

**State Support of Artists:
The Case of the UK in a New Labour
Environment and Beyond***

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‘State support of artists’ often suggests ideas of direct financial support, through fellowships, purchase of art works, or funding of arts organisations. Elsewhere, I have argued, with Marilyn Rueschemeyer, that state support should be construed more broadly.¹ For this paper, however, I will concentrate on state support in the narrow sense: cultural policy at the national level that provides monetary support. Specifically, my topic is the Arts Council in England. My 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. Also, I ignore for the most part Scotland and Wales, and local government.

In order to gain a view of arts funding in Tony Blair’s Britain, I begin with the past, on the assumption that understanding the tensions that have been institutionalised in the Arts Council from its inception, and the changes – borne by political winds – that it has weathered since, may provide some perspective on the present situation.

The ‘Nationalisation’ of Culture

Janet Minihan suggests that the arts were ‘nationalized’ along with other services and industries after the war.² Indeed, the Arts Council of Great Britain was chartered in 1946. It grew out of a wartime cultural enrichment programme, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), which focused on keeping up morale on the home front. CEMA organised 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 to quote 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’.³

John Maynard Keynes, ‘not a man for wandering minstrels and amateur theatricals’,⁴ assumed the chairmanship of CEMA in 1942. Under his influence, CEMA shifted away from its popular focus and towards the interests of the art establishment and the social elite. In his address to the nation, broadcast on the BBC Home Service upon 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.⁵

A key feature of the Arts Council was that it was set up at ‘arms-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’.⁶ Its job was to respond to external initiatives, not to generate them.

Under Keynes’ stewardship, the Arts Council showed a preference for excellence over popularity, as suggested by the slogan, ‘Few, but roses’.⁷ Nevertheless, a tension existed in the Arts Council between ‘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 institutionalised in the early days of the Arts Council, and they still underpin current debates about state funding for the arts.

In his speech, Keynes inadvertently highlighted the distinct and contradicting missions of the Arts Council. He said,

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.⁸

The Arts Council inherited panels, for music, drama, and art, from CEMA. The emphasis was more 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 it and from which touring exhibitions were selected.

In general, the Arts Council’s budget and remit increased steadily from 1946 through to 1979, when the new Tory Government ushered in a new era for state-supported arts. Now I would like to fast forward to 1979 when Margaret Thatcher came to power.

The ‘Privatisation’ 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.⁹

The arts, unlike many national industries, were not literally privatised. 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 instil 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 non-interventionism 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’.¹⁰ 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’, meet targets and provide ‘value for money’. These organizations, including Arts Council clients, were required to seek supplemental funding from private sources in what is now called a ‘mixed economy’ approach.

The notion of enterprise culture and the foisting of it on charities and public bodies continued through the decade. As Anthony Beck commented in 1989: 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.¹¹

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 to 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, there were various efforts to encourage private, and especially corporate, sponsorship of the arts. This was done 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 (or ABSA; now called Arts & Business), a non-profit organisation that was 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 that time thought this money should have been spent directly on the arts rather than channelled into a business charity.¹² The state’s relationship with ABSA was formalised in 1984 when the government established the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme. The Scheme used financial

incentives to encourage corporate sponsors and was administered by the ABSA on behalf of the Office for Arts and Libraries, matching private funds up to the sum of £35,000.

Second she emphasised ‘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’.¹³ 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 which 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 art world concerns with excellence or policy makers’ 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. This was 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.¹⁴

But the government persisted in its insistence for change.

Robert Hewison points out another consequence of corporate funding and government emphasis on enterprise culture, that is, the arts having to grapple with a dictionary’s worth of business jargon. He writes in 1987:

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...’¹⁵

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 30 years ago, almost no one talked about the arts in these terms.

John Major’s Contribution

John Major was elected Prime Minister in 1992. Shortly after coming to office, he formed a new department of state, the Department of National Heritage. It took over the responsibilities of the former Office of Arts and Libraries as well as English Heritage, sport, film, and tourism which were previously the responsibility other departments. 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. The first was that in 1994, the Arts Councils of Wales and of Scotland, which were technically subcommittees of the Arts Council of Great Britain, became formally independent, and funded through the Welsh and Scottish Offices. The Arts Council of Great Britain ceased to exist and was replaced by the Arts Council of England.

