BBC MUSIC JOHN PEEL LECTURE

By BRIAN ENO

On Sunday 27th September 2015 Brian Eno gave the BBC Music John Peel Lecture which took place at the British Library as a part of the Radio Festival 2015 - organised by the Radio Academy. The lecture was broadcast live on BBC Radio 6 Music and will be transmitted on Friday 2nd October 2015 on BBC Four at 11pm.

Brian Eno was the fifth high-profile speaker to deliver the John Peel Lecture since 2011 as a part of the Radio Festival. Past speakers have included The Who's Pete Townshend, who in 2011 explored the implications of digital music media in an age of free downloads and a disposable attitude to music; Billy Bragg, whose speech in 2012 explored how music and radio need mavericks to keep moving forward; Charlotte Church, who in 2013 gave an insightful speech on the theme of women and their representation in the music industry; and in 2014 Iggy Pop, who spoke about free music in a capitalist society.

Mark Radcliffe:

Hello and welcome to a much anticipated evening here at the British Library. And what a place it is. Built in sturdy red brick in an homage to the resolutely solid north of England. It is also placed conveniently closed to the great railway termini which provide gateways to the north. So that given the speed of train links, it is more quickly accessible from, say, Stoke than it is from Wimbledon. Come HS2, it will be quicker than getting here from Hoxton. And for only fifty five billion pounds. Amazing. And it's incredible to think that as well as an extraordinary sound archive, every book ever published nestles somewhere in this labyrinth of learning. And I derive great joy from knowing that deep in the bowels of book stacks here lie four works written by myself. Safely snug in the knowledge that they will never be taken off the shelves ever again. And fitting too that we should be here for the Peel Lecture. I knew John and it was an amazing thrill for me to call him a friend as he was the voice I grew up listening to when I realised that he was the portal to that other most previous of archives, the sound track of our lives. And it was only because John Peel made programmes like that, cared that much about the music, and proved that a DJ could talk in hesitant, chummy mumbles and not in a voice that was more suited to selling car insurance, that people like me got the chance to be on the radio. You may of course consider this a mixed blessing; but John thanks again, we will always be grateful. And so to the man we've come to hear tonight. Previous lecturers have been Pete Townsend, Billy Bragg, Charlotte Church and Iggy Pop. An odd sort of supergroup. But if anyone could corral their talents and make it sound strange and beautiful, it is genuinely the most interesting Brian I know. He was born Brian Peter George St John le Baptiste de la Salle Eno and with a name like that, it was clear he came from a long and noble line. Of postmen. And as he's having his full name read out, so am I. So hi from me, Mark Radcliffe. But Brian Eno is one of the most foremost musical thinkers of our time. He even invented ambient music when he was ill in bed. But from his Roxy Music beginnings, numerous collaborations and often global selling productions, he has never lost his sense of sonic adventure. What was it one of his oblique strategy cards said? Honour thy mistake as a hidden intention. And for generations of artists, musicians and, indeed, those of us who spend our lives on the radio in constant displays of public fallibility, I know Peel would have agreed with this, that that thought alone we will be forever in his debt. He did me the honour of writing a quote for the front of my last book, Reeling In The Years – you can check it

out here later. It will not have been borrowed. The quote says if I wanted to study the history of pop music, I'd have Mark Radcliffe as my professor. Generous, but on this occasion wrong. If I, or John Peel, or anyone else wanted to study the history of pop music, we would want our professor to be Brian Eno. So let's take a look at some of his dizzying achievements.

ARCHIVE:

MR: As an art student in the '60s, self-professed non-musician Brian Eno began exploring the possibilities of recording and manipulating sound.

BE: I guess the tape recorder leading into the synthesiser, those were the only instruments that really fascinated me because I felt that with those it was possible to use all other instruments in an interesting way.

MR: Eno never intended to be a rock star, but after a chance encounter, found himself on stage as the flamboyant keyboard player with art rock band, Roxy Music.

05:00 - BE: I came along originally just to make recordings of the group. When I saw the synthesiser I naturally started playing around with that as well. And so I became – almost imperceptibly became – the synthesiser player.

MR: Very quickly the band caught the attention of a certain John Peel who gave them their first airplay in 1972.

JP: Roxy Music, probably the only band where from our time that when you listen to their records you thought where the hell has that come from?

MR: Eno's passion for experimentation led him to a new kind of electronic music – both as a solo performer and in collaboration with artists like John Cale and Robert Fripp. In 1975, his album, Discrete Music, marked the creation of ambient music. And it was soon followed by the seminal Ambient 1: Music for Airports. Eno went on to become one of the most sought after producers in the industry. He has been described as Bowie's muse; a vital catalyst behind Talking Heads; and U2's fifth man. Other collaborators include Pavarotti, Coldplay and, more recently, Underworld's Carl Hyde. An artistic polymath, his 2006 audio visual art installation, 77 Million Paintings, was constructed so that you would never see the same image twice. And this painter in sound as he once described himself has gone on to curate festivals and compose numerous television and film scores. One of the most influential people in the music industry today, he remains at the vanguard due to his restless desire for discovering new places, exploring new sounds and coming up with oblique strategies for confronting the problems of the world.

