

Babbage's Bifurcated Brain

David Worrall

It is this avid ambitious desire to take possession of the object for the benefit of the owner or even of the spectator which seems to me to constitute one of the outstandingly original features of the art of Western civilisation.

- Claude Lévi-Strauss.

The convention of perspective, which is a feature of European visual art since the early Renaissance, centres everything in the eye of the beholder and thus creates the illusion that the mind's eye is the centre of the visible world. By convention, western culture has called the projected appearances created through this technique "reality".

At the same time, there developed in European music the concept of "the work" - a complete and separable entity with beginning, middle and end, which, with the help of notation, could withstand the translations of geography and time, ie. could become more objective.

Scientific method also developed rapidly during this period and its success was based for a large part on the apparent ability to separate the object and the subject, the thinker from the thought, in order to determine "facts".

Of course religion, the official one anyway, and eventually the state, developed powerful allies with the high-priests of this objectification by promoting individuals as the atomic objects of humanity, responsible through their own actions for the destiny of their immortal soul as determined by one externalised, objectified "God".

One of the consequences of all these developments was the accretion of reason and rationality to the point where reason, rationality and logic were equated with objectivity. Witness the way rationality (relation-ality) and logic atrophied from Milton's *Art of Logic* to the binary state logic misnamed Boolean, for example.

So even though the arts and the sciences of the West developed to serve different social needs, they were essentially all functioning within, and thus supporting, the Newtonian paradigm of objective reality. The main features of this reality are a tenacious possession of facts and the belief that these facts can be deployed in an objective context-free way, and the tendency to retreat from the general to the particular. Objectivity thus often results in a taking account of the parts at the expense of the whole and subjectivity is downgraded as sub-rational.

Now, in this century we are rediscovering that the subjective is as real as the objective and that facile objectivity (which is really no more than the belief in objectivity) is made up of a regress of tautologies which ends up being defined as the socio-political *status quo*, and importantly, that this objectivity contains within it the seeds of its apparent opposite, subjectivity. So, through the "objectively" derived theories of quantum mechanics, chaos, complexity, fuzzy logic etc, our culture is rediscovering, in its own way, the inclusive relationships between subjectivity and objectivity which were known to ancient civilisations and other cultures effects and practices such as Shavism, Buddhism, Alchemy etc -in short of other ways of knowing, of understanding that Nature cannot be "observed"; it can only be approximated. As Heisenberg said, "What we observe is not nature in itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning." Reality is partly our own creation and what we are is partly the shape of our own motives. Facile objectivity "detaches" us from nature (or tries to) and so is it any wonder then that we feel detached?

One of the of an education system which promotes the separation of the objective and the subjective in the way that Western economic "rationalism" currently does, is that it promotes a false sense of the all-importance and dominance of the facile uses of objectivity such as logical positivism and behaviourism together with the propaganda that art-making and science-making are activities with little to do with each other and as such it unnecessarily limits the lives of those undertaking the activities and in the end atrophies the activities themselves.

In the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Physicians, Babbage's brain can be found in 2 jars (1 per hemisphere). Is this a symbol of our detached selves? Denying the subjective does not stop it from existing. Attempts to invalidate the dance between the subjective and the objective in any human activity denies the fecund possibilities of the consummation of these two aspects of reality. The new economic rationalist morality is dangerous because it continues the fallacy of facile objectivity and forces all activities, including the practices of the arts and sciences, to be measured by its own atrophied value system and channels them into the service of its own ill-defined "objective" outcomes.

Closer to home, the traditional Australian culture is exceptionally conservative and this results in relatively little value being placed on the truly innovative in the arts and the sciences. Until Australians learn to promote, support and celebrate the type of innovation in which the interplay of the subjective and the objective approaches is fundamental, Australia will continue to be a very difficult place for creative professionals to work and it will continue to project a culture in which as the Japanese rightly say there is a lack of sense of

sophistication. Never has the time to stimulate the roots of this tree been more urgent: no quick fix or glossy multimedia "makover" will effect the needed maturing.

The defenders of dynamic objectivity understand that meaning is created by an act of will and thus objectivity needs to be wrestled out of the jealous guardianship of the "rationalists" and the cynically self-interested; to be rescued from the sterility in which it still labours; to re-establish the collaboration between art and technology that the Greeks called *Téchne* - there is no distinction.