liberation’ is achieved without overwhelming difficulty.

Although many animateurs profess to be radically dissatisfied with the cultural, social and political status quo, the logic of their activity is that of social engineering, not revolution;54 it is an ameliorative technique which implies that current ills can be diagnosed experimentally and cured by piecemeal social reform.55 The animateur’s dilemma is this: if after repeatedly being exposed to various new cultural experiences, people still don’t want what we expected them to find enriching, what then? ‘We have piped unto you and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented’. (Matt. xi: 17).

The Three-Dimensional View — Critical Theory

To illustrate a ‘three-dimensional’ view of cultural ‘needs’, which recognizes that the problem of unexpressed cultural ‘needs’ may be much more deep-seated than seems to be implied in the praxis of animation, we can turn to the writings of the Frankfurt School. Leading Frankfurt theorists — Adorno and Pollock who have already been quoted in criticism of the one- and two-dimensional views, together with Horkheimer, Marcuse, Löwenthal and others — trace the state of contemporary culture not to limited and reformable institutions, but to the fundamental structure of capitalist society.
Stolzman’s argument seems very plausible in relation to wealth, prestige and other manifestations of power which form the broad lines of stratification in most societies. But, as he recognizes, it depends on the existence of some degree of consensus about what is worth striving for (things for which there is no contest are not scarce or valuable). As he perhaps does not recognize, this forces him back close to the subjective position. This becomes apparent on turning attention once more specifically to the cultural domain. Very marked cultural stratification exists in industrial societies under both capitalist and communist regimes, but there is not much evidence of consensus about the cultural ‘things worth striving for’. The evidence is rather of widespread indifference or hostility on the part of lower social groups to manifestations of ‘high’ or even upper middle culture, though the occasional working man is reported as wistfully wondering what he might be missing.\textsuperscript{66} If we then argue that those forms of cultural interest associated with the better educated and well-to-do must, for that reason, constitute advantageous forms of culture, and what lower groups say they like reflect ‘false consciousness’ of cultural interests or needs, we have arrived back at the hierarchic conception of culture. Alternatively, it can be argued that cultural choices or ‘tastes’ are governed by more basic factors over which there is more general social contest — access to education and, behind that, economic chances — and that tastes would change if these inequalities were removed. The implication still remains that ‘high culture’ is advantageous simply because it is relatively inaccessible and, in effect, that the advantages ought to be spread more widely through a process of ‘democratization of culture’.

In fact, the Frankfurt School theorists rejected ‘democratization of culture’, not so much because it involves the imposition of cultural standards \textit{de haut en bas}, but because they did not believe that the strategy could work in society as it now exists. \textit{Marcuse} denounced what he called ‘affirmative culture’:

\begin{quote}
By affirmative culture is meant that culture of the bourgeois epoch which led in the course of its own development to the segregation from civilization of the mental and spiritual world as an independent realm of value that is considered superior to civilization. Its decisive characteristic is the assertion of a universally obligatory, eternally better, and more valuable world that must be unconditionally affirmed: a world essentially different from the factual world of the daily struggle for existence, yet realizable by every individual for himself ‘from within’, without any transformation of the state of fact.\textsuperscript{67}
\end{quote}

Yet the Frankfurt School viewpoint equally leads to rejection of the populist element present in the idea of ‘cultural democracy’. Members of the School certainly refused to glorify ‘working-class culture’ as it now exists — a tendency evident later in the writings of Richard Hoggart.\textsuperscript{68} Colin Sparks, using his reading of the Frankfurt School to criticize some of the work inspired by Hoggart at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham, has explained quite succinctly why working-class culture must not be glorified:

To hypostatise a single, unique development as the calibration-table against which all other developments are to be measured is to reject any notion of the complex historical evolution of social classes in relation to each other. The consequences are quite surprising
. . . the argument leads with irresistible logic to a celebration of capitalism in one of its many unpleasant forms. The culture which is chosen as a yard-stick is, it should be remembered, the culture of a subordinate class. If this is the source of our evaluations, then from what point can we criticize the fact of domination?69

