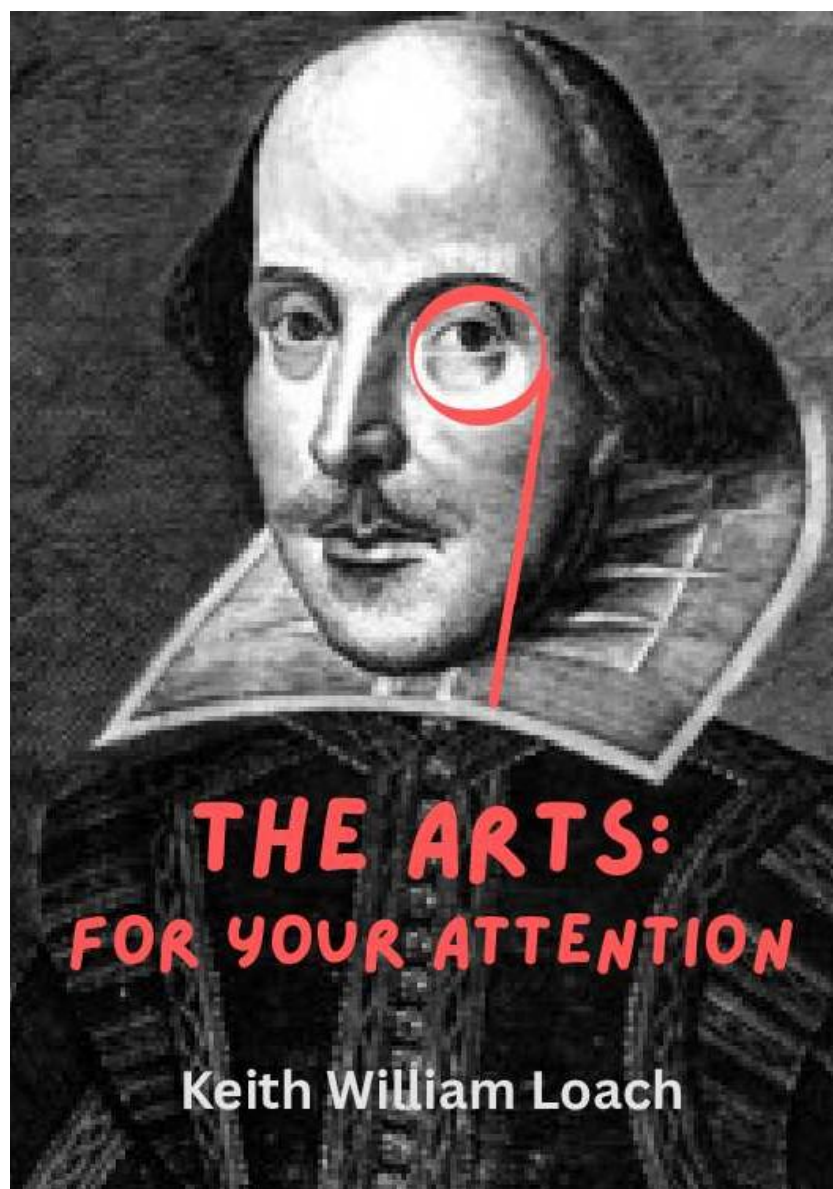




The Arts: For Your Attention

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About the Author

Keith William Loach holds a **MusBac** (University of Toronto), an **MA Music** (York University) and an **MBA** (University of Toronto). His graduate work in music examined the effect of music on the brain, with a broader focus on how music and meditation can be supported in healthcare policy.

Keith has delivered papers at the *International Conference of Dalcroze Studies* at Laval University in Quebec City and at the *International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation Colloquium* at Guelph University in Guelph, Ontario. Keith supports community music.



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Keith is a proud member of the **Kingston Road United Church Senior Choir**. Music is a big part of who we are at **KRU**. We recently underwent a \$1,000,000 roof replacement that has left little room for operations. Please



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The Arts: For Your Attention

Prelude

The Arts: For Your Attention is an essay about creativity, education, critical thinking, fake news, financial-industry MacGuffins and how **The Arts** can help. Paying attention to detail and developing concentration through artistic study builds a mindset and framework that overflows into all aspects of our lives.

