

State Support of Artists: The Case of the United Kingdom in a New Labour Environment and Beyond

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ABSTRACT. This article discusses state support of artists in the United Kingdom, focusing on the Arts Council England. To understand the present—or the future—support of visual artists, one needs to understand the past. Accordingly, the article begins with a brief history of the Arts Council of Great Britain from 1946, discussing Thatcher’s reforms after the 1979 election. Tony Blair’s New Labour continued many of the same strategies instituted by the Conservatives. At the same time as fiscal constraints and “enterprise culture” were imposed, the mission of the Arts Council was broadened to include both geographical representation and a more populist agenda. A review of the contemporary arrangements for state support of artists in the United Kingdom shows that many of the tensions that exist within today’s Arts Council were institutionalized in its early days. The article concludes with a comment on what the current situation may portend for the future.

For many, the phrase “state support of artists” suggests direct financial support, through fellowships, purchase of art works, or funding of arts organizations. Elsewhere, I have argued, with Marilyn Rueschemeyer, that state support should be construed more broadly (Alexander and

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Rueschemeyer 2005). For the purposes of this article, however, I will concentrate on state support in the narrow sense: cultural policy at the national level that provides monetary support to artists. The specific focus of this article is the Arts Council of England (ACE)¹; the particular concern is with visual artists—painters, sculptors, and the like—who could be said to be “fine artists.” Many of my comments, however, will include reference to practitioners in other disciplines and to the arts in general. The discussion will necessarily be broad-brush, as this “policy area” is both diverse and fragmented. For the most part, I ignore Scotland and Wales and the support offered by local government.

To gain a view of arts funding in Tony Blair’s Britain, I begin with the past, based on the premise that an understanding of the tensions that have been institutionalized in the Arts Council from its inception and the changes—borne by political winds—that it has weathered since will provide some perspective on the present situation.

The “Nationalization” of Culture

Janet Minihan (1977) suggests that the arts were “nationalized” along with other services and industries after World War II. Indeed, the Arts Council of Great Britain, chartered in 1946, grew out of a wartime cultural enrichment program, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA; n.d.), which focused on keeping up morale on the home front. CEMA organized many events that were consistent with its motto, “The Best for the Most.” One example was “Art for the People,” a travelling exhibition. The show included works that CEMA purchased, which, according to CEMA, were “not to show supreme examples of art, but rather to give illustrations of pleasing and competent contemporary work which might be bought by ordinary people and lived with in ordinary houses” (n.d., qtd. in Wu 2002, 34).

John Maynard Keynes, “not a man for wandering minstrels and amateur theatricals” (Sir Kenneth Clark, qtd. in Wu 2002, 34), assumed the chairmanship of CEMA in 1942. Under his influence, CEMA shifted its focus from the popular arts toward the interests of the art establishment and the social elite. In his address to the nation, broadcast on the BBC Home Service on the founding of the Arts Council, Keynes said, in an often-quoted remark, “I do not believe it is yet realized what an important thing has happened. State patronage of the arts has crept in. It has happened in a very English, informal, unostentatious way—half baked if you like” (1945/1991, 106). A key feature of the Arts Council was that it was set up at “arm’s length” to the government. The Arts Council was an independent, chartered body that was, as Keynes put it, “free from red tape, but financed by the Treasury.” (105). Its job was to respond to external initiatives, not to generate them.

Under Keynes's stewardship, the Arts Council showed a preference for excellence over popularity, as suggested by the slogan "Few, but roses" (Pearson 1982, 56). Nevertheless, a tension existed in the Arts Council between the goals of "raising" and "spreading." "Raising" implies a focus on high standards of aesthetic excellence, often London based, that would raise the level of public taste. "Spreading" refers to increasing audiences for and access to the arts by bringing art to the people, especially in locations outside London. These tensions—between raising and spreading and between excellence and popularity—were institutionalized in the early days of the Arts Council, and they continue to underpin current debates about state funding for the arts.

