

On The Margins: A Study of the Representation of the Arts in the News Pages of the Newspaper

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Abstract

The principal objective of this paper is to investigate how the arts are represented in the Australian print media. The research is conducted by means of textual analysis focusing on a number of case studies where arts stories appeared in the news pages of an Australian daily broadsheet newspaper. This paper argues that in these case studies the arts are represented in terms of a limited range of rhetorical frameworks. These frameworks help constitute public knowledge about the arts and their marginalised status in Australia. This paper offers a critique of current arts policy which fails to recognise the role of the media in reinforcing the marginalisation of the arts.

Keywords

Arts representation, Australian print media, arts as news, rhetorical analysis

Introduction

A concern with the public's opinion of, and knowledge about, the arts was the subject of a high-profile report on the arts, *Australians and the Arts 2000* published in 2000 by the Australia Council, the federal government's key arts development and funding agency. This research, conducted by Saatchi & Saatchi, was commissioned in order to address the relationship between the arts and the general public and to find a way to 'promote the value of the arts' (2000: 2). The report explicitly acknowledges that 'attention paid to the arts in the news...is one of the factors which determine how people define the arts' (2000: 29). One of the report's findings argues that: '...many in the media express frustration at the inability of people within the arts to either understand what modern media requires or to have the skill to deliver relevant arts content'. The report concludes that it is important to 'close the gap in understanding between the arts sector and the media...' by addressing the 'lack of skill and knowledge within the arts about how to work effectively with the media' (2000: 356-357).

A number of issues are striking about this report and its recommendations. First, there is the critically unexamined notion, lying at the very heart of its research, to do with the idea of 'the value of the arts'. As is argued here, the word 'value' in relation to the arts signifies a complex set of tensions within what cultural theorist Bourdieu calls the 'aesthetic field' (Codd 1990: 142), but in the Australia Council report, the notion of 'value' is unproblematised. Secondly, the report contains assumptions about the idea of 'delivering' arts content to the media. It predicates its assessment of the issue on a functionalist transmission model of communications processes (a model based on the assumption of a causal relationship between sender, message and

receiver). Thus, the notion of 'getting the arts in the news' is also understood as an unproblematised process only requiring a knowledge of how to suit the media's requirements. By eliding issues to do with representation (not to mention the mediating power of technology) the report perpetuates the idea that the media simply reproduce 'information'. What is more, the implication here is that the arts sector has merely to learn how to better deliver itself up to the 'gatekeeper' and to package its product for more ready media consumption. Arguably, in ideological terms, this report (and the assumptions that lie behind it) functions to maintain, reproduce and naturalise the circulation of existing ideas about the arts and its 'value'. Here is the triumph of arts commodification; here, underwritten by government arts policy, is the imperative to acknowledge the twin verities of promotion and public appeal.

Aim

The purpose of this paper is to look at the territory of the arts in the print media, and specifically in the news, by means of an analysis of dominant recurring forms of representation. In order to understand the currency and rhetorical power of those representations, I address a number of specific instances of arts reporting as case studies. These case studies present a range of familiar rhetorical frameworks through which 'the arts' (as an entity) come to be understood. In particular, these frameworks help constitute public knowledge about the arts, their role and value. By repeating and reinforcing these aspects of public knowledge, the newspaper plays an important role in maintaining the currency of these dominant ideas. My contention is that these frameworks, as reproduced in the news, work to marginalise the arts; to put them in their place at the margins of what 'counts' in a national society. This paper contends that while the Australia Council/Saatchi & Saatchi report shares this view-that the arts are languishing on the margins-their solution is to promote the arts by means of the very medium which has contributed to that marginalisation in the first place.

This paper, then, aims to address a key question: What kinds of public knowledge are promoted by the familiar and repeated discourses about the arts in the pages of the mainstream daily Australian broadsheet newspaper, *The Age*? This paper aims to construct a picture of the complex set of tensions which exist around the linking of 'Australians' (readers, audiences) with 'the arts'-terms which, the Australia Council's report does not anywhere acknowledge, are themselves contested and contingent.