BE: My way of working has always been not to set a goal and try to reach it, but to see what I do anyway and see how I can make use of it. It's a different way round of working, I think.

LECTURE

MR: Ladies and gentlemen, Brian Eno.

BE: Thank you very much. Thank you Mark that was the funny part over I'm afraid. I can't compete with him. When I started thinking about this talk a few weeks ago, I found myself writing the strange

sentence, something about the creative industries. And I thought industries? That's not really quite the right word for what I think I'm doing. And I started wondering about the genesis of that term. I can sort of understand why it's used because, you know, people who work in the creative arts are always desperate to try to get a little bit of money from government and apparently the way of convincing them that they should give you some money is to tell them that you're an industry. If you're an industry that means you're part of the economic framework and that everything you do can ultimately be expressed as a single number. Like your contribution to GNP or the number of jobs that you provide or things like that, the number of Number Ones you've had. I thought this is the sort of the beginning of the end of the arts, really, if we start to try to make things expressible by single numbers in that way. What we also do, by the same token, is we start to think that things that can't be evaluated in that way are actually not worth anything. Now I saw a sort of example of this, I thought, a few weeks ago when the Education Secretary said she thought that it was a good idea for students not to go into the arts and humanities because they didn't offer such good job prospects as the STEM subjects. Now this word stem is quite interesting. It stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics. All things that I'm very sympathetic to and interested in. But there's an idea around that those are actually the important things.

10:02 - Even the acronym gives it away, you know, the idea of stem, the thing that's at the centre which everything else grows off from. So the idea is that those things are important, they're part of the sort of economic mill and they're part of what makes Britain great and increases our GNP and what have you. And the arts, on the other hand, are sort of nice. You know, they're a bit of a luxury, actually. Something you might do when you're relaxing after you come home from a hard day's work at a proper job. So I thought that attitude was part of what this comes from, this new idea of the arts as a kind of economic entity. And the other idea I think that was underneath that, what Nicky Morgan said – though by the way I shouldn't crucify her about this, it was an off the cuff comment and maybe she doesn't really think what I say – but she did say it. The other sort of message there is that anyway even if you did think the arts were important, they're so sort of untamed and random and individualistic that there's really nothing you could do about improving and encouraging the arts. It's not the affair of the state, essentially, is the message I got. The arts is just something that sort of unfettered individuals go into and brilliance spouts out of their head like oil out of an oil well or something like that. So I want to talk about two questions tonight. The first one is, is art a luxury? Is it only a luxury or does it do something for us beyond that? And the second question is, is there a way that you can create a situation in which the arts flourish. If you think they're important, perhaps you should be encouraging them in some way. So those are the two things I'm going to address: now to address those I have to come round it in quite a long way around. Essentially I think we need to rethink how we talk about culture. Rethink what we think it does for us and what it actually is. We have a complete confusion about that. It's very interesting. If you talk to twenty scientists – and this is the experiment I've done by the way, and say to them what do you think science does, they pretty much all agree. You'll get twenty versions of a very similar answer. It's to do with understanding something about the world. If you talk to twenty artists and you say to them what do you think art does you will probably get about fifteen different answers. And there'll be a couple of repeats. So here we all are engaged in the creative industries, but at the centre of this is a subject that none of us really have a very clear idea about. What are doing when we make art and what are we doing when we consume it? So I'm going to start with a definition of culture. This is treading on very thin ice because a lot of people have attempted this and a lot have failed. So I'm going to make a quite

narrow definition of culture. And I'm going to call culture the creative arts. But I'm going to make a very broad definition of what art is. And my definition is quite simply art is everything that you don't have to do.

BE: Now what I mean by that is that there are certain things you do have to do to stay alive. You have to eat, for example. But you don't have to invent Baked Alaska or sausage rolls or Heston Blumenthal. So you have this basic activity that we and all other animals do, which is called eating, but then unlike all other animals, we do a lot of embroidery and embellishment on top of it. We make eating into a complicated, stylised activity of some kind. You have to wear clothes. But you don't have to come up with Dior dresses or Doc Marten boots or Chanel little black frock, whatever it's called. You can tell I haven't got one. So once again we have an essential need - clothing ourselves – which we then do with intense sort of interest.