In his founding speech, Keynes inadvertently highlighted the distinct and contradicting missions of the Arts Council:

The task of an official body is not to teach or censor, but to give *courage, confidence and opportunity*. . . . New work will spring up more abundantly . . . when there is a universal opportunity for contact with traditional and contemporary arts *in their noblest forms*. . . . But do not think of the Arts Council as a schoolmaster. Your *enjoyment* will be our first aim. (106; emphasis added)

The Arts Council inherited panels for music, drama, and art from CEMA. It placed greater emphasis on the performing than the visual arts. Nevertheless, the Visual Arts Department supported painting through the Arts Council Collection, which was made up of contemporary works purchased for the collection and from which touring exhibitions were selected.

In general, the Arts Council's budget and remit increased steadily from 1946 to 1979, when the new Tory Government ushered in a new era for state-supported arts. But the situation changed in 1979 when Margaret Thatcher came to power.

The "Privatization" of Culture

In her first few years as prime minister, Thatcher reduced government funding for the arts, changed the governance structure of museums, and put in place incentives for private (especially corporate) arts sponsorship. These actions were consistent with Thatcher's policy of "rolling back the frontiers of the state." Thatcher's first Art Minister, Norman St John-Stevas, reinforced this message by warning arts organizations to seek alternative sources of funds:

The arts world must . . . accept the fact that Government policy . . . has decisively tilted away from the expansion of the public to the enlargement of the private sector. The Government fully intends to honour its pledge to maintain public support for the arts . . . but we look to the private sphere to meet any shortfall and to provide immediate means of increase. (qtd. in Baldry 1981, 34)

The arts, unlike many national industries, were not literally privatized. Nevertheless, the changes instituted by the Conservative Government significantly altered the relationship between state and art, in a climate of fiscal austerity. Notably, Thatcher's policies reflected a shift in how the arts were to be valued and managed.

Crucial to this shift is the notion of "enterprise culture," which Thatcher sought to instill throughout "UK, plc." Enterprise culture enshrines the values of liberal economics, emphasizing three key principles: the efficiency of markets, the liberty of individuals, and the noninterventionism of the state. The opposite of enterprise culture is the "culture of dependency," which implies that organizations or individuals are dependent on the "nanny state."² Under Thatcher, government was no longer to be seen as the sole provider of funds for the public sector. Organizations such as museums, universities, and the National Health Service were pressed to run themselves in the manner of private businesses, to use marketing tools to serve "customers," to meet targets, and to provide "value for money." These organizations, among them Arts Council clients, were required to seek supplemental funding from private sources in what is now called a "mixed-economy" approach.

Enterprise culture was foisted on charities and public bodies throughout the decade. Anthony Beck commented that Tory arts policies are

one with the general cultural strategy of "the Thatcher revolution" which sets up business as the ideal-type of all social activity—understanding "business" as a mythical representation of early capitalism, entrepreneurial, buccaneering, progressive. The cultural transformation of the management of the arts institutions to make them bold, inventive and energised is a central element of [Thatcher's] policy for the arts. (1989, 370)

I have stated that the Tories reduced funding to the arts. In fact, the Grant-in-Aid awarded the Arts Council did increase during Thatcher's tenure, but in many years grants grew at less than the rate of inflation. Further, the rate of growth was slow compared the trajectory from 1946. Moreover, a greater proportion of the allocated funds were earmarked for specific purposes. Funds were devolved to the regions or were granted to replace (but only partially) funds lost elsewhere—for instance, after Thatcher eliminated the Greater London Council in 1983.