Methodology

The methodological approach of my paper is an analysis of the rhetorical features in the news texts which make up two specific case studies. As Yin has argued, the case study is an important research strategy where the aim is to develop our understanding of 'individual, organizational, social and political phenomena'. (1989:14) In particular, the use of this approach here allows for a detailed analysis of the relationship between text and context- a type of relational investigation, Yin argues, ideally suited to the case study approach. (1989:23)

The rhetorical form of textual analysis was employed to identify patterns of representation in the coverage of arts stories which, appearing in the news over successive days, allowed complex 'episodes' to be examined from beginning to end. In rhetorical analysis, texts are treated as sites for meaning production. The compositional elements within the texts which construct and position their subject matter are identified. Alasuutari states that the study of rhetoric is '...a

method of reconstructing or laying bare the interaction context that the speaker or writer has constructed in the text' (Alasuutari: 95). This notion of the 'interaction context' is important as it suggests an approach to textual analysis which assumes an audience routinely engaged in the business of meaning-making while being enticed to adopt beliefs, dispositions and attitudes.

Limitations

This research does not measure the frequency of rhetorical elements against others. Thus, the limitations of the research undertaken here allow for a speculative conclusion only; namely, that the elements identified here may be central in understanding how public knowledge about the arts in Australia is informed. In developing a rhetorical approach to the analysis of news texts, this study is *not* intended as an analysis of news as a product of the processes by which it is produced. I chose to focus on textual outcomes rather than going down the path of qualitative analysis. Such an approach could, however, be the subject of a larger research project which focuses on, for example, the implications of this analysis for arts organisations as they develop their promotional strategies.

Case Study 1: Aesthetics VS Morality

Introduction

This case study addresses a specific instance of arts coverage in the news pages of *The Age*. The story appeared in *The Age* in October 1997 when the National Gallery of Victoria opened an exhibition of photographs which included a work entitled *Piss Christ* by New York photographer, Andres Serrano. Much controversy followed with Church leaders claiming that the work, which features an image of a crucifix immersed in urine, was blasphemous and offensive to Christians and should be removed from public view. Stories covering the Serrano exhibition made front-page news in *The Age* over six consecutive days.

Content Overview

In October 1997 the National Gallery of Victoria held an exhibition of the work of photographer Andres Serrano. The exhibition was the site of much controversy and all of it was played out on the pages of *The Age*. Starting with a front-page article entitled 'Row on crucifix art heads for court'; *The Age's* coverage begins by describing a legal confrontation between the Catholic Church and the gallery over one of the photographs in the exhibition, *Piss Christ*. The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Pell, was seeking a legal injunction to ban the photograph. Gallery director, Dr Potts, insisted that the exhibition proceed, arguing that 'Serrano is without doubt one of the most important of contemporary photographers'. For Pell, 'the conjunction of the sacred symbol and excrement is recognised universally as deeply insulting', and he asks the question: 'Why should Christians be insulted at government expense in our most prestigious art gallery?' (*The Age* 8/10/97, p.1). The next day, the front page of *The Age* carried an article with the headline 'Art or blasphemy: Serrano's crucifix divides our city'. It announces that Serrano has arrived in town to launch the exhibition of his work and that he 'walked into the most almighty furore over a piece of art that the city has seen in decades'. The article goes on to explain that 'Serrano ... cannot understand the fuss. All he wanted to achieve with his art was to get people's attention' (*The Age* 9/10/97, p.1). On the same day, two further articles appear in the News section of the paper. The first was an article covering the court case where it is explained that for the Church the fact that the crucifix had been urinated on was 'grossly offensive,

scurrilous and insulting'. Serrano, who was not present at the proceedings, is quoted as saying that 'he chose to use urine because it was a lovely yellow color' (*The Age* 9/10/97, p.4a). The second article on the same page explains, public outrage is mounting; a representative of the protesters is quoted as saying 'as a tax-payer-funded institution, the National Gallery has an obligation to canvass community views before exhibiting controversial work' (*The Age* 9/10/97, p.4b). On the next page, an article reports Serrano's reaction to the fuss; here Serrano alludes to the similarity between his own work and that of Marcel Duchamp, a controversial French artist who shocked audiences in the early part of the twentieth century by displaying a urinal, entitled *Fountain*, as a work of art. Some days later, a headline announces 'Serrano show axed /NGV acts after hammer attack', which reveals that the entire exhibition had been cancelled after an attack in which 'two youths destroyed *Piss Christ* with a hammer' (*The Age* 13/10/97, p.1).