15:01 - We stylise and embellish and ornament and decorate. Movement. We have to move. But we don't have to do the rumba, the tango, the Charleston and the twerk. So even something as straight forward as movement we, as humans, elaborate it into area of stylistic activity, essentially. So the basic activity is movement. What we like to do with it is to stylise it in lots and lots of different ways. And communicating is the same way. You know, we all have to communicate because we're humans and we live in cooperative groups. But in fact we do a lot more than just communicate. We write epic poems and pop songs and symphonies and advertising and so on and so on. So again with communicating we do a lot of additional stuff on top of just communicating. And all of that stuff, what's characteristic of it is that it's highly stylised. And it's not only highly stylised, but it's not randomly stylised either. We care a great deal about what we're doing. For instance, people will say to you – and almost mean it – I wouldn't be seen dead in that. Or they might say I don't think I could live without my Bjork albums. Or similar things like what. What colour shall I dye my hair? It's a real crisis. So people invest a lot of their thinking into how they style themselves. And, in fact, we all show that. Nobody here is dressed randomly and nobody – I can't see you very well – but I don't think anybody has a random hair cut either. If anybody does, I would really like to see it. So I think there's a whole lot of things that we do which you might just call stylisation. But what I want to persuade you that they are actually part of this very broad definition of art as I'm using it. I made a list of things that I would put under that umbrella. Symphonies, perfume, sports cars, graffiti, needlepoint, monuments, tattoos, slang, Ming vases, doodles, poodles, apple strudels. Still life, Second Life, bed knobs and boob jobs. All of those things are sort of unnecessary in the sense that we could all survive without doing any of them, but in fact we don't. We all engage with them. So the first question is why is any of that important? Why do we do it? And notice it's not only us relatively wealthy people in terms of global wealth who are doing it, it's everybody that we know of. Every human group we know of is spending a lot of their time – in fact almost all of their surplus time and energy – is spent in the act of stylising things and enjoying other people's stylisations of things. So my question is what is it for? It's like my friend Danny Hillus, who's a scientist, was asked by a well-known science website, along with about 300 other scientists, he was asked what is the most interesting scientific question at the moment? A lot of the other people replied with things about the cosmological constant and Ryman's Hypothesis and all these very complicated things. And his question was very simple: he said why do we like music? And if you start thinking about that, that is really one of the most mysterious things you can imagine. Why do we even have an interest in music? Why do we have preferences? Why do we like this song better than that one? Why do we like this Beethoven sonata better than that Beethoven sonata? Why do we like this performance of

that same sonata better than that other performance? We had very fine distinctions about things that we prefer, aesthetic things. And yet none of it seems to have much to do with functionalism, with staying alive and certainly not with industries I would say. So, as I say, we're all doing it and we're all thinking about it. What are we actually doing? So I want to look at what children do. If you watch children playing what they're doing mostly is let's pretend. Let's pretend this stick can change you into a frog. But if you have this bottle top and you shine it at me, I can't fly any more.

20:03 - Something like that. Those are the kind of games that children like to play. And they play them absolutely incessantly. And everybody sort of intuitively knows that children playing is important. It's how they learn. We also know that if we don't let children play, they don't develop well. It's the process of acclimatising that a child is going through. So when a child is saying let's pretend, what they're really saying is let's imagine. Imagining is possibly the central human trick. That's what distinguishes us from all other creatures. We know from quite careful study now that the amount that other animals can imagine is very, very limited compared to ours. We can imagine worlds that don't exist. We can not only imagine them, we can imagine what is going on within them. We can change details, we can say okay, I'll make it this instead of that and then see what happens. So we can play out whole scenarios in our head in imagination. And that, of course, makes us able to experience empathy, for example. By definition empathy is having the feeling of what the world is like in somebody else's head. Well you can only do that, really, if you are skilled at this job of world building. And children start world building as soon as they can do anything. They start it very, very young indeed. So they're exercising this great talent of imagination. They're becoming humans, actually. They're growing out of being animals and they're becoming humans. And they spend a lot of time doing it and until we send them to school and tell them to actually start learning, they're doing fine at it. I often wonder what would happen if we just let them carry on doing that. Sort of like they do in Finland, which has the highest educational attainment rate in the world, I believe. In Finland you don't start to learn to read until you feel like learning to read, which can be 7 or 8 years old. Anyway, I wouldn't go on about education, sorry. There's a lot to get through. But I do want to keep this idea of imagination in mind that the thing that humans are doing, especially young humans are doing, when they play, is imagining. They're learning to imagine. They're learning to think about how other worlds could be. You think about this world by imagining alternatives to it. And you think, of course, about futures by imagining how the world could turn out. It could be like this. If this happens, it could be like that. This is why we can make bridges and have football teams and design weddings and have parties and have governments and so on and so on. Because we can imagine those things. Now my first point is to say that children learn through play, but adults play through art. So I don't think we stop playing. I think we just carry on doing it, but we do it through this thing called art. And so the reason I made that big list of things which could, of course, have been endlessly long was because I want to say that all of those things, from the most exalted, with inverted commas, like symphonies, to the most mundane like cake decoration or nail painting or something like that, they are all doing the same thing. They are all the construction of little worlds of some kind. Okay, so you're thinking how's nail decoration a world? Let's start in the obvious sort of example. Novels and films. It's very obvious when you read a novel that what you're doing is immersing yourself in another reality of some kind. You know, if you read Little Dorrit or something by Dickens you're in the 19th Century, you're in the culture of debtors' prisons, the poorest people in London. And the effect of that, of course, could be dramatic on a reader. It was very dramatic on Dickens' readers. Most of whom were probably people who hadn't experience debtors' prisons and

who were shocked by what they read and who developed a kind of empathy for the people portrayed there.