Two other aspects of Thatcher's policies are worth mentioning here. First, the government undertook various efforts to encourage private, and especially corporate, sponsorship of the arts, for example, through changes to tax law and through "Challenge" schemes, whereby funds raised elsewhere would be matched in varying proportion by state funds. The government worked with the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA; now called Arts and Business), a nonprofit organization established in 1976 to encourage corporate philanthropy in the cultural arena. In 1980, the Tories granted

£25,000 to ABSA to help it raise funds for arts institutions from the private sector. Many observers at the time thought this money should have been spent directly on the arts rather than channeled into a business charity (Wu 2002, 55). The state's relationship with ABSA was formalized in 1984 when the government established the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme. The scheme, administered by the ABSA on behalf of the Office for Arts and Libraries, used financial incentives to encourage corporate sponsors, matching private funds up to £35,000.

Second, Thatcher emphasized "value for money." The 1983 National Audit Act, for instance, empowered the auditor general to assess government departments and public agencies in terms of the three *e*'s: "economy, efficiency and effectiveness" (Hewison 1995, 256). Along with other public services, arts organizations were thereby required to produce and meet performance indicators that measured such outcomes as attendance and access, and they were required to engage in forward planning that set targets against which future performance would be measured.

In sum, Thatcher's impact on the arts amounted to a dramatic shift in emphasis from the arts themselves—whether in the form of art world concerns with excellence or policymakers' concerns with access—to the prudent management of the arts. The arts were now to be judged by economic yardsticks and were exhorted to throw off the culture of dependency, pull up their socks, and look for additional funding elsewhere, a task that proved difficult for many in the arts world. In the words of Richard Luce, the arts minister, speaking in 1987, "there are still too many in the arts world yet to be weaned from the welfare state mentality—the attitude that the taxpayer owes them a living. Many have not yet accepted the challenge of developing plural sources of funding" (qtd. in Beck 1989, 367–68). But the government persisted in its insistence for change.

Robert Hewison points out another consequence of corporate funding and government emphasis on enterprise culture—the arts would now have to grapple with a dictionary's worth of business jargon. Hewison writes:

Business sponsorship has already changed the language of the arts. [The director of the ABSA Colin] Tweedy remarks that "arts organizations often fail to understand that they are selling a product to a potential customer and have to deliver benefits accordingly." The Minister for the Arts speaks of "the delivery of the art product" to "consumers of art." This language has been enthusiastically embraced by the Arts Council . . . which presented its bid for increased government funding in 1986/87 in terms of a business prospectus: "the money spent from the public purse on the arts is a first-rate investment. (1987, 128; emphasis added)

Today, this way of speaking has become so common that we tend to take it for granted. But it is worth pointing out that only thirty years ago, almost no one talked about the arts in these terms.

John Major's Contribution

John Major was elected prime minister in 1990. Shortly after the 1992 General Election, he formed the Department of National Heritage, which assumed to the responsibilities of the former Office of Arts and Libraries as well as English heritage, sport, film, and tourism. He also continued Thatcher's policies of cutting public funds, encouraging private ones, and inculcating a managerial approach to the arts.

Major presided over two important changes to the public funding of the arts in Great Britain. First, in 1994, the Arts Councils of Wales and of Scotland, technically subcommittees of the Arts Council of Great Britain, became formally independent and drew their funding from the Welsh and Scottish offices. The Arts Council of Great Britain ceased to exist, and the Arts Council of England (ACE) replaced it.

In 1994, the second, dramatic change occurred—the launch of the National Lottery. The lottery was to raise funds for “good causes” that would serve as an addition to state funds, rather than replace existing appropriations. Twenty-eight percent of the income for the lottery was split evenly between the five initial good causes and was distributed by designated bodies, including the Arts Council (Gray 2000, 119). In the lottery's first year, the arts received more than £250 million (76).

The National Lottery has engendered popular debates on how money raised should be spent. The lottery is a regressive funding mechanism, in the sense that those with lower incomes spend more on the lottery than those with higher incomes. Some observers suggest that a greater proportion of lottery funds should be used to benefit areas of interest to those who play the lottery, such as sport, and that the more highbrow projects beloved by those who do not play the lottery, such as the visual arts, should receive fewer or no funds.