Aesthetic Value VS Moral Value

The sequence of articles around this story deploy a number of key 'dualities', each of which play out some of the contradictions and tensions inherent in the media's portrayal of the arts. One of the central assumptions/tensions articulated here is the notion of 'value'; aesthetic value set against moral value. As the story proceeds, there is an accumulation of images (and concomitant ideological associations) related to the community protest which builds over the course of the week. The notion of community values becomes associated with the moral position which is represented in this story by Church leaders, Christian groups and 'taxpayers'. At the same time, the idea of aesthetic value is understood, implicitly at least, as *amoral*; it is represented not by a community group, but by the lone and individualist (if not actively self-interested) voices of Dr Potts, the Gallery director, and Serrano himself. The community representatives are seen as wishing to uphold, and speak on behalf of, the value of moral decency, and one has the sense that this interlocking of ideas of 'community' with those of 'morality' is, indeed, the 'winning' position. In ideological terms, the inter-relationship of these key ideas has been 'naturalised'. This is further enhanced by the *absence* (from the news pages) of any substantial representation of the arts 'community' who together might have voiced an altogether different set of philosophical views, understandings and assumptions about the role of art in society.

Modern Art is a Con

Another and connected critical feature of the representation of the arts in the media is the idea of modernism as a 'con'—a confidence trick. There is here a familiar dichotomy: classical art is timeless and authentic, and modern art is, at best, insubstantial and at worst a confidence trick played on the unsuspecting public. These ideas are reinforced in a number of the articles where the artist, Serrano, is given a limited range of 'positions' from which to speak. In a number of instances Serrano is quoted as saying that he doesn't care about the fuss—it is a portrayal of deliberate insouciance designed to insult those community representatives who were taking it all very earnestly indeed. We also have many of the articles playing out the key idea of modern art (and artists) as fundamentally superficial (Serrano chose urine because of the 'lovely yellow color'), or merely attention seeking (Serrano says: 'First and foremost I try to get people's attention', *The Age* 9/10/97, p.1). This idea of the artist as an insubstantial creature—flighty, spoiled, attention seeking—is greatly reinforced in an interview with Serrano in New York which appeared in the Metro section of the paper on the day before he arrived in Melbourne. The journalist, Alan Attwood, places an emphasis on the artist's preference for style (he was 'dressed all in black') over substance (he wants, above all, 'to be noticed'), and these references work to reinforce an understanding of the artist as a con-artist (*The Age* 9/10/97, p.1, Metro).

Attwood goes on to quote art critic Robert Hughes—a (high) cultural ‘celebrity’/expert invoked, presumably, as a guarantor of sound aesthetic judgement—who claimed in his book, *American Visions*, that *Piss Christ* ‘is an example of the depths to which modern art has sunk’. The journalist writes that ‘Serrano...is not at all upset about this... “There’s a lot of people that Robert Hughes doesn’t like—I’m impressed he included me. It’s great—I want to be in the history books”’ (*The Age* 9/10/97, p.1 Metro). Here again a familiar rhetorical strategy is at work—the use of the quotation from an ‘expert’ voice. Hughes is inserted into the text in the apparently unproblematic role of aesthetic arbitrator, and we learn that not only does *Piss Christ* not make the grade, but that the artist is insensible to its qualitative implications!

There is here, then, a complicated set of often conflicting ideas and assumptions about art and its ‘value’. The abiding idea of modern art as a kind of confidence trick is reinforced by the representation of Serrano as superficial; he privileges the aesthetic over the moral, and he treats self-publicity as his highest *raison d’être*. On the other hand, the invocation of (celebrity) critic Robert Hughes and the famous dead Dadaist, Duchamp, act as a reminder of the ‘respectable’ (or canonical) face of modernism.

Judgements of Taste

If we accept the notion that the *Piss Christ* story plays out a number of familiar, if sometimes conflicting, ideas about art and its function, the issue of how these ideas are made persuasive, needs to be further explicated.