None of this is to say that the Frankfurt theorists were opposed to a more democratic cultural life, though their conception of what later came to be known as 'cultural democracy' was a complex one. As Jay explains:

The Frankfurt School disliked mass culture, not because it was democratic, but precisely because it was not. The notion of 'popular' culture, they argued, was ideological; the culture industry administered a non-spontaneous, reified, phony culture rather than the real thing. The old distinction between high and low culture had all but vanished in the 'stylized barbarism' of mass culture. . . . The subliminal message of almost all that passed for art was conformity and resignation. . . . Increasingly, the Institut came to feel that the culture industry enslaved men in far more subtle and effective ways than the crude methods of domination practised in earlier eras.70

To give a specific example, Adorno (a distinguished musicologist as well as philosopher and sociologist) argued that no reliance could be placed on average listeners' opinions of the music they heard:

Not only were they incapable of overcoming the conformity of cultural norms, but even more fundamentally, their ability to hear had itself degenerated. It had regressed, not physiologically, but psychologically. The regression was not to an earlier musical era, but rather to an infantile state in which the listener was docile and afraid of anything new . . . Like children who demand only food they would have enjoyed in the past, the listener whose hearing had regressed could respond only to a repetition of what it had heard before. Like children who respond to bright colours, he was fascinated by the use of colourative devices that gave the impression of excitement and individuality.71

This is plain evidence of Adorno's confidence that it was possible to distinguish true and false 'needs', true and false enjoyment. As Jay points out, he never abandoned his own personal cultural elitism.72 Certainly he and his colleagues rejected the vulgar Marxist antipathy to 'bourgeois culture'. Adorno considered most socialist contributions to cultural criticism inadequate. 'In wishing to wipe away the whole as with a sponge, they develop an affinity with barbarism. Their sympathies are inevitably with the more primitive, more undifferentiated, no matter how much it may contradict the level of intellectual productive forces'.73 Rather than seeing cultural phenomena as merely ideological expressions of particular interest groups, Adorno and his colleagues believed that great art even of the bourgeois epoch contained a 'negative' or critical element. 'Art, since it became autonomous, has preserved the utopia that evaporated from religion', wrote Horkheimer,74 but it could do so only by expressing the contradictions of society rather than by falsely and prematurely resolving them, as mass culture did.

In what circumstances did the Frankfurt writers envisage that the expressed wants and tastes of the people would reflect their deeper 'true' cultural 'needs'? Certainly not in society as it is at present organized. Marcuse repeatedly argued that 'individuals raised to be integrated into the antagonistic labour process cannot be
judges of their own happiness'. In a society where productive labour remained alienated, culture and art were demoted to leisure-time and consumption, and thereby to mere diversion and 'entertainment' for the majority, and recherché snobbery for the highbrow minority. The Frankfurt theorists were by no means the first to note and bemoan this dual tendency. Huizinga, for example, contrasted the late Middle Ages with modern society, as an era when 'art had not fled to transcendental heights; it formed an integral part of social life'. And in the nineteenth century, Richard Wagner decried the frivolity of bourgeois entertainment, and sought through his operas to restore the achievement of Greek tragedy — embracing all the arts, human experience, and the whole population. It is ironic that Wagner's works are considered among the most highbrow of minority cultural interests.

The organic relation between culture and everyday life could not, in the Frankfurt view, be restored simply through a new form of art, as Wagner and (in a rather different way) animateurs seem to believe. Fundamental social changes were required, in effect to integrate the base and super-structure of society which capitalism had sundered.

But how could this re-integration be brought about? If capitalist society exercises such total political and cultural hegemony over the mass of the people, how are they ever to recognize their 'true' economic and political interests, let alone their 'true' cultural 'needs'? Discussing what he calls the 'three-dimensional' view of power, Lukes relies on Gramsci's argument that in a crisis, in overt conflict with the capitalist class, the workers will recognize their 'true' interests. However dubious may be the argument that 'true' political interests will become evident in a sudden flash of revelation, it is surely still more implausible when extended to cultural 'needs'. The tastes which have been conditioned by existing society can scarcely change overnight. Presumably, then, the social conditions necessary for 'true' cultural 'needs' to find expression are brought about through the pursuit of economic and political interests. Marcuse confirmed this when he wrote:

Insofar as unfreedom is already present in wants and not just in their gratification, they must be the first to be liberated — not through an act of education or of the moral renewal of man, but through an economic and political process encompassing the disposal of the means of production by the community, the reorientation of the productive process toward the needs and wants of the whole society, the shortening of the working day, and the active participation of individuals in the administration of the whole.