The Arts: For Your Attention examines the dark side of media control and how it is responsible for much of the upheaval in our world today. In addition, it looks at established societal beliefs that have imposed massive and disruptive distraction in our lives. We have lost our attention spans, our ability to focus, our moral compass, and worst of all, we have lost our understanding of *critical thinking*.

The digital onslaught of information can be overwhelming. Many techniques are available for spreading misinformation - red herrings, bluffs, false flags, misdirection, lies of omission, etc. - and today's fake news organizations use these in not-so-subtle ways to push forward their agendas. Much of it is obviously bogus and identifiable with minimum effort.

But it is the not-so-obvious misdirections lying well below the surface that could be the most devious and most disruptive. Many of these are typically not on the critical-thinking radar. They exist as established societal norms that are rarely questioned yet justify unfair and biased behaviour in everything.

This story is not a whodunit; it is a whatdunit.

The MacGuffin

A MacGuffin is a literary plot device, such as a person, a goal or an object, that is introduced to drive a narrative forward. It typically motivates the characters in the story but is ultimately insignificant to the reader or audience. It is the application of an "often-replacable catalyst", a technique popularized by Alfred Hitchcock.

Hitchcock once described the MacGuffin as: "The device, the gimmick, if you will, or the papers the spies are after... The only thing that really matters is that in the picture, the plans, documents or secrets must seem to be of vital importance to the characters. To me, the narrator, they're of no importance whatsoever." He also suggested that, "The MacGuffin is the thing that the spies are after, but the audience doesn't care." A MacGuffin does not have to be a physical item; it can be a secret, a piece of information, or an idea. This type of distraction is referred to as an "intangible MacGuffin".

The MacGuffin is a well-used literary device included in works by Alfred Hitchcock, Agatha Christie and possibly every TV police procedural drama ever produced. Examples of MacGuffins in Hitchcock's work include the microfilm in *North by Northwest* and, in John Huston's work, the statuette in *The Maltese Falcon*.

Sometimes, the story tricks the audience into thinking that the subject or item matters when it does not, or the item turns out to be a fake, serving as a plot twist. The briefcase in *Pulp Fiction*, the Ring in *Lord of the Rings*, or "Rosebud" in *Citizen Kane*, the MacGuffin is everywhere. And the MacGuffin's roots are far deeper than pop culture.

The MacGuffin in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the tale told by the ghost of Hamlet's father. Claudius, the uncle, killed Hamlet's father in order to marry his mother and become King, or so says the ghost on a dark evening on the battlements of Castle Elsinore. While this may be an interesting view of events, the MacGuffin's purpose is to explain and support the reason for Hamlet's vengeful behaviour throughout the play. Shakespeare's *Henry V* uses the desire the King has to own France as the MacGuffin that drives him to apply his moral ambiguity and harsh tactics to achieve his goal. It is fascinating that Shakespeare's works were produced over four hundred years ago and written with an insight that defies time, creating situations and moral dilemmas that are real and pertinent in today's world.

Fake News

A MacGuffin is technically a plot device used in fiction, be it an object, secret, or goal, that drives the characters' actions but, in itself, is ultimately insignificant. Fake news, on the other hand, refers to fabricated information, misinformation or disinformation presented as legitimate and it can be devastating. This news is typically motivated by a deliberate intention to either mislead or generate revenue.

It is not difficult to make a connection between the MacGuffin and fake news. They share thematic similarities in how they function:

both serve as distractions or catalysts that can either 1) shift focus away from reality or 2) provide underlying support for a cause or behaviour. Fake news in today's world has become the perfect tool for audience distraction. In Johann Hari's book, ***Stolen Focus***, he discusses the internet as a marketing machine designed to control and direct every moment of our screen time for someone else's benefit, mostly for monetary gain but more insidiously for influencing outcomes.

As Hari suggests, resistance is futile. The internet is driven by thousands and thousands of the world's best programmers whose sole mission is to deprive you of choice. Every click-bait is designed to pull you into the next click-bait giving the illusion that you are making your own decision for the next pageview. You are not. You are being led to where the programmers want you to be. Online manipulation is a proven science and we are at their mercy. In hunting for a good will moment, we must realize that our inability to focus is *not our fault*. We are but pawns.

The Arts are discussed here as a moving-forward solution to our societal MacGuffin-blindness. Through artistic study, we develop, in simple terms, a "big picture" approach to analysis and problem solving.