25:00 So they suddenly understood that there was a class of people that they had not seen much of, tended to ignore who, to their surprise, had the same sorts of feelings that they had. And the same triumphs and the same disappointments. So, in that case, you know, the immersion into a world has a distinct social effect. It makes you understand that those other people don't live in quite the same world as you and to have some sympathy for the one that they are in. Similarly a novel by, say, Neil Stephenson or Will Self or somebody like that, builds a world that doesn't actually exist, that never existed. It's a new world, it's an imaginary world. Once again, by immersing in that, you are not only increasing your ability to imagine and flex your muscles, your mental muscles in worlds, but you're also always looking back at the world you're actually in. Making comparisons. So I think it's easy to see in those cases books, films, things that have words essentially, what the message is. That you're being invited to enter a world and enjoy it and learn something from it. It's not so obvious in, for example, hair styles. So I like hair styles as an example because we all have them – well not quite all of us. But if you think about what's going on when you choose to wear your hair one way rather than another, what you're really doing is saying I belong to this particular world where this kind of hairstyle would exist. You're broadcasting something, but you're also very alert to all the other hairstyles that you see around you. So you're in receive mode as well. And what I think you're doing then is you're positioning yourself in all the possible stylistic worlds that could exist, you're taking a certain position. And that's an identification for yourself, it's an identification for other people as well. There's an American aesthetician called Morse Peckham who I was very interested in. He wrote a book called Man's Rage For Chaos: biology, behaviour and the arts. And he says in it art is the exposure to the tensions and problems of a false world in order that man may endure the tensions and problems of the real world. So I'd actually go a bit further than Peckham – probably even as far as Bromley or Lewisham – and say it's also the exposure to the joys and freedoms of a false world in order that we might recognise those and locate them in the real world. So I like this idea of art having a serious function in our lives and I think this might be one of them. I don't think it's the only one, by the way, but I've only got 40 minutes. I was on a bus a few weeks ago and there were two ladies sitting behind me. They were talking about some TV soap that they'd been watching. And it turned out that in the last night's edition of the soap one of the characters had been revealed as a lesbian. And this was quite a big surprise, because apparently she hadn't shown those tendencies before. At least not during the broadcast hours. And I was listening to these ladies talking about this. And I realised that because it was a soap opera they were able to talk about it in a way they couldn't ever do if it was something that actually was connected to them. If it was their daughter or their auntie. Or if it was either of them. So they were able to discuss this piece of art, which may have been Coronation Street, I don't know. And to discuss the issue that it had posed on that particular occasion with a neutrality - and actually a sense of fun because they both thought it was very funny - that you probably wouldn't be able to accord to a real life event. It would be too sensitive. And I suddenly thought okay, so one of the things that art is doing for us all the time – again I'm using that very broad definition of art – it's giving us a chance to have feelings about things that are not dangerous.

30:05 - When you go into a gallery, you might see a most shocking picture. But actually you can leave the gallery. When you listen to a terrifying radio play you can switch the radio off. So one of the things about art is it offers a safe place for you to have quite extreme and rather dangerous feelings.

And the reason you can do that is because you know you can switch it off. So art has a kind of role there as a simulator. It offers you these simulated worlds – a little bit like a plane simulator. You know, the reason you have simulators for learning to fly a 747 is so that you don't crash too many 747s. You can have a crash and get out and laugh. Well it's true of art as well. There's a book by an American historian called William McNeil, it's a very, very nice book called Keeping Together in Time. And its subtitle is dance and drill in human history. And in that book he talks about the intense pleasure humans feel in muscular coordination; in dancing, in marching together, in carnivals, in all the things where a lot of people synchronise themselves. And I was thinking about that in relation to the two ladies on the bus. And I was thinking what they're really doing is synchronising. You know, we live in a culture that is changing so incredibly quickly. I was thinking about this the other day and I thought probably in a month of our lifetimes we have about the amount of change that there was in the whole of the 14th Century. So we have to somehow come to terms with all of that. None of us have the same experiences; you know you might know a lot about what's happening in cars and you might know a lot of what's happening in medicine and you might know something about mathematics and you might know something about fashion. None of us are at all expert on everything that's happening. So we need ways of keeping in synch, of remaining coherent. And I think that this is what culture is doing for us and as I said, culture is the creative arts so far as I'm concerned. So I'm starting now to propose the idea of culture as a sort of collective ritual, or a set of collective rituals that we're all engaged with. So this is a short explanation of why I think the arts are worth pursuing for other than GNP reasons. You know, I think that the problem, as I said earlier, about the GNP argument is that okay it's nice to know that we've all contributed 28 billion pounds, I think it was last year, to the Gross National Product. But it isn't the most important thing. The most important thing is that we have been altogether – that doesn't mean just the artists, so called, it means everyone, it means all the people actually in the community, everybody – has been generating this huge, fantastic conversation which we call culture. And which somehow keeps us coherent, keeps us together. If you will accept that that might be correct, then you might also think well, it sounds pretty important, that job. So how does it come about, how do ideas come about? Where does art come from? Is it just out of thin air, as libertarians and laissez fairists tend to think? Romantics as well. They imagine that people like Beethoven walk about with symphonies in their head and they all sort of just burst out into reality by some unstoppable, divine force. I don't think that's how it happens. And I went to a show about 25 years ago now, at the Barbican. Of early 20th Century Russian painting. It was an area of painting that I particularly loved – in fact it was my period, really, that I loved thinking about and looking about and I thought I knew quite a lot about it. I went to this show at the Barbican and there were probably 150 artists in there, including all the big names like Kandinsky and Tatlin and Rodchenko and so on and so on. And I would say that 70 of the artists in there I'd never heard of. And they were really good. And I thought that's so mysterious, why didn't I know about any of those people?