The second, dramatic, change was the launch of the National Lottery also in 1994. The Lottery was to raise funds for ‘good causes’ that would be as an addition to state funds. That is, Lottery money was not supposed to 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. In the Lottery’s first year, the arts received more than £250 million.¹⁶

The Lottery has brought up popular debates on how money raised should be spent. The Lottery is a regressive funding mechanism, in the sense that those on lower incomes spend more on the lottery than those on higher ones. Some observers suggest that a greater proportion of Lottery funds should be used to benefit areas, such as sport, of interest to those who play the lottery. The more highbrow projects beloved by those who do not, 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’.¹⁷ The name fit more comfortably with Labour’s early emphasis on ‘Cool Britannia’ while 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, the Arts Council’s budget again grew strongly. At the same time, his government’s rhetoric on the arts has tended towards 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’.¹⁸

Alongside the populist theme is 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.’¹⁹ The arts are also required to make a positive contribution to social issues. New Labour has charged the arts, and culture more generally, with responsibility to increase social inclusion and, in Smith’s words, ‘to assist in the regeneration of areas of deprivation’.²⁰

In 2003, the Arts Council wrote (notice the wording here):

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.²¹

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

In the past, the Arts Council provided some fellowships, bursaries, and prizes directly to individual artists, but it focused on making grants to organizations. Consequently, most of the support artists themselves received reached them indirectly, channelled through such organizations. Under New Labour, this continues to be the case. But in 2002, the Arts Council was significantly restructured. One result was an initiative to ‘place artists at the centre’. The Arts Council 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.²²

Changes were also made to the National Lottery in 1998. A sixth ‘good cause’ was added. The New Opportunities Fund would henceforth underwrite projects in health, education and the environment. This was significant for the arts to the extent that 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 were now competing against another priority area and would receive less money.

The National Lottery Act also founded a new non-departmental public body, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA). NESTA’s strapline is ‘making innovation flourish’. Their focus is on the practical application of ‘creative Britain’ in commercial settings. Their 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.’²³

NESTA is mentioned enthusiastically in government descriptions of national arts policy, but having introduced it, I shall now leave it aside, as it clearly may benefit certain commercial artists who wish to start businesses, but it not designed to aid fine artists. One final change worth mentioning is that the National Lottery will help fund the 2012 Olympics in London. I will come back to this later.

At this point, I feel ready to present a simple, schematic view of the current funding arrangements for the visual arts in Great Britain (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 government, respectively. (I have ignored, for simplicity, Northern Ireland.) These two arts councils also receive a portion of National Lottery funds, although I have not drawn in the arrow.

Figure 1 about here

In the middle of the page, we see that the Treasury allocates money to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, which in turn supports a variety of public corporations and agencies and non-department public bodies. Of interest to the visual arts is its funding of the Arts Council of England and the National Museums. ACE, through its regional arts councils, supports client organisations and artists.

Although I have not talked about it, local government funds the arts in a variety of ways and I have included a box here to represent this. On the right, we see the National Lottery which provides a portion of its income to the Arts Councils for a variety of purposes. I have put in Arts & Business as an important nonprofit organization, and a regularly funded client organization of the Arts Council. There are many other partnerships between the Arts Council and local government, development agencies, schools and even with businesses which are not represented. Arts & Business is a particularly interesting case, and is one of the charities supported by the Prince of Wales, who also serves as its President. Their grant-in-aid is used to leverage private contributions.

A final box represents the private sector, which has increasing importance to arts funding. According to Colin Tweedy, Chief Executive of Arts & Business, the private sector

currently contributes about £530 million to the arts each year.²⁴ We should be cautious about what this figure means for the arts (or even what it means), but it highlights government requirements for plural funding.

Funding for Individual Artists

Now I would like to turn to funding of individual artists. The Arts Council, in a historical shift, has funded individual artists as a priority area since 2002. Figures from the Arts Council’s *Annual Review* show that in Fiscal Year 2005-06, nearly 1600 artists received individual grants, amounting to a total of £8.8m across England. The lowest grant to an individual was £90, and the highest was nearly £52,000. The median granted amount was £4,700.²⁵ As an example, we can consider 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’.²⁶ The funding covered her travel expenses and allowed her to prepare press and gallery packs to send in advance.

To put this into context, we can compare the support of individuals with the support of Creative Partnerships, which bring artists, artworks and creative projects into schools, and the support of Arts & 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 and Arts & Business, 1.8. The rest 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.

In terms of individual artists, there is less funding available than you might think, given the Arts Council’s rhetoric on the importance of the artist. 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 said to me, the Arts Council focuses on artists with ‘infrastructure’. Funding for individual artists is also short-term.