The Arts: For Your Attention

The Arts

The education system today promotes the development of critical thinking. This includes not only self-examination but also the ability to question the sources, timelines, perspectives and motives of everything encountered. Skepticism is healthy in the pursuit of truth. As well, an awareness of conditions such as *confirmation bias* and *cognitive dissonance* helps guard against misinformation.

Confirmation bias is the natural tendency to see more often things you agree with versus things you do not. *Cognitive dissonance* is the natural tendency to disregard and avoid processing things that do not fit within your worldview or opinion.

STEM is an acronym (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) discussed in education policy and curricula to address and stimulate a sector of education that, in 2001, was perceived to have been in decline for decades. Its importance has dwindled over the years as institutions that followed the President Bush-driven agenda have failed on all counts to improve education in any way. The tragedy, of course, was the decimation of study in the humanities; the arts became a casualty in the rush to technology.

Creativity

Studying the arts – literature, music, visual arts, pottery, etc. – introduces *subjectivity* (not just objectivity), *abductive reasoning* (not just deductive reasoning), and *integrative thinking* (not just linear thinking), and it is these qualities that provide the needed creative foundation for everyone, including engineers, to succeed.

Subjectivity is rooted in individual perspectives, emotions, feelings, and opinions, which can vary from person to person. *Objectivity*, on the other hand, is based on verifiable facts, research, and data, independent of personal biases, making it essential for scientific, technical and neutral reporting. Objectivity discourages out-of-the-box thinking thereby restricting creative potential.

Abductive reasoning is often referred to as our gut-feeling and is typically based on general information acquired over time through life experience. Although the potential is huge for abductive reasoning to be clouded with emotion and misinformation, it is still effective as a starting point to form creative hypotheses for further examination. Many ideas derived through *abductive* reasoning that may begin as whimsical or tangential become practical over time. *Deductive reasoning* begins with a hypothesis and through analysis and exploration, attempts to arrive at a logical conclusion justifying the hypothesis. Scientific method is based on it. But conclusions arrived at through deductive reasoning can only be as valid as the premises upon which they are built.

The *integrative thinking* methodology, inherent in artistic study, provides an infrastructure that fosters the creative and analytical thought processes required in all aspects of life. It scaffolds a framework that rises above the limitations of an “A or B” (either/or)

solution to seek new and creative solutions that accommodate both A and B. It promotes a broader awareness of possibilities. *Linear thinking*, on the other hand, is based on a logical sequence of thought processes, which tends to discourage the freedom to explore tangential options.

Integrative Thinking

Integrative Thinking theory was developed by Graham Douglas in 1986. Douglas describes it as “the process of integrating intuition, reason and imagination in a human mind with a view to developing a holistic continuum of strategy, tactics, action, review and evaluation for addressing a problem in any field.”

Roger L. Martin is a prominent writer, strategy advisor, and Professor Emeritus at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto. Martin's 2007 book ***The Opposable Mind*** builds on Douglas's theory to define and build a practical creative process that relies on *salience*, which is the ability to identify and prioritize the most vital variables in a problem while ignoring extraneous noise.

As an analogy to the salience component of the integrative process, imagine flying from Calgary, Alberta, to Vancouver, British Columbia. On a rainy day, it might be possible to see only a few of the Rocky Mountain peaks throughout the entire flight. And on a clear day, the entire range may become visible right down to the valleys and rivers of the rugged landscape. But on a cloudy day, the primary mountain tops are still visible but many mini-peaks appear as well. It is this filtered information, these new and smaller mountain tops, that Martin would refer to as "salient points".

Mountain Tops

The secondary peaks might display characteristics that make them unique amongst their peers, such as being snow-covered, having trees or grass, or being pointed, rolling, wide or narrow, etc. Combinations of these salient points could then make a correlative connection with one or more of the primary-peaks. Applying minor and seemingly-insignificant associations to obvious and seemingly-unrelated characteristics opens a broader world of options and possibilities for big-picture solutions.

Linking several mini-peaks together can create arguments that could support one or more of the primary peaks. Possible solutions are presented that include not just A or B, but options that could include A, B, C, D and E that become viable through a variety of mini-peak connections.