This is Marcuse at his most optimistic; the conditions he stipulates for a cultural transformation appear to be surprisingly conventional, prosaic, even simple. Later, in One-Dimensional Man, Marcuse was to be much more pessimistic about prospects for the future. This pessimism is probably a more realistic conclusion to draw from the Frankfurt School's diagnosis of the deep-seatedness of contemporary cultural malaise.

Conclusion

The practical significance of the notion of 'cultural needs' derives from its
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recurrent use in discourse about cultural policies, but it proves also to be of some theoretical interest. Three views of ‘cultural needs’ have been examined, each of them implicitly or explicitly based on different philosophical or theoretical assumptions, and each associated with rather different modes of research or praxis. None of the three should be dismissed out of hand, for none is without problems or virtues. The ‘one-dimensional’ view, which I argued was frequently embodied in administrative approaches to cultural policy, is on its own perhaps the least adequate of the three. If authorities make vocal cultural associations and interest groups their prime interlocutors in policy-making, they are plainly overlooking the problem of latent ‘needs’ almost entirely; and, as I suggested, to use questionnaires and surveys in an uncritical manner represents scarcely any advance. Yet this is not to say that survey data are totally without value. As the Frankfurt School emphasized, they are essential to compare evidence of the objective state of affairs. And even so technocratic a technique as PPBS does often involve the juxtaposition of subjective and objective data, though scarcely in the way envisaged by Adorno, Marcuse and their colleagues.

The two-dimensional view, associated with animation, does not supplant but only supplements the kind of practices associated with the one-dimensional view. The logic of animation is that of reformism or piecemeal social engineering; but it is doubtful whether it has yet yielded the kind of findings which could systematically guide the amelioration of socio-cultural policy. The difference between the two- and three-dimensional views is obviously to a considerable extent ideological, but it is also in part an empirical issue; at present we can only speculate about the extent to which cultural behaviour can be modified by reformist measures within the basic structure of society as it exists, and to what extent it is determined by that structure, which must itself be changed as a prior condition of cultural change. Even if we decide that the three-dimensional view is empirically more accurate, this is not to declare the role of the animateur redundant; in several countries (notably Holland) the role of the animateur is seen as akin to that of the social worker, and even revolutionaries rarely urge that social work be discontinued because they see it as relieving the symptoms rather than curing the disease.

It is scarcely surprising if practical men and policy-makers think mainly in one- and two-dimensional terms, since the ‘three-dimensional’ view locates the formation of ‘cultural needs’ in broader social structural processes which can scarcely be changed significantly by limited and short-term initiatives. The writings of the Frankfurt School point to the rejection of present popular tastes, even when stirred by animateurs, as the principal yardstick for cultural policy, and incidentally to the repudiation not only of ‘democratization of culture’ but also of the more simplistic notions of ‘cultural democracy’. They also serve, however, to remind policy-makers that their policies, their exercise of collective authority, are themselves one among many formative forces shaping the cultural experience and therefore the cultural ‘needs’ of the future.