The Art Council, then, continues its focus on organizations. One programme, Own Art, loans money at nought percent interest for people to buy works of art. The Arts Council reports that more than 2,600 customers drew on the Own Art interest-free loan scheme in 2005/06 for purchases worth more than £2 million. Twenty-nine percent of customers were first-time buyers of contemporary arts or crafts.²⁷ Clearly this is a good programme that benefits artists. It is worth mentioning, however, that the programme is considered under the rubric of the ‘Creative Economy’, and it is art dealerships, rather than artists, who are its chief target. Since only artists represented by registered galleries can sell their works this way, the scheme highlights the need for artists to have ‘infrastructure’.

Another issue, though unrelated to the previous ones, is that the Arts Council construes the term ‘artist’ broadly. This is useful inasmuch as the Arts Council must cover all artistic disciplines. However, it is difficult to find information specifically on fine artists, and among these, on those practicing visual arts. A recent, statistical study commissioned by the Arts Council, for instance, used what is called a ‘marketplace definition’ of artists.²⁸ The study, which draws on the UK Labour Force Survey, included only people who were 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.²⁹

It seems to me that the Arts Council has done a lot of good for the arts in the UK. It sponsors a broad range of projects and organizations that are doing interesting and exciting things. Arts Council support has been beneficial to a large number of artists, both directly and indirectly. As an example, consider Antony Gormley’s *Angel of the North*, which is in

Gateshead in the North East of England. At 20 metres high, it is the largest sculpture in Britain and was erected in 1998 at a cost of about £1 million. The National Lottery, through the Arts Council, provided a grant of £584,000.³⁰

I find it hard to find fault with the projects and organizations supported by the Arts Council. What is problematic is the language that appears necessary in describing the arts. And it is also important to consider what, or who, gets left out. For instance, the Arts Council’s description of Gormley’s *Angel* casts it in the context of ‘huge social problems, dereliction and dying traditional industries’ in the North East and states that ‘The enormous popularity of the Angel of the North has helped ... spawn direct private sector investment in the arts.’³¹ The impression is left that the overriding importance of the sculpture has to do with regional regeneration and fundraising.

I was particularly struck by the Arts Council document, *Turning Point*, published in 2006, which is the Arts Council’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 Arts Council’s responses in terms of clear targets. In the first paragraph for the priority area ‘Support for Artists’, the Arts Council 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...³²

One hates to be too cynical when the Arts Council is doing the best it can, but one might think that the success of British artists might have to do with their own talent – or a whole

host of other factors – before one would consider that it was due to 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 centres, and for financial security, and it addresses the under-representation among artists of disabled people and ethnic minorities. And this brings up the issue of what gets left out.

Here, I would like to address the issue of censorship. Britain is a free country and there is no overt censorship of the arts. Nevertheless, the British system of funding for the arts implies that some sorts of works fit better than others. In a market system, art works that match consumer desires sell better, so there is pressure for artists to produce such works.³³ 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*. 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.’³⁴

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. A crucial issue is who will be in power. Blair has pledged that he will step down before September 2007. As I write in March 2007, most commentators expect that the Labour party successor will be the Chancellor Gordon Brown.

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. The Arts Council is currently undertaking a ‘public value’ consultation called ‘The Arts Debate’ in honour of its 60th anniversary. It has invited people to send email or join an on-line 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?’ In addition, the Arts Council also periodically reviews each of its policy areas and currently it is the turn of the Visual Arts. The result of this review will be published in 2008.

The government is also undertaking a Comprehensive Spending Review, and will present a Green Paper on ‘The Creative Economy Programme’ in summer 2007. In the Spending Review of 2000, the Arts Council received an extra £100 million from the Treasury.³⁵ 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,³⁶ and the Arts Council is reportedly bracing for a cut of 5 percent.³⁷ Other projections assume a flat rate of funding, in nominal terms, which amount to cuts after adjusting for inflation.³⁸

And 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 somebody has to pay. The original cost estimate of £2.4 billion has risen to £9.3 billion.³⁹ London’s Mayor, Ken Livingstone, has refused to raise taxes in the capitol to cover a greater share than already agreed, and that seems to leave 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.⁴⁰

This undoubtedly seems to be the case. Nevertheless, it begs the question as to why commercial values are challenging aesthetic ones.

I believe that Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of fields of power provides a forceful tool for understanding the contemporary situation.⁴¹ 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 within the field of art, there are two poles. The autonomous pole is independent of other fields, and produces ‘pure’ art – art for art’s sake – that is rich with cultural capital, but poor with economic capital. Moving toward the other, heteronomous pole, the arts are penetrated by the commercial sector, producing both ‘bourgeois’ art which sells reasonably well, but which still has some claim to art-ness, and ‘industrial’ art, which is lowbrow and produced only because it sells.