New Labour

Tony Blair's New Labour government came into power in 1997, and many in the arts world were hopeful that his government would reverse trends set by the previous administration and usher in a new, more positive era for the arts. Significantly, New Labour changed the name of the Department of National Heritage to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Chris Smith, the first culture secretary under Blair, said of this change: “we wanted something more forward looking, a name that captured more accurately the new spirit of modern Britain, that signalled the involvement of all” (1998, 2). The name fit more comfortably with Labour's early emphasis on “Cool Britannia,” whereas the Department of National Heritage sounded old-fashioned and backward

looking. Along with the new title, New Labour set out four key themes for the department: access, excellence, education, and economic value.

The Blair government did increase the financial support given to the arts; in Blair's ten years in power, ACE's budget again grew strongly. At the same time, his government's rhetoric on the arts has tended toward populism. In 1998, Chris Smith wrote,

All of these themes [access, excellence, education, and economic value] are interlinked around the focal point of the individual citizen, no matter how high or low their station, having the chance to share cultural experience. . . . This is a profoundly democratic agenda, seeing cultural access as one of the egalitarian building blocks of society. (1998, 2-3)

Alongside the populist theme, New Labour placed a strong emphasis on the economic value of the arts—in terms of tourism, jobs, and wealth creation. And New Labour has not forgotten Thatcher's emphasis on managerialism. As Chris Smith says, "I am very anxious indeed to ensure that efficient administration becomes as valued an aspect of artistic organization as creative and aesthetic power" (1998, 21). New Labour also required that the arts make a positive contribution to social issues and has charged the arts and culture, more generally, with the responsibility to increase social inclusion and, in Smith's words, "to assist in the regeneration of areas of deprivation" (19). In 2003, ACEI wrote:

We are looking for a new, *grown-up relationship* with arts organisations; one that is based on trust, *not dependency*. . . . We consider this new relationship to be fundamentally important to the future of the subsidised arts.

Arts organisations . . . must play a *leadership role* in terms of artistic innovation and experimentation, as well as in how they are *managed and governed*. They are crucial to all our priorities and we will ask them to make a major contribution to our ambitions in *cultural diversity*

We will be fair in what we expect of organisations. We will help provide *training* for their employees and we will help to produce more *cultural managers* and leaders for the future. . . .

In return, we expect arts organisations . . . to be *well managed* and to *deliver* using our investment. (2003, 5; emphasis added)

The resonance of this extract with the ideals of enterprise culture, which has not dissipated since Thatcher, and the consonance of ACE's choice of words with business logic are hard to miss.

In the past, ACE provided some fellowships, bursaries, and prizes directly to individual artists, but it focused on making grants to organizations; consequently, most of the support that artists received reached them indirectly, channeled through such organizations. Under New Labour, this continues to

be the case. But in 2002, ACE was significantly restructured. One result was an initiative to “place artists at the centre.” ACE writes:

The artist is the “life source” of our work. In the past, we have mainly funded institutions. Now we want to give higher priority to the artist.

We can do this indirectly through training, legislative change, or in stimulating the economy for artists. Or we might provide direct assistance through more funding, or help with spaces to work, with equipment, time, or travel and opportunities for international exchanges.

We believe artists, at times, need the chance to dream, without having to produce. We will establish ways to spot new talent; we will find ways to help talent develop; we will encourage artists working at the cutting edge; we will encourage radical thought and action, and opportunities for artists to change direction and find new inspiration. (2003, 4)

The Blair government also made changes to the National Lottery in 1998, adding a sixth “good cause” which the lottery would support. The New Opportunities Fund would henceforth underwrite projects in health, education, and the environment. This addition meant that the arts because the arts would now receive a one-sixth rather than a one-fifth share of lottery funds. As lottery money is characterized as distinct from government funding, the change could not be seen as a funding cut, but obviously the arts would now have to compete against another priority area and would receive less money.