On the other hand, to the academic sociologist, the three-dimensional view is of more central interest. The Frankfurt theorists’ distinction between true and false
cultural 'needs', or between true and false enjoyment, is in the end difficult to make without recourse to extraneous aesthetic standards or appealing to a philosophical anthropology which speculates on the nature of individual human needs in a utopian situation where people were not subject to compelling social forces. If the superior nature of 'true' enjoyment cannot (eventually) be demonstrated in the happier faces of the workers listening to Schoenberg, but only deduced from the precepts of Critical Theory, the distinction may be thought metaphysical. Yet the Frankfurt School's historically-rooted analysis of present cultural tendencies and their relation to economic and political power is a persuasive one. 'Taste' is not just a matter of social psychology or the product of educational patterns at one point in time; it emerges out of long-term developmental processes in which compelling social forces shape deep-seated needs in individuals. These processes can be studied without recourse to the distinction between 'true' and 'false' needs. As a paradigmatic example, I have in mind Norbert Elias's Über den Prozess der Zivilisation, in which historically changing manners are studied not as matters of superficial fashion, but as long-term, unplanned but structured, compelling trends (Zwangsläufigkeiten) towards greater social and self-control, and related to state-formation processes and changing figurations of power. The 'tension-balance' in individuals, argues Elias, changed in complex connection with social balances of power. Although Elias's research was concerned with aspects of culture in the hierarchical sense of what it meant to behave as a 'cultured' person, there seems no reason why it should not be taken as a model for research into — among other things — the many forms of 'excitement' now encompassed in discussions of contemporary cultural life.\(^1\) In the sense that 'cultural needs' are always the product of social experience, they are always 'manipulated' and never spring 'spontaneously' from any pre-social individual 'human nature'. They should therefore be seen in terms not of a true/false dichotomy but of balances of power between social groups, including cultural producers, distributors and consumers. Such balances of power vary from period to period, society to society, and from facet to facet within the very complex cultural life of industrial societies. Investigating them empirically is not a simple matter, but it is in principle possible.

Notes

1. This is a revised version of a paper entitled 'Social Research and the Study of Cultural Needs', delivered at the opening session of the Canadian Conference on Social Research and Cultural Policy at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, 18-20 April, 1977. I would like to thank Zygmunt Bauman, Norbert Elias, David Lane, James Simpson, George Walker and Jiří Zuzanek, for their varied comments on the earlier draft.


4. For a brief account of these symposia, see Simpson, *op. cit.* The full report of the influential Arc-et-Senans colloquy was published in *Futuribles*, numéro hors-série, October 1973.


21. Personal communication.


28. For an especially good study of cultural associations in one of the towns participating in the Fourteen Towns Project, see Josette Coenen-Huther, ‘Étude des associations à La Chaux-de-Fonds’, Cahiers JEB, No. 2, 1975.
29. For a comparison of the effectiveness of consultation with associations as against the use of opinion surveys as tools for decision-making in Exeter, see S. J. Mennell, ‘Cultural “Needs” and Municipal Initiative’, Social and Economic Administration, 10 (2), 1976, 123-34.
32. For a more detailed discussion of the Exeter surveys, see Lewes and Mennell, op. cit.
34. Ibid., p. 229.
35. Parallel criticisms of traditional social research have also come from a standpoint antithetical to Pollock’s, that of the ethnomethodologists.
39. For details, see Lewes and Mennell, op. cit., chap. 6.
41. Ibid., p. 232.
47. Ibid., p. 10.
50. La décentralisation culturelle, Cahiers JEB, points 4, 1976, p. 28.
52. Adorno, op. cit., p. 244.
53. Loc. cit.
55. George Walker of the Council of Europe argues (in a personal communication) that animation should not be put exclusively in the two-dimensional view. ‘Many community artists and animateurs have that view. But equally, much of the animation philosophy has derived from the three-dimensional view . . .’. That is no doubt true of
somatic animateurs' personal ideology, but I still maintain that the logic of what most animateurs actually do is essentially 'two-dimensional'. Walker rightly also points out that animation is not the only example of 'two-dimensional' policies. The national cultural policies adopted in Scandinavia in recent years also clearly belong in this category. See for instance the Swedish government's New Cultural Policy, Stockholm 1972.

56. For an extended explanation, though not from an adherent of the Frankfurt viewpoint, of why this conventional polarity is misguided, see Norbert Elias, What is Sociology?, London, Hutchinson, 1978.

57. Adorno, op. cit., p. 255.
58. Ibid., p. 254.
59. Loc. cit.
64. Loc. cit.
67. Marcuse, op. cit., p. 95.
70. Jay, op. cit., p. 216.
71. Ibid., p. 190.
72. Ibid., p. 23.
75. Marcuse, op. cit., p. 191.
78. Lukes, op. cit., p. 40 ff.