Bourdieu distinguishes between a “popular” aesthetic and a ‘Kantian’ aesthetic (1984: 4 – 5). The ‘popular’ aesthetic is ‘based on the affirmation of the continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function’. Popular taste, he argues, ‘performs a systematic reduction of the things of art to the things of life’ and this includes making aesthetic judgements on the basis of the ‘norms of morality’. Much of this perspective is discernable in the news coverage of the *Piss Christ* story. This contrasts with the way Serrano’s work is discussed on the arts pages of *The Age* which, arguably, fall within the mode of a ‘Kantian’ aesthetic. On the last day of the news’ coverage of the incident, the art writer Peter Timms wrote a feature article in the arts pages entitled ‘Derivative, vacuous and bland’ (*The Age*, 14/8/97, p.1 Metro Section). In some ways, Timms’ article exemplifies the general approach to the discussion of the arts which regularly takes place in the arts pages of *The Age*—an approach or disposition which Bourdieu would almost certainly describe as ‘Kantian’. This, he explains, is a tendency to: ‘...bracket off the nature and function of the object represented and to exclude any “naïve” reaction—horror at the horrible, desire for the desirable, pious reverence for the sacred—along with all purely ethical responses, in order to concentrate solely upon the mode of representation, the style, perceived and appreciated by comparison with other styles’ (1984: 54). This description of the aesthetic or Kantian disposition alerts us to the contrary tendency at work in the news stories covering this case. There, the image of the crucifix submerged in urine is seen, almost exclusively, as performing a sacrilegious ‘function’ which seems *ipso facto* to demand an ethical or moral response.

In this case study, I have been concerned to identify a range of rhetorical strategies at work in the *Piss Christ* story, as it appeared in the news pages of *The Age*. I have argued that the play of tensions between the ideas of aesthetic and moral value, as well as the dichotomy between prestigious (classical) art and disingenuous (modern) art— are notable features of this story’s coverage in *The Age*. I have argued that these repeated constructions of the arts draw on existing processes of familiarisation which underpin audiences/readers’ sense-making of the

arts and their connection to the social world. In particular, the rhetorical mode of the *Piss Christ* story works to address the reader as a member of the 'moral' community who is wary (if not disdainful) of the superficiality of the artist. The reader is addressed as an aesthetic sceptic who is deeply suspicious of the value of modern art. This mode of address, and the textual features that produce it, gives weight to my study's contention that the arts, as they appear in the news, are put in their place, at the margins. What 'counts' in this story, with its particular 'systems of distinction and classification' (Mercer 1992:28), is the triumph of function over form and the moral over the aesthetic.

Case Study 2: Creativity and Deceit

Background

In 1997 a series of articles appeared in *The Age*, focusing on three separate cases where artists had apparently made fraudulent claims about their identity. One of the key elements that links the three stories investigated here, is the central and organising idea of the writer/artist as 'author' or originating artistic 'subject'. In each case, the authors were not who they claimed to be, and the revelation of their faked identities was reported by *The Age* as news. As Glow (2001) has argued, these stories have in common a Romantic notion of the author invoking the importance of individuality, originality, moral veracity and authenticity. Arguably, this is an ideal to which any particular author can be exposed and found wanting, and it is precisely the failure of the three artists in these news stories to adequate the idealised version of the artist as author, that makes them newsworthy. Fundamental to this Romantic ideal is the idea that the author is capable of producing transcendent truths. It will be argued here that these stories of artists with faked identities are understood in terms of a tension between the notion of 'creativity' on the one hand and the production of untruths or deceit on the other.

Content Overview

On March 8 1997, *The Age* ran a front-page story entitled 'Durack paints a clear picture of her double life' which reveals that Eddie Burrup, an Aboriginal painter with many paintings to his credit, did not exist and was, instead, the creation of artist, Elizabeth Durack. Durack, a white, female artist from Western Australia, 'confessed her double life...and wanted to make a public admission' (*The Age*, 8/3/97, p.1). This is followed by an editorial, 'Eddie Burrup's art', which expresses concern that Durack's hoax 'could have unfortunate consequences' for the 'wider acceptance and understanding of Aboriginal art' (*The Age*, 10/3/97, p. 10). Just four days later, *The Age* ran another story in the News section entitled, 'Row over one more arts hoax'. An autobiography of an Aboriginal woman, published two years earlier, was in fact the work of 'an unrepentant white man', Mr. Leon Carman (*The Age*, 14/3/97, p. 4). On the next day, P. P. McGuinness writes a piece entitled 'Artistic fraud mocks an ancient culture'. McGuinness comments on the Durack and Carman stories, and writes that while 'it is only too easy to laugh at the way literary and artistic establishments can be taken in by hoaxers', it is important to remember that 'there are many Aborigines who will be deeply hurt by the latest incidents' (*The Age*, 15/3/97, p. 27). Just over a week later, *The Age* covered a news story entitled 'Writer's Aboriginal claim in doubt' which reveals that published author Archie Weller who 'for twenty years...has been funded, published and billed...as an Aborigine' has not been able to 'prove his Aboriginal descent' (*The Age*, 24/3/97, p. 4).