35:02 - And so I thought there must have been so much going on at that time and the differences between the ones who survived into history – like Kandinsky – and the ones who you've never heard of, was very small. There were a lot of people making great pictures then. So I thought how did that come about? Why was there so much going on at that time? And I started reading about that period in history in Russia. Well one of the reasons that went on was because it had a lot of help. There were a lot of collectors. They put a lot of money into the scene, but there were a lot of hangers on as well. What would normally be called hangers on. There were people who had nice apartments that

artists could meet and have parties in, or people who rented salons. There were people who had empty places where you could have a show. You know, even if you weren't very well known. There were galleries that went out in competition with one another to poach the newest, the best young artists. There was a whole thriving scene around the artists themselves. And that thriving scene was actually what produced all this work, I think. I came up with this word then. Which I still use, which is the use scenius. So genius is the talent of an individual, scenius is the talent of a whole community. And I think, you know, in history you see many examples of great sceniuses, like that point in the Renaissance when Rafael, Michaelangelo and da Vinci were all alive at the same time and in the same cities. Or British pop culture, actually. British pop culture in various times has been that kind of scenius where suddenly all sorts of talents and opportunities came together. And you get something that is actually an ecosystem. Now this thing about ecosystems is that it's impossible to tell what the important parts are. It's not a hierarchy, you know. We're used to thinking of things that are arranged in levels like that, with the important things at the top and the less important things at the bottom. Ecosystems aren't like that. They're richly interconnected and they're co-dependent in many, many ways. And if you take one thing out of the ecosystem, you can get a collapse in quite a different place. They're constantly rebalancing. And I feel that culture is like that. And I think that British musical culture in particular has been like that. So my thought the other night, when I was walking home was new ideas are articulated by individuals, but generated by communities. What we tend to do is – perhaps quite naturally – celebrate the individuals. We're very keen on the names. But what we don't do is to look at the whole community that they're drawing from. Now I'm going to give you as an example of this my own story in a very potted form. Usually when people tell their story, they make it seem like they did it all themselves. I did it my way. I'm a self-made man. It's particularly notable among high tech billionaires who tend to think that they started the world. So my story is like everybody's story and very complicated and I'm just going to look at certain particular parts of it. When I was 11, I passed the 11+ and because I was of Catholic parents I got a scholarship to a Catholic Grammar school. Like many schools, it had set aside a few places for bright, working class boys I believe was the phrase. Then I went to art school. The art school was free. We didn't pay fees then. I spent five years at art school. Absolutely invaluable time. I studied with some great teachers, some of whom, incidentally, had taught Pete Townshend who was one of the first in this series of lectures. I left art school and I went on the dole. This was a very important part of my life. And I went on the dole because I desperately didn't want to get a job. Because I was worried if I got a job, I would never get out of the job. And I want to be an artist. I was very clear about that.

40:01 - So I stayed on the dole and doing odd jobs and had the great good fortune of meeting Roxy Music. So I had luck. Joined a wonderful group of people. And then another great piece of good fortune, which I know was mentioned in the introduction here, was that John Peel came to one of our early shows. And put us on the radio. A writer called Richard Williams heard it, wrote about it. A big piece. Which was pretty unknown at the time because we didn't have management record company or even fans, actually. And then of course John Peel was one of the reasons I'm here, actually, because he was a key figure in my life. And then the other thing that I should mention that kept me going during that time was the NHS and the Library Service. So I mention all of those things. They're not the only things in this story, of course. But they're important in a way because they were all institutions that had been set in place a long time ago by people who had some sort of idealistic notion of social engineering. Lord Reith, setting up the BBC, had the idea that the whole nation would benefit from being a part of this new idea of radio, that ideas could be spread around