It seems to me that we are witnessing the interpenetration of the autonomous pole of ‘pure’ art not just by the commercial sector, but by the state and by a managerial way of

thinking about all aspects of contemporary life – an ideology which supposes that all social issues can be solved by neoliberal economic processes.

Quite how we got to this juncture is merely suggested in the brief history given here, but suffice it to say that it was not easy and encountered much resistance – as would be predicted by Bourdieu’s theory that the field of power involves conflict and struggle.

Tensions exist within today’s Arts Council, many of which were institutionalised in its early days – but there are also some new ones. The original tensions involved perceived conflicts between excellence and access. But it is worth remembering that both of these issues are ones of intrinsic interest to the art world. Excellence needs no explanation. Access may be less apparent, and viewer numbers 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 there are a number of tensions that exist because of priorities imposed from elsewhere; 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.

The Arts Council was formed to work at arms-length from Government. The arms-length principle was designed to protect the Arts Council, not to mention arts organizations and artists, from political interference from above and also from below. Artists were to be protected from party politics in matters that were 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 them, 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 the trend to continue.

But I would like to end on a more hopeful note, with the words Robert Hewison, who makes an 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’.⁴²

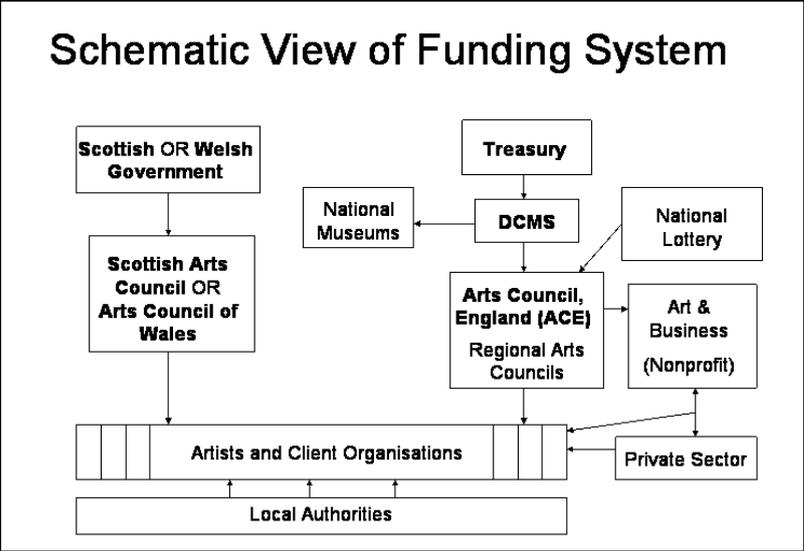


Figure 1: Schematic View of the UK Funding System for the Arts

Notes

- ¹ Alexander & Rueschemeyer (2005).
- ² Minihan (1977).
- ³ CEMA (n.d., quoted in Wu, 2002: 34).
- ⁴ Sir Kenneth Clark (quoted in Wu, 2002: 34).
- ⁵ Keynes, ([1945] 1991: 106).
- ⁶ Keynes (p. 105)
- ⁷ Pearson (1982: 56).
- ⁸ Keynes (p. 106, emphasis added).
- ⁹ Quoted in Baldry (1981: 34).
- ¹⁰ On enterprise culture, see Alexander (2007); Heelas & Morris (1992).
- ¹¹ Beck (1989: 370).
- ¹² Wu (2002: 55).
- ¹³ Hewison (1995: 256).
- ¹⁴ Quoted in Beck (1989: 367-8).
- ¹⁵ Hewison (1987: 128, emphasis added).
- ¹⁶ Gray (2000: 119; 76).
- ¹⁷ Smith (1998: 2).
- ¹⁸ Smith (1998: 2-3).
- ¹⁹ Smith (1998: 21).
- ²⁰ Smith (1998: 19)
- ²¹ Arts Council of England (2003: 5, emphasis added).
- ²² Arts Council of England (2003: 4).
- ²³ NESTA (2007).
- ²⁴ Arts & Business (2007).
- ²⁵ ACE (2006b). The average grant was \$5580.
- ²⁶ ACE (2007c).
- ²⁷ ACE (2006a: 14).
- ²⁸ Jeffri & Greenblat (1989: 10).
- ²⁹ Davies & Lindley (2003).
- ³⁰ ACE (2007b).
- ³¹ ACE (2007b).
- ³² ACE (2006c: 29).
- ³³ Galloway et al (2002: 97).
- ³⁴ Hewison (1987: 126).
- ³⁵ Arts Council of England (2007a).
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