The Production of an Artistic Subject

In order to understand the rhetorical power of these three stories, it is important to grasp the historical preoccupation with the individual artist. Griselda Pollock argues that this preoccupation 'is symptomatic of the work accomplished in art history—the production of an artistic subject for works of art'. This subject which is constructed from the art work is then 'posited as the exclusive source of meaning...and the effect of this is to remove art from historical and textual analysis by representing it solely as the "expression" of the creative personality of the artist'. This, Pollock argues, suggests that the artist and the art work are locked into an unbreakable circuit whereby the artist becomes the subject of the art work and the art work is 'the means of contemplative access to that subject's transcendent and creative subjectivity' (1998: 102).

In the three news stories of this case study, the identity of the artist is in question. This produces a sense of panic about how to 'read' and 'value' works of art whose creative origins are suddenly dubious. On the day the first story broke, journalist Martin Daly writes: 'There are three blank spaces on the wall of the Gippsland Art Gallery in Sale where until early yesterday the evocative pastels of former West Australian convict, Eddie Burrup, were part of a profound Aboriginal statement on native title and its intrinsic links to Australian Aboriginality...The problem is that the reclusive Eddie Burrup...does not exist. Eddie Burrup is a figment in the imagination of...artist Elizabeth Durack' (*The Age*, 8/3/97, p. 23). Here the question of the artist's identity immediately effaces the aesthetic judgement (the pastels were 'evocative') and their putative political or moral significance (the paintings were 'a profound Aboriginal statement'). The paintings lose their claim to beauty and profundity on the basis that their creative origins are 'fictional'.

Two days later, a further story on the Durack case written by Tania Ewing reveals that Durack intended to continue to paint under the name Eddie Burrup 'as part of a mission to achieve reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia'. The story goes on to explain that: 'Aboriginal art experts questioned whether genuine collectors of contemporary indigenous art would buy a Burrup work now that the painter's identity has been revealed...The paintings...even with a promised disclaimer saying Ms Durack is the true author, are more likely to attract buyers lured by the notoriety of Ms. Durack's pseudonym, according to an Aboriginal art expert' (*The Age*, 10/3/97, p. 3). Here the idea of 'value' is interlocked with authorial authenticity. What is more, Durack's moral position (expressed as her desire to participate in the reconciliation process) is effectively expunged since 'genuine collectors' and 'art experts' no longer attribute value to the paintings.

The Art Expert

The figure of the 'expert' or art authority features prominently in these stories. In the Durack story, art experts are called upon to make judgements about the value of the Burrup paintings. In the Carman case, which hit the news pages six days after the Durack story first emerged, publishers and book reviewers are quoted commenting on the literary merit of Carman's book. While expert opinion is called upon by the journalists to attribute value to, or take it away from, the works of art in question, the figure of the expert is also accorded another 'function' in these stories. Most of the stories contain at least one reference to art specialists, particularly those on awards or funding committees, who have been 'taken in' by the artist's assumed identity. This is the flip side to the elevation of the art expert as cultural arbiter; the art expert is here debased and seen as misguided, gullible and agenda-driven. Nowhere is this made more apparent than in the article written by P. P. McGuinness who says: 'It is only too easy to laugh at the way

literary and artistic establishments can be taken in by hoaxers. They are full of phonies and pretenders themselves and to fool them is not at all difficult' (*The Age*, 15/3/97, p.27).