Martin also makes an excellent case for the use of abductive reasoning ("gut feeling") as opposed to relying solely on inductive and deductive reasoning to arrive at decisions. Because of its flexibility and untethered freedom from limitation, abductive reasoning can be used as a starting and finishing point in the creative process.

Habit Of Thought

Martin distinguishes between *integrative* thinkers versus *conventional* thinkers and suggests that we can train ourselves to dig deeply and creatively for more comprehensive solutions. With increased exposure to the discovery process, he believes we develop a “habit of

thought” that becomes our natural method for decision-making in all aspects of our lives. Integrative thinking is a skill that develops over time with repeated practice.

The Arts encourage the repeated application of *subjective*, *abductive* and *integrative* thinking. Stimulating these attributes repetitively on a regular basis engrains the process as standard. It is in this way that study in the arts improves the potential success of study not only in the sciences, but in all aspects of life. Put another way, how do you get to where you want to be? Practice, practice, practice.

Studying *literature* and *music* are areas that can help build a solid foundation for developing critical thinking, creativity and good mental health. They help support a multi-tiered framework upon which we can hang little bits of baggage-free reality to attain calmness and grounded thought. Thinking bigger than ourselves is a process that The Arts nourishes.

The following section illustrates an example of art-in-action using a Shakespearean Sonnet (literature) and a four-part vocal arrangement (music), hopefully demonstrating and building critical thinking skills through *subjective*, *abductive* and *integrative* out-of-the-box thinking.

The Arts: For Your Attention

All You Need Is Love

Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets, all of which were written in iambic pentameter and contain *fourteen lines* of text comprised of *three quatrains* (verses/descriptives) and *one couplet* (conclusion/resolution). They were composed between 1592 and 1598, with 126 sonnets written for a young man, 26 sonnets written for a woman, and 2 of a general nature. It was Shakespeare's publisher in 1609 who contextually ordered, and then numbered, the sonnet series to be printed as a collection titled **SHAKE-SPEARES SONNETS. Neuer before Imprinted.**

None of Shakespeare's sonnets were titled and it was standard practice in the day to refer to sonnets through their first line of text. For example, Sonnet 18 would have been called *Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?* and Sonnet 29 would have been called *When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes.*

The word iambic refers to two syllables – *da-DUM*. The word pentameter refers to a group of five.

da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM
Shall I comPARE thee TO a SUM mer's DAY
When IN disGRACE with FOR tune AND men's EYES

Iambic pentameter is a common poetic meter consisting of lines with ten syllables. It is popular because it mimics a natural rhythm found in speech and, at a basic level, the iambic pulse connects with the sound of a heartbeat.

Renaissance

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the peak of the *renaissance* era. Music at that time (one hundred years pre-Bach) used modes and one of the most popular was the *dorian mode* (used here) based on the second degree of the major scale. Renaissance music also featured a compositional technique called *fauxbourdon*, which uses a parallel harmony that follows the melody one sixth below.

This *a cappella* arrangement of Shakespeare's Sonnet 25 attempts to stay true to the style of music in use and popular at the time. The quatrains here play on the iambic pentameter rhythm in a 3-beat pattern over a 4/4 time signature. The da-DUM rhythm could represent, in 4/4 time, an eighth note followed by a quarter note. A three beat sequence would therefore include two da-DUMS. When all five da-DUMS are played consecutively in 4/4 time, they tend to feel unnatural and even awkward due to the 3-beat against 4-beat overlap. Its performance requires concentration and focus.

Lyrics

Sonnet 25 is about the elusiveness of happiness in the pursuit of fame and fortune. The three quatrains establish Shakespeare's quandary. The first quatrain refers to the envy associated with the world of

public recognition. The second shines light on the fickle and fleeting world of pride and glory. The third speaks to the famed warrior, honoured for battles won but nothing else. And then in the couplet, where Shakespeare always summarizes his sonnets with a conclusion or revelation, he states that in the end, love is all you need.

The chorus of this arrangement uses the phrase *Live, Laugh, Love*. These words have often been attributed to a 1904 poem by Bessie Anderson Stanley called *Success*, which reads: "*He achieved success who has lived well, laughed often, and loved much*".

Success

Shakespeare suggests that fame and fortune may not be the path to happiness or success. Perhaps in life, living-well, laughing-often and loving-much may reap better rewards.