differently. A lot of the way people are talking about the internet now. The scholarship system was a piece of social engineering from some sort of long term generosity of mind of the people who set up that school. The dole, you know, why does the dole exist? It exists because somebody thought it was repulsive that people should be poor in a society where there was a lot of money going around, that some people should be very, very poor. It seemed objectionable. Doesn't seem objectionable to a lot of people these days, which was interesting. So these forms of social engineering appeared and, as I say, I think they represent a sort of altruism, a generosity towards the future, which I think is just starting to find its time now. We are now in a new era. We come from an era of scarcity, basically. Economic scarcity. And when all of economics is based on the idea of scarcity and the idea of competition for resources. What we're moving into, I think – this is explored in Paul Mason's book Post Capitalism and in David Graber's books and various other people are writing about it. What we're moving into is an era of abundance. And co-operation. We're super productive, we're going to become even more productive as we automate, and we're going to become even less connected to the production. Because automation means robotisation and it means that humans are less necessary to that process. So what are we all going to be doing? We're going to be in a world of ultrafast change. It's really accelerating at the moment and will continue to. And we're going to have to somehow stay coherent. What are we going to be doing? I think we're going to be even more full time artists than we are now. And I don't just mean the professionals like me, I mean everybody, is going to have to be constantly involved in this activity that I was describing earlier of being able to resynchronise with each other, to connect things together, to be able to make adventurous mind games about different futures, to be able to understand things. There are some interesting social initiatives now. There's one called Basic Income. I don't know if you have heard of that. This is the idea that everybody should get a wage. Everybody. Whether they work or not. So that we simply eliminate poverty in one step like that. There would be no more poor people. You think Jesus, that sounds ridiculous. It isn't ridiculous, actually, you might want to read about it. Another thing that tells you about the future we're moving into is the open source movement. Where people, instead of producing ideas carefully defending them and keeping all the rewards from them are starting to share ideas.

45:00 - You know, Linux which is the operating system that most of the very big computers run on, is an open source system. If you wanted to, you could go and change it. Wikipedia is the same kind of thing. These are both sharing resources that would have seemed unthinkable to share twenty years ago. In fact I'm sure if you'd mentioned these ideas twenty years ago people would have said that will never happen. And it would never have happened in the economics of the past two hundred years. Altruism. Altruism has a kind of a new face. Writers like William McCaskill are starting to think let's get rational about altruism. We have to be more altruistic. You know, it's unsustainable that this tiny sliver of the world that we live in is so rich compared to the rest of the world. You know, if you think the refugee crisis is bad now, you wait. It can't work that we are so much richer than the rest of the world and not expect them to come and want to take some of it. So all of these challenges require us to constantly be remoulding ourselves and when we do remoulding we don't really do it by sitting down with books of philosophy and rethinking our attitudes from the ground up. Very few of us do that. I'm not one of them either. What we tend to do is we get a sense of what everybody else is thinking about things and we sort of work out our attitudes in relation to everybody else as we generally think, quite collectively. I think it's good that we do. I think it's very important that we have more and more of the mechanisms for doing that. This is why I think we need to be thinking

about art and culture not as a little add on, a bit of luxury, but as the central thing that we do. I want to finish by reading a passage from Barbara Ehrenreich's beautiful book which is called Dancing in the Street. The subtitle is a history of collective joy. She says she was in Brazil. She says the samba school danced down to the sand in perfect dignity, wrapped in their own rhythm, their faces both exhausted and shining with an almost religious kind of exultation. One thin, latte coloured young man dancing just behind the musicians set the pace. What was he in real life? A bank clerk? A bus boy? But here in his brilliant feathered costume he was a prince, a mythological figure. Maybe even a god. Here, for a moment, there were no divisions among people except for the playful ones created by Carnival itself. As they reached the boardwalk, bystanders started falling into the rhythm too and without any invitation or announcements, without embarrassment or even alcohol to dissolve the normal constraints of urban life, the samba school turned into a crowd and the crowd into a momentary festival. There was no point to it. No religious overtones, ideological message or money to be made. Just the chance, which we need much more of in this crowded planet, to acknowledge the miracle of our simultaneous existence with some sort of celebration. Thank you very much.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

MR: Take a seat and we'll take some questions. That was amazing. I've never heard, actually, the concept of art put quite as succinctly as that.

BE: Oh, thank you very much.

MR: It is the stuff that we don't need to do.

BE: Four word definition.

MR: I should take that away. I was also intrigued that therefore a boob job became art.

BE: Well it's stylisation isn't it?

MR: It's stylisation, yeah, yeah. So we have some questions. We have some time for some questions from the audience and questions that have come in as well. So maybe we'll take some that have come in on Twitter first and I don't know who this is from, perhaps they will tell us at the end. The question, Brian, is this: has the proportion of people creating art changed over history? Is technology relevant? Alex Gollner. Now I suppose that feeds into what actually is a sort of anti-dystopian view that you're espousing, really. Not a kind of bleak view of the future, but a wonderful view of this global, collaborative, artistic community.

50:00 - BE: Yeah so I think with surplus income, you know, with increasing wealth, art activity definitely increases. It is difficult to do anything stylistic when you're absolutely starving. But as soon as cultures move just above the starving level, they're doing it. So technology, well there's always been technology. You know, if you want really a complicated piece of technology, have a look inside a grand piano. We tend to think of technologies as the things we're dealing with now. Danny Hillis, the same scientist I mentioned earlier, said to me once, technology is the name we give when it doesn't work properly yet. So the things that work we don't tend to think of them as technology like bicycles and grand pianos. But yeah, technology of course is moving so quickly, it's a little bit like that other analogy I gave within a week there's more software, that is to say more new instruments

available to a composer now, than there were within four or five years in the sixties, you know? I remember that one thing in the Sixties, one of the big moments was the wah wah pedal.

MR: Right yeah, it was a good moment.