The question, then, is how do the contradictory discourses around art experts (as determiners of the 'value' of the arts) circulate within these news stories? The idea of the art expert and the figure of the artist (as articulated and understood through the rhetorical technique of psychobiography) are invoked in these news stories in such a way as to reproduce and reaffirm familiar ideas about the arts and the artist. This ideological positioning is locked into place by the Romantic conception of the 'author' which, as Dugald Williamson argues, 'is an important category of thought and practice...it is not a purely theoretical notion, but a way of organising social roles, creative endeavours and knowledges about cultural forms' (1989: 1). And this 'important category' of the author is nowhere better reaffirmed than when its opposite (the 'inauthentic' artist) is shown to have failed the Romantic ideal of originality and moral veracity. The exception proves the rule; the author, and by extension the art expert, retain their privileged and eternalised status precisely because here are instances of failure.

A Transcendent Truth

Williamson argues that Romanticism heralded a belief in 'a new kind of authority for the work of art and the artist' by making 'the individual artist the major element generating both the artistic product and the criteria by which it is to be judged'. He points out that within the Romantic framework 'the issue is no longer whether the poem fulfils...conventional expectations or an audience's known taste but...whether it is sincere, genuine and a true reflection of the actual state of mind of the poet while composing' (1989: 7). This, then, is the key transgression in these stories: Durack's paintings, Carmen's book and Weller's entire literary output are no longer readable as sincere, genuine or aiming for a transcendent 'truth'. Rather, they reinforce the idea of the artist, at best, as an unstable personality and, at worst, as a charlatan and liar.

In the cases of Durack and Weller, the journalists covering these stories emphasise the distinction between the biographic 'facts' about the artist (the 'truth'), and the work they have produced under an assumed identity (the falsehood). In all the stories examining the Durack case, for example, the journalists describe her as elderly and (not just *not* Aboriginal but) a member of a large and respected West Australian pastoralist family. We learn that she 'was awarded an OBE in 1965, has an artistic reputation under her real name and is represented in public collections' (*The Age*, 8/3/97, p. 1). These biographic facts connoting respectability and (high) cultural kudos is set against the assumed identity, Eddie Burrup, who is understood to be 'a figment in [her] imagination' (*The Age*, 8/3/97, p. 23). It is as if her creative imagination is the generator of an inexplicable falsehood, rather than (or as well as) the crucible of her artistic endeavours.

Connecting all three stories is a further rhetorical strategy which (though often implicit) is clearly a feature of these news stories. In all of them there lurks both the idea of political correctness and a critique of its apparent agenda. According to Robert Manne, political correctness was, from its origins in the second half of the 1980s, a pejorative term used by cultural conservatives and right-wing libertarians to describe the world-view of the left-wing intelligentsia. 'The politically correct were seen by cultural conservatives as that segment of the intelligentsia which...through a combination of prim conformism and illiberal intolerance, tried to impose their views on others. According to the cultural conservatives, a new catalogue of secular sin – racism, sexism, elitism, ageism, speciesism, anti-environmentalism, ableism, and so on – had been invented' (1996: 172). In the case of the three news stories, one of the ideas which clearly links them is that Aboriginal writers and artists are in a special category of their own which is

underscored by the existence of special Aboriginal arts prizes, awards, funding arrangements, gallery spaces, publishing deals and so forth. The implication is that the dominance of politically correct thinking has provided opportunities for ethnic and Aboriginal artists to exploit their marginality. These news stories present/reinforce the idea that the world of the arts is captive to a politically correct agenda and that those who are most responsible for policing its conceptual boundaries have been conned by their own ideological conformism. Arguably, if these artists had not assumed Aboriginal identities, their stories would not have made the front pages of *The Age*. Indeed, the implication might be that in terms of 'newsworthiness', the arts are themselves here immaterial – these stories make it as news because they fall within an accepted discursive framework and appear to reiterate public knowledges about how the world is organised. In particular, they reiterate the discourse of authenticity, both cultural and authorial, by elaborating instances of its transgression.