Another “success story” is an expression credited to Zig Ziglar (1926-2012) with a deeper reference to the philosopher Seneca: "*Success is when preparation meets opportunity*." It suggests that achieving goals requires being ready to act when favorable chances arise. Proactive skill development and hard work allow individuals to capitalize on moments that others might miss, effectively turning potential into success. We owe it to ourselves to be prepared for life in the best possible way, not necessarily financially, but cognitively and mentally. Developing critical thinking skills requires preparation; enter The Arts.

So, what is success? If we believe the currently accepted financial-industry mantra, the important things in a *power-takes-all* world include leverage, lies, deception, greed and selfish motivation.

These attributes are part of the currency that defines success driven by today's accepted societal norms.

But what if success was defined by a different currency, one based on humanitarian values? Perhaps the *power-of-good-will* could and should be most important. Attributes that include integrity, knowledge, compassion, fairness, honesty, community and accountability would be a welcome relief.

As *fake news* explodes and *fact checking* implodes, today's *currency* of control, based on *money*, *status* and *power*, is in desperate need of a paradigm shift to include *respect*, *integrity* and *compassion*. Perhaps the pendulum has bridged its extreme arc and is ready to return to a more moderate and kinder world.

Sonnet 25 by William Shakespeare

Let those who are in favour with their stars
Of public honour and proud titles boast,
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,
Unlook'd for joy in that I honour most.

Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
And in themselves their pride lies buried,
For at a frown they in their glory die.

The painful warrior famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories once foil'd,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd:

Then happy I, that love and am beloved
Where I may not remove nor be removed.

William Shakespeare
(1564-1616)

All You Need Is Love

Sonnet 25

Keith William Loach

$\text{♩} = 92$ Quatrain (verse)

Voices 123 Shhhh... *p* (Let) those who are in fa - vour with their stars Of pub - lic ho - nour and
4x's prin - ces' fa - vour - ites their fair leaves spread But as the ma - ri - gold
pain - ful war - rior fa - mou - sed for fight, Af - ter a thou - sand vic -

Voices 123 One two three *pp* (Whisper) (Optional harmonies. Gradually build through quatrains to couplet.)

Voice 4 One two three four One two three four One two three four One two three four (Whisper)

Clap/Stomp *pp*

5

V123 proud ti - tles boast, Whilst I, whom for - tune of such tri - umph bars, Un - look'd for joy in that
at the sun's eye, And in them - selves their pride lies bu - ri - ed, For at a frown they in
to - ries once foil'd, Is from the book of ho - nour ra - zed quite, And all the rest for - got

V123

V4 One two three four One two three four One two three four One two three four

Clap/Stomp

9

V123 1. I ho - nour most. Great 2. their glo - ry die. The 3. for which he toil'd;

V123

V4 One two One two three One two One two three One two three

Clap/Stomp

2

14 Couplet (conclusion)

V123 *mp* Then happy I, that love and am be-loved Where I may not re - move nor be re-moved.

V123 Ah Where I may not re - move nor be re-moved.

V4 *p* Bah Bah

Clap/Stomp

19 *mf* Mu - sic - med - i - ta - tion Live, laugh, love Mu - sic - med - i - ta - tion Live, laugh, love

V4

Clap/Stomp

23 Mu - sic med - i - ta - tion Mu - sic - med - i - ta - tion Live, laugh, love

V4

Clap/Stomp

25 Mu - sic med - i - ta - tion Ah Mu - sic - med - i - ta - tion Live, laugh, love Ah

V4

Clap/Stomp

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Sonnet 25 - All You Need Is Love

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The Arts: For Your Attention

MacGuffins

A foundation of critical thinking is the application of the 5Ws, positioning Who and Why most prominently in the analysis. MacGuffins are everywhere and the following is an example of just one area of society that needs our attention. The MacGuffin-focus here is on the “great experiment” of democracy.

A brilliant British documentary about capitalism is *The Century of the Self* by filmmaker Adam Curtis. It is about the twentieth century conflation of three concepts: the positive attributes of *democracy*; the less positive attributes of *capitalism*; and the zero positive attributes of *consumerism*.