The National Lottery Act also founded a new nondepartmental public body, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA). NESTA’s strapline is “making innovation flourish,” with a focus on the practical application of “creative Britain” in commercial settings. Its Web site states: “We are the largest single endowment devoted exclusively to supporting talent, innovation and creativity in the UK. Our mission is to transform the UK’s capacity for innovation. We invest in early stage companies, inform innovation policy and encourage a culture that helps innovation to flourish” (2007).

NESTA is mentioned enthusiastically in government descriptions of national arts policy, but I shall now leave it aside, because, although it clearly may benefit certain commercial artists who wish to start businesses, it is not designed to aid fine artists. Another change under New Labour worth mentioning is that the National Lottery will help fund the 2012 Olympics in London, a point that I will come back to later.

At this point, a simple, schematic view of the current funding arrangements for the visual arts in Great Britain may be useful (see figure 1). On the left, we see that the Scottish Arts Council and the Arts Council of Wales are funded by, and responsible to, the Scottish Executive and the Welsh Assembly governments, respectively. (I have ignored, for simplicity, Northern Ireland.)

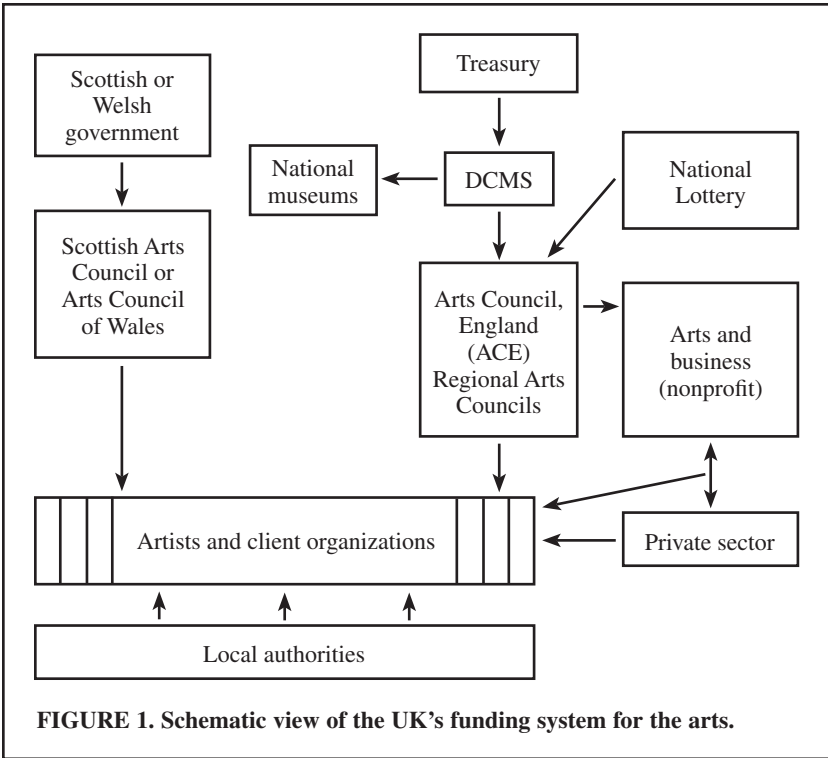


FIGURE 1. Schematic view of the UK's funding system for the arts.

Although these two arts councils also receive a portion of National Lottery funds, I have not included that source in this diagram.

In the middle of figure 1, we see that the Treasury allocates money to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), which in turn supports a variety of public corporations and agencies and nondepartment public bodies. Of interest to the visual arts is DCMS's funding of ACE and the National Museums. ACE, through its regional arts councils, supports client organizations and artists.

Although I have not mentioned the subject, local government funds the arts in a variety of ways, and I have thus represented that source here. On the right-hand side, we see the National Lottery, which provides a portion of its income to the Arts Councils for a variety of purposes. I have included Arts and Business as an important nonprofit organization and a regularly funded client organization of the ACE. There are many other partnerships between ACE and local government, development agencies, schools, and even with businesses that are not represented. Arts and Business, a particularly interesting case, is one of the charities supported by the Prince of Wales, who also serves as

its president. Arts and Business uses its grant-in-aid it receives from ACE to leverage private contributions.