BE: It was a good moment. In fact lots of people made a whole life out of it, basically. You know, Jimi Hendrix without the wah wah pedal is as unimaginable was Bryan Ferry without vibrato, you know? So that came out and many records came out with it. Now every couple of days you get something as interesting as the wah wah pedal coming out. So the problem is keeping up.

MR: Indeed, yeah. And that was another fascinating thing, you said that the speed of change, a month now is like the whole of the 14th Century. I mean that's a fascinating kind of time comparison.

BE: Actually, when I was thinking about that I was going to say a week, but I thought I'd better say a month just in case there's something I've forgotten about the 14th Century. But I actually had a list. I knew I wouldn't have time to read it, but I took last week's New Scientist, and I just went through all the headlines and there were I would say 15 or 20 things that I, as a consistent reader of New Scientist, had never heard of. They were new technologies or that they were the first photos from Pluto, for instance, showing the relief of the landscape. And I thought this is absolutely amazing. You simply can't absorb this. You just have to do it collectively. Nobody's going to be able to do it individually.

You know, they used to say that the last man who understood everything was Leibnitz. I remember when I lived in America, actually, a man died and it was noted on the news because he was the last man who understood the whole of the American tax system. And he'd been there from the beginning. You know, the whole tax system in America started round about the '20s, I think, and he'd been there right until 1978 I think he died. And he actually was the only person who still had a picture of the whole thing. After he died it was down to specialists.

MR: Right, right, we're all specialists now. Here's another question that's come in: although, as an artist you abandon you work to the appraisers, do you value what is said by those who are not artists? And that's from Veganzalal on Twitter. Sounds like some god from a distant planet. So in this interest of the global collaborative community, is the opinion of non-artists as valid as artists? I suspect you think perhaps more so.

BE: Yes. In some ways I do. There are few things that go wrong with people when they become professional critics. One of them is that they always think the words are what the important part of a song is. You know? And I sort of understand why that is because words is the medium that they work in. But I think it's peculiar to critics to take that attitude about analysing a piece of music in terms of its words. Of course what I'm talking about, the stylisation thing, is that everything is important.

55:01 - Style is content, basically. So the fact that something is dub reggae versus doo-wop, even if they have exactly the same words, to me that's a completely different song. The meaning isn't in the words, actually, for me. It's not entirely true. There are some songs where the words happen to mean a lot.

MR: And some of my favourite records of yours have got words which are used as sound. You know, something like Backwater on Before and After Science, and the rhymes in there. I can't hog you for myself and talk about my favourite records, let's have some questions from the room.

BE: I just want to see that there's a question from Adam Buxton!

MR: Oh a question from Adam Buxton that has come in, and it says do you worry the freshness in approach that comes with being a non-musician is in danger of being replaced by skill?

BE: Well it hasn't happened to me yet.

MR: No. Okay, so let's have some questions.

Audience member: Thanks for the talk it was extremely interesting. I'm sorry if I've got the wrong end of the stick with this question, but some of the things you were talking about was making me think or just wondering how important you feel drugs are for people to imagine things, especially when people become adults and perhaps they can't imagine things as much as kids. And also that lovely last quote about people coming together and losing their inhibitions and how important drugs can play in that kind of feeling. Whether it's acid house or the Sixties and hippies or whatever.

BE: I think drugs can be very important, but I think if you take drugs you have to take them very seriously. They're not play things as far as I'm concerned. I don't take drugs. I haven't for quite a long time and it's because they don't have this quality that I mentioned about art. You can't switch them off. You can't leave the room. You're stuck with them and that's really a problem, I think. And they last much longer than they should. You know, if someone came out with a really good hallucinogen that lasted about twenty minutes I'd probably be hooked on it. But essentially I think the problem with drugs is that everything feels so much better when you're on them, and then it looks rather disappointing when you're off them, you know? In Roxy Music we had a very strict non-drug policy. Which we maintained until one show where a guy walked in, a friend of ours, and he passed round a joint. We never, ever did this before we went on stage. And we made the fatal error of doing it and the gig was so hilariously chaotic. In retrospect it was hilarious, it was an absolute nightmare at the time. You know, you are out of control. Now being out of control is wonderful, that's why we do lots of things. Because we want to be out of control. But you don't really want to be out of control when you're on a stage in front of 3,000 people.

MR: Some people do, don't they?

BE: Some people do. Yeah.

MR: Whether it's a good idea or not.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In Roxy, what you were saying, they would maybe like getting messy on stage.

BE: Who was that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Drugs enhanced the performance. Well as far as I'm concerned.

MR: All right, let's have some more questions. Let's go right at the back there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi Brian, thanks a lot. How good are you at listening to music you hate? When you listened to John Peel, there was music you didn't like, but you trusted him and now we curate ourselves, we have hit lists, we follow people on Twitter, we slag people off we don't like. We tune out the things we don't like. So artists may be great, but how are we, as fans now? Have we become just a bit more selfish?

BE: I think we've become more niche-y. Because it's easy to be more niche-y. You know, I had this idea that I told Jeff Bezos once, the guy who runs Amazon, that you know they have the thing in Amazon where you order a few books and then they keep showing you more of the same kind of books and you think for Christ's sake I know enough about medieval chivalry now, please. So I suggested to him that they have a thing that comes up saying people who've ordered this book have never ordered any of these. Still not implemented, I might say.