Curtis suggests that *democracy* has become synonymous with *consumerism*, and it has become our constitutional right to get more stuff - whatever, whenever and however we want. Throughout the four-part miniseries, which covers 100 years of psychologically deceptive marketing, it is difficult to avoid feeling used, abused and manipulated as the work of Edward Bernays (nephew of Sigmund Freud and self-proclaimed originator of “public relations”) is reviewed and analyzed.

Using psychotherapy techniques beginning in the early 20th century, Bernays' marketing campaigns (passionately embraced by governments and industry) conflated democracy with the *desire to acquire*. Purposefully stroking egos and playing upon feelings of entitlement, he positioned *wanting* as more important than *needing*. Over the past century, democracy has been transformed from a concept promoting freedom of choice and self-determination into a self-centered competition for winning approval, a narcissist-driven reward through the accumulation of assets.

This decades-long misdirection was, and continues to be, a truly brilliant and almost-indisputable MacGuffin.

Democracy

Democracy was conflated with *consumerism* through the aggressive promotion of *capitalism*, specifically neoliberal capitalism, now a well-established principle found at all levels of society and government.

Neoliberal capitalism is based on financial accountability. Governments and businesses attempt to follow a strict code of austerity, restraint, privatization, cutbacks and balanced budgets. This would be fine except that the cuts typically affect lower/middle class jobs and happen on the front line where service provider support is most valued and most needed (i.e. teachers, administrators, laborers, etc.). Budget frugality is focused on returning tax-payer (i.e. shareholder) value but rarely addresses excessive management salaries or bloated infrastructures.

Neoliberal capitalist governments tend to support concepts such as trickle-down economics, providing tax breaks for corporations and the wealthy. The expectation is that tax savings will flow through to new investment and the creation of more and better middle-class jobs.

"Capitalism is the astounding belief that the most wickedest of men will do the most wickedest of things for the greatest good of everyone."

John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946)

Horse And Sparrow

Trickle-down economics is based on the *horse and sparrow theory*, which suggests that if the horse is fed enough oats, some of it will pass through the horse's digestive tract and be excreted on the road, where the sparrows will find enough food to satisfy their own modest needs. Although a somewhat graphic analogy, it sums up the root problem of wealth inequity in today's society. That is, the rich do not feel that the non-rich deserve anything.

The application of this policy has been a proven failure countless times, from the 1890s *horse-and-sparrow theory* through to the 1980s *Reagonomics*, and yet, almost comically, the same programs are reintroduced time and time again.

The latest installment of trickle-down economics, *Trumponomics*, resulted in record government deficits and a dispersal of quantitative-easing funds to corporations (tax credits totaling over one trillion dollars) that did nothing to stimulate the economy. Unfortunately, corporate windfall tax savings tend to be used for corporate profit, such as *share-buybacks* (benefitting only the

shareholders) and *employee reduction buyouts* (again, benefitting only the shareholders).

As an example, the GM *staff reductions* of 2018 (over 25,000 jobs lost) and *plant closures* (five facilities shut down: Oshawa, ON; Detroit, MI; Warren, OH; White Marsh, MD; Warren, MI) were a direct result of the cash flow made available through the government's trickle-down tax-savings policy. The taxpayer-funded program provided GM a tax break of over \$500 million. Ironically, the gift was intended to stimulate growth and employment in local manufacturing, but it did exactly the opposite; management bonuses increased and shareholders were happy.

Neoliberal capitalism is a MacGuffin that sets a false premise for fund distribution to corporations and the wealthy, but it is not on our fake-news-check-list as being untrue or questionable.

Wealth Inequality

As the wealth-inequity ratio of rich-to-poor declines (i.e. what used to be the top 10% moved quickly through the top 1% and is now closing in on the top 0.1%), it is becoming obvious that the extra cash flow held by corporations and wealthy individuals is not invested in new business opportunities. It serves only to line the pockets of the already rich.

And perhaps a sign of our generally weakened social conscience, the rise in extreme poverty rates is a key indicator of the lack of empathy and philanthropy found in today's nouveau riche. Government hand-outs to the rich end up in the stock market where the shareholder

is king and an increasingly small number of exceedingly wealthy individuals benefit from the closed system of self-serving intent amongst their peers.

With an abundance of financial-industry MacGuffins, it is easy to understand why the concept of *Universal Basic Income* is dismissed. The reality is that the funds put into the hands of needy individuals (to purchase goods and services necessary for survival) would be recirculated quickly and locally, thus stimulating the economy effectively and efficiently.