Finally, the figure includes the private sector, an increasingly importance source of arts funding. According to Colin Tweedy, Chief Executive of Arts and Business, the private sector currently contributes about £530 million to the arts each year (Arts and Business 2007). We should be cautious about what this figure means for the arts, but, at the very least, it does highlight government requirements for plural funding.

Funding for Individual Artists

I would now like to turn the subject of funding of individual artists. ACE, in a historic shift, has funded individual artists as a priority area since 2002. Figures from ACE's Annual Review show that in fiscal year 2005–6, nearly 1,600 artists received individual grants, amounting to a total of £8.8 million across England. The lowest grant to an individual was £90, and the highest was nearly £52,000. The median granted amount was £4,700 (ACE 2006c).³ Let us take as an example the fabric artist Laura McCafferty. She received a grant of nearly £10,000 to “develop a two-year marketing strategy based on her attendance at prestigious shows” (ACE 2007a). The funding covered her travel expenses and allowed her to prepare press and gallery packs to send in advance.

To put this in context, we can compare the support of individuals with the support of Creative Partnerships, which bring artists, artworks, and creative projects into schools, with the support of Arts and Business, the nonprofit I have already mentioned. Individual artists received 2.5 percent of last year's grants, in financial terms. Creative Partnerships received 3.5 percent, and Arts and Business received 1.8 percent. The remainder of the grants are given to cover costs for capital expenses of special projects, to targeted opportunities for organizations under managed funds, and to regularly funded bodies.

Given ACE's rhetoric on the importance of individual artists, there is less funding available than one might think. Most funding is still indirect, with artists benefiting only if they work with funded organizations. Funding for individual artists tends to focus on their professional development or on developing a commercial market for their products. As an artist friend commented to me, ACE focuses on artists with “infrastructure.” Funding for individual artists is also short-term.

The Arts Council, then, continues its focus on organizations. One program, Own Art, loans money interest-free for people to buy works of art. ACE reports that more than 2,600 customers drew on Own Art's loan scheme in 2005–6 for purchases worth more than £2 million. Twenty-nine percent of customers were first-time buyers of contemporary arts or crafts (ACE 2006a). Clearly, this program benefits artists. It is worth mentioning, however, that the

program is considered under the rubric of the “Creative Economy,” and art dealers, rather than artists, are its chief target. Because only artists represented by registered galleries can sell their works this way, the scheme highlights the need for artists to have “infrastructure.”

Another issue, one unrelated to those already mentioned, is the broad way that ACE construes the term “artist.” Its broad definition is useful, inasmuch as ACE must cover all artistic disciplines. However, this approach makes it difficult to find information specifically on fine artists, and among these, on those practicing visual arts. A recent statistical study commissioned by ACE, for instance, used a “marketplace definition” of artists (Jeffri and Greenblat 1989, 10). The study, which draws on the UK Labour Force Survey, included only people employed in the arts the week before the survey. Artists were classified by “Standard Occupational Categories.” The study thereby mixed painters and sculptors with graphic designers and commercial artists (who all fall under SOC 381) and also neglected artists who were not working in the arts in the previous week (Davies and Lindley 2003).

It seems to me that ACE has done a lot of good for the arts in the United Kingdom. It sponsors a broad range of projects and organizations that do interesting and exciting things. ACE support has been beneficial to a large number of artists, both directly and indirectly. For example, consider Antony Gormley’s *Angel of the North*, which is in Gateshead in the northeast of England; twenty meters high and the largest sculpture in Britain, it was erected in 1998 at a cost of about £1 million. The National Lottery, through ACE, provided a grant of £584,000 (ACE 2007c).