There are a range of representational practices here that cluster around the categories of fake and authentic; truth and falsehood; imagination and fact. Only an 'authentic' artist, about whom the biographic 'facts' are understood, can produce, by means of the interpretation of the art expert, the transcendent 'truth' through their art. By extension, there is the artist-as-faker, whose lack of authenticity determines that his/her work has no value. But, I want to argue, these stories point to something even more fundamental about how the arts are represented in the news. At the core of all of this lies an abiding suspicion of creativity. The exercise of creativity and imagination might be regarded as the wellspring for the artist's work, but it is also seen as the precondition for deceit. In other words, creativity is an idea around which these articles in the news pages of *The Age* frame an ambivalent and contradictory set of readings. On the one hand, creativity produces 'evocative pastels' and award winning art works, and on the other, it produces unstable or duplicitous personalities responsible for work of dubious merit. Arguably, creativity is seen as a dangerous attribute, as a risk to the moral community because it is taken as a licence to flout conventional rules about truth and falsehood.

Linking all the texts in this case study are their shared rhetorical features which work to address the reader in a particular way. The tying together of questions of cultural and authorial authenticity has a mutually reinforcing effect. Thus, familiar ideas about 'inauthentic' Aborigines rorting the system become more persuasive when located alongside familiar ideas about 'inauthentic' artists conning the public, and together these ideas are locked into an apparently self-explanatory circuit. This is a key rhetorical feature of the stories in this case study and it works to address the reader as a justified sceptic on the issue of political correctness and its tyranny over the judgement of truth and value. The reader here is also addressed as a justified sceptic on the issue of creativity which, though it might produce great art, also has the dangerous capacity to transgress the moral. The contention of this study is that public knowledge about the arts is crucially shaped by the kinds of frameworks identified here and, in particular, that the news stories' repetition of ideas about the inauthenticity of art gives that idea currency and persuasive power.

A Reading of the Arts in the News

Public Knowledge

In the field of communications theory, the concept of public knowledge works against the grain of media-effects research, with its emphasis on the mechanisms of media manipulation and audiences who passively absorb media influence. Rather, the notion of public knowledge emphasises the dynamic interaction between readers/audiences and media texts, and focuses on the issue of how readers filter and evaluate the information, ideas, images and anecdotes

that come through an engagement with the media environment. Public knowledge is the meeting ground between 'the world outside and the pictures in our heads' (Walter Lippman, in Neuman et al. 1992:3). Public knowledge refers to the process by which people structure their ideas, feelings and beliefs, and develop common understandings of 'the world outside' (Neuman 1992:3).

For the purposes of this study, the concept of public knowledge is important because it emphasises the way in which information is framed and organised into meaningful structures which are not unique to each individual but form shared perspectives. I have argued that each of the case studies analysed here present a number of discernable and familiar rhetorical frameworks which work to structure (shared) understandings of the arts, their role and social status.

I do not want to suggest here that *The Age* newspaper is engaged in an ideological conspiracy to persuade its readers that the arts are worthless. Rather, I have attempted to show that these stories use a number of familiar frameworks - the aesthetic vs. the moral, psychobiography and authenticity – all discourses by which the reader comes to understand the category of 'the arts'. These various rhetorical features work to link the news story in each instance to an interpretative frame which is determined, in part, by what readers already know or believe. Together, these frameworks help to constitute public knowledge about the arts and their social, economic, moral and political 'value'.

Conclusion

I have argued that public knowledge about the arts and their role in Australia is constituted, in part, by the various rhetorical frameworks by which the arts are represented in the news pages of the newspaper. In the *Piss Christ* story the arts are seen as insincere and operating outside the moral sphere. In the story of the three artists with faked identities, the arts, with their promise of transcendent truth-seeking, are seen instead as captive to the partiality of the politically correct agenda.

In terms of arts policy, one might argue that on the evidence of the Australia Council/ Saatchi & Saatchi report, the commodification of the arts and the business of determining public demand and 'product placement', has become its highest priority. This study's critical analysis of the way the arts are represented in newspapers has highlighted the failure of arts policy to address the marginalisation of the arts and suggested, too, that there is still much to be done to address the problems that have been identified. In particular, the role of the print media in shaping and maintaining particular discursive frameworks and public knowledges about the arts needs to be further analysed.

The rhetorical familiarity with which news journalists write about the arts is a part of the process by which the arts come to be defined in the mind of the public in particular ways. That definition, while allowing that the arts can be, amongst other things, entertaining or transcendent, does not anywhere admit the possibility that the arts can or should also be disruptive or transgressive. The perpetuation of the suspicion of creativity keeps the arts in their 'place', forever locking them out as a serious contributor to the public discussion of who we are and where we are going.

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