Wasting-money-on-poor-people is yet another MacGuffin working on behalf of neoliberal capitalism.

The Stock Market

Parking cash in the stock market has no societal benefit. The financial services industry does not create value in the traditional sense nor does it contribute to a goods and services economy other than money management. Likewise, growth in the stock market has little value in the health of the economy; the benefit to operational activity is negligible.

We should not be excited about a soaring stock market. A rising stock market is of value only to the segment of the population that is invested in it – wealthy individuals and cash-rich corporations. As far as participation goes, the middle class is typically not well-invested in the stock market as many have their cash tied up in home ownership (especially the boomer generation) and other assets. The poor typically have no discretionary income available to devote to this type

of investment activity. Extra funds directed toward the top 1% typically end up in the stock market providing no shared advantage.

This is the mother-of-all MacGuffins perpetrated by governments today. Associating a rising stock market with a thriving economy is false, and governments use it to justify horrible and inhumane behaviour under the auspice of success.

Market As God

Society has come to worship financial success as our reason for being, our *raison d'être*. Some authors suggest that capitalism has become the new religion. That is, God did not die, but was instead transformed into money.

Harvey Cox, author of the book *Market as God*, suggests that the rights of individuals have been replaced with the rights of shareholders. In deifying itself, the Market has become omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent, basing its existence on the business theology of supply and demand. Compassion for humanity cannot exist in this type of economic infrastructure because the poor and needy have no currency, respect nor relevance. Their position has no leverage and therefore no voice nor place at the table. The stock market (as God) rewards the rich and commodifies everything else.

In the book *Sapiens*, Yuval Noah Harari takes this analogy one step further stating that the “capitalist-consumerist ethic” has strong religious overtones, setting the lifestyles of the rich as the *utopian paradise-reward*. Money and envy have become the benchmarks for achieving heaven-on-earth. Our religion of *consumerism* encourages

the less well-heeled to “go into debt buying cars and televisions they don’t really need.” Harari continues with “The supreme commandment of the rich is Invest! The supreme commandment of the rest of us is Buy!”. In a Market-as-God world, losing faith becomes more than personal; it can be profoundly devastating at the mental, physical, economic and societal levels.

This is a hallelujah-MacGuffin that our society-as-audience unconsciously accepts without questioning its fundamental flaws.

Creative Thinking

Democracy has been under attack for a very long time and the blind acceptance of these financial-MacGuffins has accelerated its decay. The endless stream (and acceptance) of fake news has eroded confidence in the Fourth Estate (Press/Media) and the Fifth Estate (Digital/Independent Media), and we would be naive to think that this was not done deliberately.

A cornerstone of critical thinking is *fact checking* and, regardless of the external pressure to simply accept what we are fed, we must persevere.

The Arts: For Your Attention

Finale

Meditation is a gateway to critical thinking. By clearing one's mind of debris, a clean slate is presented that promotes creativity without limitation or baggage. "*White. A blank page or canvas. So many possibilities.*", were the prophetic words written by Stephen Sondheim in his 1984 musical ***Sunday in the Park with George***. Spoken by pointillist artist Georges Seurat as he stares at his easel, he is expressing the joy of calm and rational thought without distraction.

Meditation

One of the objectives of meditation is to slow mental activity to let the subconscious mind bubble up without judgement or control. Many individuals express their desire to "stop the noise" or "clear their thoughts." Many explore meditation to "improve their focus" or "help them concentrate." The quest for "inner peace and tranquillity" is common and many attach religious overtones to the process, which, while important, is not a requirement for meditative success.

Technology has dramatically limited our capacity for reflective examination. Social media platforms encourage spontaneous emotional reactions and the few seconds typically allotted between receipt and response leave little time for sober second-thought or moral consideration. It is a challenge to maintain composure, and the current social and political arenas of hatred, narcissism, selfishness and bullying tend to inspire knee-jerk retributions.

Critical thinking is somewhat of an art form. It requires diligence, patience, commitment, integrity and a desire for truth. Taking arms against a sea of MacGuffins and fake news requires unbound creativity to parse fiction from fact, lies from truth, and, as Shakespeare suggests, by opposing end them. Studying The Arts gets you out of the box and into a world of possibilities.