1:00:00 - Well two things have happened. First is that in the Sixties which, of course, is when people of my generation were first really listening passionately to music, there wasn't that much music to listen to. You know, there was a real bottleneck which was the record companies could only release so many a year. The radio could only play so many. So there weren't that many things to listen to. So pretty much everybody knew everything that was going on. Everybody knew who Jimi Hendrix, Cream, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Grateful Dead, whatever else, who they were and had a feeling about them. But now there are whole areas of music that have big sections in record racks and whole websites, whole cultures around them that I have no idea what's going on in them at all. So I think music has expanded and branched out, just like a sort of evolutionary tree. So it's impossible to keep up with everything that's going on. I mean Peel was absolutely the best curator, really. He was a wonderful curator because he was adventurous and he was kind of unembarrassed, too, about his tastes. He was also unembarrassed about his mistakes. As when he played the first album I made with Fripp backwards.

MR: Because you'd taken it on tape, hadn't you?

BE: You'd gone in on tape. And we used to store tapes tails out, it was called. But the BBC didn't. They stored them heads out. So they put the tape on and it played the whole of a twenty minute side backwards. And I tried to ring the BBC and say you're playing it backwards. The receptionist wouldn't put the call through. So he played the whole thing backwards and then later on in the show he flipped to the other side and played that backwards as well.

MR: Did you like it backwards?

BE: I didn't really, I have to say. I'd like to say it was absolutely wonderful and we decided to release it that way. I mean we still do have that option, the John Peel remix.

MR: Let's have some more questions, Shaun in the front row, Shaun Keaveny.

BE: Oh that's Shaun Keaveny! I've always wondered what he looked like (audience laughter)

MR: He looks like that.

SK: The guy off the shipping forecast. Thanks, it was a wonderful thing to hear you talk like that. Is it naïve, then, or is it kind of what you were saying that as work becomes more automated, as the

world becomes more automated and just last week there was a lot of discussion about when machines are going to become sentient and we're all going to be out of jobs and things, is one of the things that you're postulating that actually that, in the distant future, could be a positive thing? Like the other thing that you said about everybody getting a living wage. And there was an experiment in Germany a few years ago, I believe, about that. They found that the cultural significance of it was fantastic and then you can read the books you've always wanted to read and listen to what you wanted to listen to, that could, in the distant future, kick us onto a different evolutionary level altogether. Is that one of the things you have been hopeful about technology that that could one day provide us?

BE: Yeah. Well I don't know if you've read this great book by Yuval Noah Harari, it's called Sapiens. And it's sort of a history of humanity. It's a fantastic book. And he says that there are, so far, three great human revolutions. The first one is the cognitive revolution where we suddenly started forming communities and talking to each other. So it's sort of the birth of language 70,000 years ago. Second one is the agricultural revolution which is also the birth of communities. The move away from nomadism. So civilisation, which comes from the word 'city' starts then. The next one, 500 years ago or so, 300, was the scientific revolution. Where we start to treat the world as something we can manipulate. We learn to control the world. And he says the current one that's just starting is sort of the post-human revolution. It's where we start to build a future where we're not the most important part, necessarily. We start to build a future with beings more intelligent than us, possibly. It presents a lot of challenges, but it presents a fantastic prospect as well. I think people are just starting to take it on board.

1:04:58 - David Graeber, for example, the guy who wrote that book Debt, The First 5,000 Years, he talks about this condition of abundance and cooperation as sort of utopian. The problem is that it means that some people have got to let go of the profits. Because at the moment what's happening of this all of this increase of productivity is – or nearly all of it – is going right to the top end of the scale, the people who are already very rich. I saw an absolutely incredible, shocking graph the other day. It was a little graph in a book. It was about three inches by two. And it was a graph of the distribution of wealth on the planet. So the first 80% of the people, they're right down at the bottom of the graph. They're living on two or four dollars a day. And then there's sort of right at the end of the graph there's quite a sharp exponential as we come to the ten or twenty percent of us who live in the rich west. As I said, the graph was about two inches high. The end of the graph is about forty or fifty times as high as a 23 storey building but the guy says then in the book, actually if I had done this graph to scale, the end of the graph would have been twenty three storeys high. It's so ridiculously out of proportion. And I just think it is not tenable that we sustain those kinds of differences. We can't do it. We have to be altruistic just for the sake of not being flooded by people who want to share it. You know?

MR: Well that's all the time we have, I'm afraid and I think that certainly one of the things I've taken away from this, actually, is a real joy. Because we sort of seem to live in a world where we're completely bombarded with things that are supposed to frighten us. Whether it's change of leadership in a political party or the movement of people and the diaspora or the emissions from diesel cars. And so I think that we can walk out of this room with some perhaps joy as we sort of move hand in hand with Brian Eno towards the great collaborative artistic utopia. And let's hope

that in many ways he's right. So we thank Brian Eno very much and from the British Library we bid you good night.

(applause)

END