I find it hard to criticize the projects and organizations supported by ACE. What is problematic, however, is the language that seems to be necessary when describing the arts. It is also important to consider what, or who, is left out of the funding loop. For instance, ACE’s description of Gormley’s *Angel* casts that work in the context of “huge social problems, dereliction and dying traditional industries” in the northeast and states that the “enormous popularity of the *Angel of the North* has helped . . . spawn direct private sector investment in the arts” (ACE 2007c). The impression left is that the overriding importance of the sculpture relates to its role in regional regeneration and fundraising.

I was particularly struck by *Turning Point* (ACE 2006b), ACE’s ten-year strategy for the contemporary visual arts in England. The document reads like a report from a business firm, identifying challenges and recording the ACE’s responses in terms of clear targets. In the first paragraph for the priority area “Support for Artists,” ACE writes: “British visual artists are world class. Their power as cultural ambassadors is shown by the international demand and reception for their work. The work of our distinguished visual artists is represented in museums, galleries and biennales all over the world. This has been made possible by rapid growth of the commercial sector in London”

(2006b, 29). One hates to be too cynical when ACE is doing the best it can, but the success of British artists might have more to do with artists' talents—or a whole host of other factors—than with the growth of the commercial sector in London.

Nevertheless, the section on “Support for Artists” brings up many important issues, such as the need for workspace, especially in expensive city centers, and the need for financial security. It also addresses the underrepresentation of disabled people and ethnic minorities among artists, a reality that brings up the question of who is left out.

Here, I would like to address the issue of censorship. Britain is a free country, without overt censorship of the arts. Nevertheless, the British system of funding for the arts implies that certain types of works fit better than others. In a market system, art works that match consumer desires sell better, a fact that may create pressure for artists to produce such works (Galloway et al. 2002). Similarly, artists who wish to garner state support must fit in with the funding priorities of government agencies.

I would not go so far as to say that these realities “distort” the kinds of art produced. All systems both constrain and enable and thereby shape artists and works of art, as Howard Becker argued so convincingly in his book *Art Worlds* (1982). But, as Hewison comments, “The main point at which interference occurs . . . is the sponsor’s choice of what, and what not, to sponsor. Inevitably new work, experimental work and any kind of art which challenges the cultural and economic status quo finds it almost impossible to secure sponsorship” (Hewison 1987, 126).

Beyond Blair’s Britain?

Today, arts organizations face a number of uncertainties as to the shape that state support will take in the next decade. Gordon Brown became prime minister in June 2007, and there may be a change of political party in the next general election, due to be held before 2010.

Several reports are in progress, the contents of which will not be available for some months. ACE recently completed a “public value” consultation called “The Arts Debate” in honor of its sixtieth anniversary. The council invited people to send e-mail or join an online discussion on “key questions” such as “When should an artist receive public money?” and “Should members of the public be involved in arts funding decisions?” The results of this consultation were published as this paper went to press, and the policy implications will become clear when ACE publishes short- and long-term responses in 2008 (ACE 2007d). In addition, ACE also periodically reviews each of its policy areas; currently, the visual arts are under review. The results of this review will be published in 2008.

The government is also undertaking a comprehensive spending review and will present a strategy document on “The Creative Economy Programme” in January 2008 (DCMS 2007). In the Spending Review of 2000, ACE received an extra £100 million from the Treasury (ACE 2007b). This will not be the case this time. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport has warned funded organizations to prepare for cuts from 2 to 7 percent (Tusa 2007), and ACE is reportedly bracing for a cut of 5 percent (Kettle 2007). Other projections assume a flat rate of funding, in nominal terms, which amount to cuts after adjusting for inflation (*Guardian Unlimited* 2007).

The 2012 Olympics in London is causing concern in the arts world. The expected costs of the games have risen higher than Mount Olympus itself, and someone has to pay. The original cost estimate of £2.4 billion has risen to £9.3 billion (*Metro* 2007). London’s mayor, Ken Livingston, has refused to raise taxes in the capital to cover a greater share than already agreed, and that seems to leave only National Lottery funds or the public purse. Either way, the arts world fears that money will be directed away from culture.