Critical thinking is a discipline that can be learned.

Arts and Science

Albert Einstein famously stated “Creativity is intelligence having fun.” Although he never spoke of meditation, he was known for his long solitary walks, violin playing and his “hypnagogic insight” before napping. He referred to “elegant solutions”, cutting through extraneous noise to create answers “as simple as possible but not simpler.” Einstein had the capacity to think-big and connect the dots on a broad range of subjects, suggesting that “All religions, arts and sciences are branches of the same tree.”

Charles Darwin’s 1859 *Origin of Species* was based on adaptation capability, a result of the creative randomness and improvised variation built into our evolving gene pool. It is the subtlety of

improvisational nuance through adaptation that defines evolution, and although the expression *survival of the fittest* might work well in sports analogies, it was not a part of Charles Darwin's thesis, nor was it connected in any way to his evolutionary theory. Darwin was not known for his meditation nor his artistic gifts, although he did host regular concerts and art displays at his home. However, his work on the social instincts of sympathy and empathy as tools needed for survival helped establish mindfulness as an evolutionary necessity.

Creativity is naturally built into our bodies, both chemically and intellectually. It is an important component in the process of adaptation and, ultimately, our survival as a species.

We need creativity. The Arts are there to help.

Mental Health

Clarity of thought requires a healthy mind. Studies in addiction and mental health have shown that developing social connections through community involvement, especially in music-making ensembles, such as choirs, can have a profound effect on physical and mental well-being.

Anecdotal stories regarding the success of music for improving health abound, and many are supported with scientific studies. Some of the researched benefits and attributes of singing in a choir include the following:

rhythmicity (auditory and motor neuron connectivity)

synchronicity (group breathing and heart rates)

stress relief (cortisol decrease)

physical therapy (abdominal and facial exercise)

creativity (improvisational expression)

depression management (serotonin increase)

communal participation (primal needs of engagement)

“happiness” (increases in both oxytocin and dopamine).

Participating in The Arts, a forum that implicitly features *non-invasive, non-chemical, community-based* and *artistically-driven* mental health solutions, can improve the quality of our lives.

Sometimes a MacGuffin is just a harmless MacGuffin. It is not our job to blindly accept them as inconsequential, but to evaluate and analyse their premise and purpose. Fake news masquerading as accepted and unquestionable truth can be infectious and the sooner it can be identified, the sooner it will end. MacGuffins are used as distractions to support plot development that, in the end, may or may not be right. Sometimes they can be nefarious and sometimes they are just another squirrel.

Shakespeare covers subjects in a voice as relevant now as it was then. His opinions on various topics are often vague and almost always observational and reflective in nature, leaving judgement to his audience. His work, like most good art, rarely provides answers. Art is not for answers. Art should stimulate questions, opinions and discussions with dialogue spanning many subject areas and issues.

Searching for truth has forever been a full time job and critical thinking has never been more important. From 400 years ago, Shakespeare's voice speaks to a world that sees history reliably

repeating itself over and over and over again. What have we learned?
What will we learn? What can we learn? Think about that.

The Arts: For Your Attention

The Arts: For Your Attention is an essay about creativity, education, critical thinking, fake news, financial-industry MacGuffins and how **The Arts** can help.

William Shakespeare
(1564-1616)

All You Need Is Love
Sonnet 25

Keith William Loach

$J = 92$ Quatrain (verse)

Voices 123 Shhhh... *p* (Let) those who are in fa - vour with their stars Of pub - lic ho - nour and
4x's prin - ces' fa - vour - ites their fair leaves spread But as the ma - ri - gold
pain - ful war - rior fa - mou - sed for fight, Af - ter a thou - sand vic -

Voices 123 One two three *pp* (Whisper) (Optional harmonies. Gradually build through quatrains to couplet.)

Voice 4 One two three four (Whisper) One two three four One two three four One two three four

Clap/Stomp *pp*

Shakespeare's Sonnet 25 is about the elusiveness of happiness in the pursuit of fame and fortune. What is success?

In the end, *love is all you need.*

*"Without facts, you can't have truth. Without truth, you can't have trust.
Without trust, we have no shared reality, no democracy."*

Maria Ressa, 2021 Nobel Peace Prize Recipient