Understanding Art and the State

How are we to understand the contemporary relationship between the arts and the state? Colin Gray argues that the process is one of *commodification* in which use value is replaced by exchange-value. He writes, the arts are “considered not as objects of use (for example, providing pleasure for individuals . . . or for provoking thought) but as commodities that can be judged by the same economic criteria [as] cars, clothes or any other consumer good. Essentially issues of aesthetic . . . worth . . . are being replaced by those of the material and impersonal market-place” (Gray 2000, 6). This undoubtedly seems to be the case. Nevertheless, it begs the question as to why commercial values are challenging aesthetic ones.

Pierre Bourdieu’s (1993) analysis of fields of power provides a forceful tool for understanding the contemporary situation. Bourdieu argues that modern society is made up of different fields of action within an overarching field of power. Within these fields, elites vie for resources—political, economic, and cultural—and for hegemony over other social classes. Further, he argues that in the field of the arts there are two poles: the autonomous pole is independent of other fields and produces “pure” art—art for art’s sake—rich with cultural capital, but poor with economic capital. Toward the heteronomous pole, the arts are penetrated by the commercial sector, producing both “bourgeois” art—which sells reasonably well but still has some claim to artness—and “industrial” art, which is lowbrow and produced only because it sells.

In my view, in the United Kingdom, we are witnessing the interpenetration of the autonomous pole of “pure” art not just by the commercial sector, but

also by the state and, relatedly, in the form of managerial thinking about all aspects of contemporary life—an ideology that supposes that all social issues can be solved through neoliberal economic processes.

In the brief history covered in this article, I have provided only a rough sketch of how we reached this juncture, but this evolution was complex and it engendered much resistance, a situation predicted by Bourdieu's theory that fields of power involve conflict and struggle.

Tensions exist in today's ACE, many of which were institutionalized in its early days—but new tensions have emerged. The original tensions involved perceived conflicts between the goals of excellence and access, interests that are intrinsic to the art world. The relation of excellence to the art world needs no explanation; the relation of access, however, may be less apparent—the number of people who view an artwork may be of less interest to the most aesthetically pure members of the arts world. But most artists would like their work to be appreciated in one way or another.

What is striking about today's situation is that a number of tensions arose as a result of priorities imposed from elsewhere, priorities that are of no intrinsic concern to the art world. I have noted only a few: the emphasis on value for money in the analysis of the merits of artistic projects, the suggestion that the arts should be responsible for increasing economic competitiveness and inspiring the creative economy, and the assumption that the arts should be an instrument of social inclusiveness. These requirements contribute to broader political agendas, but not to the goals of artists or art lovers.

ACE was formed to work at arm's length from government to protect ACE, not to mention arts organizations and artists, from political interference from above or below. Artists were to be protected from party politics in matters of artistic importance. But the tighter control of government reduced this buffer. In addition, accountability to government, especially in terms of audience numbers, increased the pressure from below by people who wished the arts to entertain or soothe, rather than challenge, them—to provide them with answers, rather than provoke them with questions. At its outset, the Arts Council was relatively independent from the political sphere, and it also served, in a small way, to insulate artists from the marketplace. In today's climate, both independence and insulation have been attenuated, and we may, perhaps, expect this trend to continue.

I would like to conclude a more hopeful note, with the Robert Hewison's impassioned plea on behalf of the arts: "Cultural policy will play an ever greater part in the national debate, for it must be understood that culture *is* the national narrative, the ground of identity and the support of society. Such a narrative cannot be sieved through the narrow accountancy of a sterile search for value for money. What we must argue for is money for values" (1995, 313).

KEYWORDS

Arts Council of England, cultural policy, state funding of the arts, United Kingdom, visual arts

NOTES

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1. To distinguish between the Arts Council of England and the Arts Council of Great Britain, the former is referred to throughout as ACE and the latter as the Arts Council.
2. On enterprise culture, see Alexander (2007); Heelas and Morris (1992).
3. See ACE (2006c). The average grant was \$5580.

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